

Cessation Theology—14 Classic Objections¹

*“Quench not the Spirit. Despise not prophesyings.
Prove all things; hold fast that which is good” (1 Thess. 4:18-21, KJV)*

Warning: Few topics are more divisive than this one. It’s a highly emotional and threatening issue for Christians on both sides of this debate—cessation vs. continuance.

Flying in the face of everything presented in chapters 7, 8, 9, and 10 of my book, *A Once Mighty Faith: Reclaiming the central teaching of Jesus, reengaging the miraculous*, (grounding Jesus’ same-natured and ever-increasing kingdom time- and nature-wise) is the widespread doctrinal and/or functional beliefs of cessation theology. It’s the assertion from many Southern Baptists, Presbyterians, Church of Christ members, some preterists, and others that some, most, or all the signs, wonders, and miraculous manifestations documented in the New Testament were withdrawn by God and therefore ceased sometime in the 1st century. Consequently, for cessationists, these supernatural manifestations are no longer authentic aspects of Christianity.

R.T. Kendall, a continuationist and charismatic pastor, lays out this theological landscape, thusly: “Cessationists believe that God, by His own will, no longer operates supernaturally—which is why many aggressively stand against the Spirit-empowered community. . . . No more supernatural healings. No visions. No direct revelation. None of the gifts of the Holy Spirit in operation.” However, Kendall concedes that “cessationists do believe in the supernatural occurrences in Scripture . . . but they have no expectation that God will intervene supernaturally today except, perhaps, through providence. But the notion of the gifts of the Spirit being in operation today . . . is out of the question.”

Nevertheless, he wisely counsels that “one should never underestimate our cessationist friends’ love for God, Scripture, sound teaching and holy living. They are the salt of the earth. Some of them are among the greatest vanguards of Christian orthodoxy. . . . They simply do not believe that God reveals Himself immediately and directly by revelation anymore. God, of

¹ This article was previewed in Appendix A of my above mentioned book.

course, could do it, they argue; He has simply and sovereignly chosen not to show His power as He did in the earliest church.”²

The Five Passages, My Five Caveats

The miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit termed “the charismata” (from the Greek word for “gifts”) are specifically mentioned in the five following passages of Scripture. They are special spiritual endowments given by God that empower the works Jesus commanded of his followers (see again John 14:12).

1 Corinthians 12:4-11: *“There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men [and women]. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit the message [word] of wisdom, to another the message [word] of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another the ability to speak in different kinds of tongues [languages], and to still another the interpretation of tongues. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each man [and woman], just as he determines.”*

1 Corinthians 12:27-31: *“Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? But eagerly desire the greater gifts.”*

1 Corinthians 14:1: *“Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy”* (also see Rom. 12:3-8).

Ephesians 4:11-13: *“It was he [Christ] who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”*

Mark 16:17-18: This passage is sometimes cited. But we have a manuscript discrepancy here. The two most reliable early manuscripts do not contain Mark 16:9-20. This passages speaks of driving out demons, speaking in new tongues, picking up snakes, drinking deadly poison, and healing the sick.

² R.T. Kendall, “They Cease to Believe,” *Charisma*, February 2014, 42-44.

Since the early '90s, I have been involved with leaders in both the cessationist and continuance movements, and from both the futurist and preterist eschatological communities. During this time I've collected a foot-long file of their various arguments for and against a continuance of these miraculous gifts. In this article we will re-explore what I believe are the fourteen biggest cessationist objections. I hope you will find the interactive mode in which these are presented to be enlightening and instructive, regardless of which side you are currently on in this theological and philosophical debate. But I do have my caveats.

Caveat #1: I, anachronistically, have termed these spiritual gifts the “power tools of the kingdom.” But I don't claim to have all the answers, or all the questions.

Caveat #2: I have observed that most Christians base their conclusion and preference more upon emotional preference and experience than upon a serious study of Scripture. Some, sadly, resort to mocking and ridicule. Let's face it, most of us have probably had both good and bad experiences with these gifts and the people trying to employ them or argue against them. But a resolution of this divisive issue should not be based on pitting individual preferences and experiences against one another.

Caveat #3: This chapter will not present an exhaustive treatise on the nature, purposes, and various nuances of spiritual gifts. That would require a book of its own. Our primary focus will be on the relevance or non-relevance of these gifts, here and now.

Caveat #4: Everything in this arena is contested. And most proponents and opponents are highly intellectual. They will readily defend their, and attack your, position. It's similar to the hostility we find with some atheists and their arguments against the existence of God—“I don't believe it; make me believe it; prove it.” But as many of us know, God doesn't usually work that way.

Caveat #5: Therefore, some, perhaps most, cessationists will not change their minds or believe anything I offer herein. Nonetheless, I believe our discussion of these fourteen classic cessationist objections will stand up to an honest and sincere test of Scripture as we reengage this theological standoff.

The Concise Case for Continuance

The strongest argument against cessation theology and for the continuance of the supernatural gifts of the Holy Spirit is the continuance of Jesus' same-natured and ever-increasing kingdom (see chapters 8, 9, and 10 in *A Once Mighty Faith*). A removal of any of its intrinsic elements must be considered a major decrease. That's the essence of what's being contested here—i.e., the nature of the kingdom of God for today.

Make no mistake; Jesus Christ was charismatic. Paul was charismatic. The early Church was charismatic. But if the cessationists are correct, Christianity is no longer charismatic. And our 1st-century brethren are no longer our models of the Christian life. Therefore, we have no model and everything is up for grabs. Hence, the basic question here is: “How Christ-like is the Christ likeness believers in Him are supposed to seek and be?” In other words, what should be normative for the practice of modern-day Christianity? Unfortunately, most Christians, as well as people in general, tend to believe what they want to believe and not what Scripture says and requires.

Emphatically, Jesus declared that “heaven and earth will pass away [that was the Old Covenant system³], but my words will never pass away” (Matt. 24:35). His words would surely include everything recorded in the New Testament regarding his kingdom and doing his works and even greater works, would they not? Then why would God have withdrawn the supernatural empowerment it takes to do them? Also, do his claims for having “all authority in heaven and on earth” and command “to teach them [and us] to obey everything I have commanded you to do” (Matt. 28:18-20) still apply?

Finally, what about these selected issues:

- “And in the church God has appointed . . .” (1 Cor. 12:28 – see the list on p. 2, again). Isn’t the Church still here?
- Being “in Christ” and in “one body” (Rom. 12:5-8). Is this still applicable? Or is there a major difference between then and now—i.e., one with these gifts and one without?
- Jesus prayed for “oneness” in his prayer for all believers (John 17:11, 20-23). But how much “oneness” is “oneness” today?
- Is the same Holy Spirit Who healed people through Jesus, Paul, the apostles, and others back then still the same Holy Spirit Who heals today through God’s people, prayer, and other means, as God wills?
- Paul called the Colossians to be “fellow workers for the kingdom of God” (Col. 4:11). Then how much of the kingdom of God are we moderns to be workers thereof?
- If these gifts were the distinctive mark of the New Testament believers, along with their message, then what is our mark today that distinguishes us from non-believers?
- In Christ they became “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Pet. 1:4). What are we today partaking of—the lesser traditions of men (see Mark 7:13; Matt. 15:6)?
- Are we now to believe that God has brought back the delivery truck to earth and repossessed parts of his “once for all delivered faith” (Jude 3), post A.D. 70 or at the end of the 1st century?
- Are we no longer as blessed by God as they were—“with every spiritual blessing in Christ” (Eph. 1:3) and “not lack[ing] any spiritual gift” (1 Cor. 1:7)? Well, if these gifts and workings of the Holy Spirit ceased when withdrawn by God, then we today lack them, right?
- Are we to believe that these spiritual gifts were revoked by God despite Paul assuring us: “for God’s gifts and his call are irrevocable” (Rom. 11:29)?
- How much of our faith today is still “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone” (Eph. 2:20)?
- Are these other spiritual powers and forces still at work today—called “rulers,” “authorities,” “powers,” and “spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (Eph. 6:12b)? If so, why didn’t God withdraw them as well?
- Truly, if the cessationists are right, their view makes obsolete a whole bunch of New Testament scriptures.

³ See my books: *Unraveling the End*, 141-169 and *The Perfect Ending for the World*, 279-319.

So where am I wrong on all this? Perhaps, we would be well advised to heed this bit of condemnation from Jesus: “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men’s faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to” (Matt. 23:13-14; also see Luke 11:52). And these warnings from Paul: “Do not put out the Spirit’s fire; do not treat prophecies with contempt. Test everything. Hold on to the good. Avoid every kind of evil” (1 Thess. 5:19-22). And, “each one should be careful how he builds. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.” (1 Cor. 3:10-11).

Let’s close this section with these challenging observations from two continuationists:

Primitive historical Christianity must always be essentially normative, and if later types of religion so diverge from the primitive type as to find the New Testament rather an embarrassment than an inspiration, the question they raise is whether they can any longer be recognized as Christian.⁴

Cessationism is no longer the default position of evangelical Christianity [as it was during and following the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century, which was a reaction against the claimed miracles in the Catholic Church]. This is partly due to the worldwide growth of the Pentecostal-charismatic movement, in which miraculous spiritual gifts play a prominent role.⁵

The Case for and against Discontinuity

The essence of cessation theology is, it posits a different-natured kingdom from what was prophesied to come and what Jesus presented, modeled, conferred, taught, and commanded his followers to seek. Please keep in mind that for something to be different-natured it need not be totally different. For instance, when Paul warned about a “different gospel” (2 Cor. 11:4; also Gal. 1:8), it, too, did not need be totally different to be different. Just different enough.

Additionally, as James D. Hernando notes: “most cessationists are only ‘partial’ cessationists, usually holding to the demise of certain revelatory and authenticating ‘sign’ gifts of the Spirit. But we must ask the exegetical question: Where in the context of Paul’s passage does he indicate that only some of the charismata were to endure in the church and others were destined for either disuse or obsolescence? The cessationist who reaches for 1 Corinthians 13:8-13 as a proof text grasps exegetical straw and proffers the most tenuous of evidence.”⁶

On the other side, the prominent and outspoken cessationist John MacArthur is committed “to the Calvinist doctrine of cessationism, i.e., the belief that the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit were withdrawn from the church after the death of the original apostles of Christ.” But, as Eddie L. Hyatt charges, this “is a false doctrine that cannot be substantiated by either Scripture or church history”⁷

Notwithstanding, “John MacArthur has done it again. With his newest attack on Pentecostals and Charismatics, *Strange Fire*, MacArthur, like Don Quixote tilting at windmills, continues his hopeless quest to put an end to the most energetic and fastest growing group of Christians in the

⁴ James Denney (1856-1917), Scottish Theologian, quote in in Robert W. Graves, ed., *Strangers to Fire: When Tradition Trumps Scripture* (Woodsotch, GA.: The Foundation for Pentecostal Scholarship, 2014), v.

⁵ George O. Wood, quoted in *Ibid.*, front matter.

⁶ James D. Hernando in *Ibid.*, 276.

⁷ Eddie L. Hyatt in *Ibid.*, 7.

world. . . . This is his third book on this subject. When MacArthur published his first attack . . . in 1978, there were about 100,000,000 Pentecostals and Charismatics in the world. By . . . his second attack . . . in 1993, the number had grown to 450,000,000. And now with . . . his third attack, *Strange Fire*, the number has reached to no less than 628,000,000. Write another book, John.”⁸

Admittedly, as charismatic J. Lee Grady acknowledges, “there is a difference between biblical correction and judgmentalism [But] John MacArthur’s book has crossed that line The biggest danger the church faces today is the smug, self-righteous attitude that we can build the church without God’s supernatural power.”⁹ Sadly, some cessationists persecute other Christians for being charismatic. The classic case is the foreign missionary supported by cessationist congregations. But when it becomes known that he or she is even entertaining the notion that these gifts are operative, his or her funding and commission is terminated.

In the pages ahead, we will present a scriptural basis and exegetical case for why the continuity of Jesus’ same-natured kingdom (post-1st century) is much stronger than the case for discontinuity. That means all of its attributes are relevant, operative, and available for those today who “seek” his kingdom (Matt. 6:33).

Lastly and once again, *I have no desire to be wrong or in error on any of this exposition. I remain open to correction—if you can do so in a scriptural and civil manner.* But as you are about to see, cessationist objections are mostly, if not totally, deductive arguments, and largely driven by disappointing personal experiences and preferences. Below is a typical example:

I was in the charismatic thing for 14 years. In 14 years all I heard about was healings, miracles and prosperity. Every service people came up to be prayed for so that they would be healed or to have a financial “breakthrough.” Beyond this it was make sure you pay your tithes and come to church. In all those years I personally did not see one legit ‘miracle.’ I saw plenty of people die and never healed though. . . . In 14 years in that environment it was all just a charade with no real depth of genuine fellowship or spirituality. It was just a bless me club and a cult of personality. I was just an actor on a stage, playing my part, toeing the party line, and making sure I kept my place in the army of drones called American mainstream Christianity.¹⁰

In this same vein, MacArthur further insists that “the reality is that the modern Charismatic Movement falsely calls itself evangelical because it undermines the authority and sufficiency of Scripture. It is neither orthodox nor truly evangelical to elevate spiritual experiences, including imagined revelations from God, above the Bible. . . . The sad fact is that biblical truth has never been the hallmark of the Charismatic Movement.”¹¹

But Kendall argues back that “cessationism is a hypothesis. It is not a teaching grounded in Holy Scripture. . . . Cessationists have *chosen* to believe God does not reveal Himself directly and immediately today.”¹²

For me, it has been truly amazing that so many people, from a deductive basis, feel that they can tell us and God how He can and cannot work today. The only way to break through this classic impasse and settle this highly emotional issue is through a sound exegetical approach. It’s to that task we next turn.

⁸ Vinson Synan in *Ibid.*, front matter.

⁹ J. Lee Grady, “Foreword,” in *Ibid.*, xxv.

¹⁰ Facebook post, 11/6/14.

¹¹ John MacArthur, *Strange Fire* (Nashville, TN.: Nelson Books, 2013), 70-71.

¹² Kendall, “They Cease to Believe,” 45.

I, however, have no delusions that this article will convince a cessationist to believe the signs, wonders, miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit are supernaturally relevant, available, and operative today. As Kendall notes in rhyme, “A man convinced against his will is of the same opinion still.”¹³ It has also been said that “an individual with an experience is never at the mercy of a man with an argument.”¹⁴ The point here is this: “There is nothing that changes the mindset of a cessationist like one’s own fatal illness or the serious sickness of a loved one. That often makes them open in [a] way they would not have been before. . . . [D]esperation is something God may use to give us a wake-up call.”¹⁵

Therefore, let’s get started and see who has rock-solid, scriptural arguments and who doesn’t. For God’s people are always being destroyed from “lack of knowledge” (Hos. 4:6).

The Big Eight Objections

Objection #1 – the Primary and Historic Cessationist Argument – to Authenticate the Apostles

According to charismatic writer Jack Deere’s assessment, “the Reformers argued that the primary purpose of New Testament miracles was to authenticate the apostles as trustworthy authors of Holy Scripture. . . . After the apostles had written the New Testament, *miracles would have fulfilled their purpose and would no longer be necessary*, for now the church would possess forever the miraculous attested written Word of God. This remains the primary argument among modern cessationists.”¹⁶

Deere next lays out these two refutations:

First refutation—“No text of Scripture says that the authority of Scripture rests on miracles! In reality, it is just the opposite. Scripture tests miracles”¹⁷

Second refutation—“In reality, only three of the original twelve apostles wrote Scripture—Matthew, John, and Peter. . . . We have authors of Scripture who were not apostles and who never did any recorded miracles! These include Mark, Luke, and Jude The book of Hebrews is even anonymous! . . . then why did Stephen and Philip do signs and wonders? . . . Why did God give gifts of healing and miracles to the church? (1 Cor. 12:7-10, [28]; Gal. 3:5).”¹⁸

Objection #2 – The Major ‘Will Cease’ Text – 1 Corinthians 13

Without question, the major and most prominent objection for all cessationists (futurists and preterists) is based on a poor translation, misreading, and misunderstanding of 1 Corinthians 13. As Graves rightly points out, “the problem is the Bible never says the gifts would stop this side of heaven. That is the crux. Show me the Bible. That is the bottom line.”¹⁹ But there are several different ways to read, interpret, and understand this passage:

¹³ R.T. Kendall, *Holyfire: A Balanced, Biblical Look at the Holy Spirit’s Work in Our Lives* (Lake Mary, FL.: Charisma House, 2014), 7.

¹⁴ William Vincent, post on Facebook, “Charismatic Preterist Movement,” 12/14/15.

¹⁵ Kendall, *Holy Fire*, 114.

¹⁶ Jack Deere in Graves, ed., *Strangers to Fire*, 119.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 125.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 202, 125, 124.

¹⁹ Graves, ed., *Strangers to Fire*, xxxii.

1 If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not 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 have not love, I am nothing.

3 If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.

4 Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.

5 It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.

6 Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.

7 It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

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,

10 but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears.

11 When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me.

12 Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

13 And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

What's "Perfection," "the Perfect?"

Futurist cessationists are taught that this "perfection" ("the perfect" in KJV) happened circa A.D. 95 when they believe the last book of the Bible was written or when the last Apostle died. Most preterists believe it coincided with the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple circa A.D. 70, when the Old Covenant system was removed and left desolate in fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy (Matt. 23:38; also see 24:1-35ff) and the New Covenant system fully arrived (see Jude 3; Heb. 8:13; 9:8-10).

Some claim that "the perfect" is love itself and, sandwiched in between the first and last verse of this chapter 13, are temporal things being compared to that which is eternal, love. But Paul never equates these two in this passage or elsewhere. And since Scripture also states that "God is love" (1 John 4:8, 16), does that then equate the perfect with being God Himself Who, at that time, had not yet come? Others insist that the word translated "perfection" or "the perfect" is better translated as "maturity" in and/or of the Church or even individual maturity. But this is somewhat of a strained meaning. In a comparable usage in Matthew 5:48 – "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" – clearly, perfect could not mean maturity. If it did, that would mean that God had to have been "immature" at some point.

The Greek word here is "teleios" (Strong's #5046). It can variously mean "complete (in various applications of labor, growth, mental and moral character, etc.); . . . (as a noun, with #3588 [the definite article 'the'] *completeness*:—of full age, man, perfect." But as MacArthur notes, "commentators have widely disagreed as to its precise meaning—offering numerous possible interpretations."²⁰ Unfortunately, Paul never defined what he meant by this expression.

²⁰ MacArthur, *Strange Fire*, 148.

Why didn't he? Because, I am going to maintain, it was obvious to his contemporaries and his readers.

Consequently, I suggest that the proper understanding and nature of this word is best determined and defined by its opposite—that which was imperfect at that time. Several times the Book of Hebrews defines what was imperfect. It was the Old Covenant system (see Heb. 7:18-19, 25; 9:9-10; 10:1-4, 11). But when the New Covenant system fully arrived, it would perfect these things. At that time, we know the kingdom had arrived fully established and salvation's arrival was still in process. Both were still awaiting the climactic event of the desolation and removal of that Old Covenant system.

But regardless which understanding one subscribes to, the bottom line result is the same. We all agree on a 1st-century fulfillment for this coming of "perfection," "the perfect."

How Much Ceased?

Answers vary from all (everything supernatural), to only three or four things, to none.

All the supernatural, charismata gifts ceased. It's deductively assumed that the three specific gifts mentioned represent all the spiritual gifts. Therefore, this "all" includes everything listed on page 2 of this article.

The big problem here is, when you start ceasing things, it's hard to know when and how to stop—i.e., by what hermeneutic? Once begun, there is no contextual logic to what cessationists will attempt to cease and discard from the Christian life and practice taught and modeled in the New Testament. In fact, some fringe preterist cessationists have ceased and eliminated everything from the Lord's Supper, water baptism, salvation, demons, angels, to the Church, evangelists, pastors, teachers, the Great Commission, and even inactivated and withdrawn the Holy Spirit. Then why not cease and eliminate the moral requirements by asserting that they were only for them back then as well? Indeed, cessationism taken to its logical extreme renders the New Testament essentially irrelevant and useless.

Only the three miraculous gifts specifically mentioned ceased. All others remain operative. It's contended that you cannot textually throw out the others if they are not cited for cessation—with the possible exception of apostles and prophets (Eph. 4:11). Yes, this is an arbitrary matter of picking and choosing from the words of Scripture and selecting what meets with one's approval and what doesn't. But, again, by what hermeneutic can one claim the extraordinary gifts (such as prophecy, tongues, and healing) for building up the Church were limited to the apostolic era and the more ordinary gifts, such as teaching, serving, and administration were not? Or that apostles and prophets ceased but evangelists, pastors, and teachers continue on?

None ceased. A strong exegetical case can be made that there was no cessation of any of the spiritual gifts. Rather what ceased was something entirely different (more on this later). This understanding is in complete harmony with other scriptures supporting a same-natured continuity of the ever-increasing kingdom, post 1st century.

A Hebrew Parallelism

The construction of vss. 8-12 is a Hebrew parallelism. A parallelism is a literary and rhetorical device. *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* defines a parallelism this way:

Parallelism is the most prominent rhetorical figure in ancient Near Eastern poetry, and it is also present, although less prominent, in biblical prose. It can be defined as the repetition of the same or related semantic content and/or grammatical structure in consecutive lines or verses. . . . [P]arallelism is a matter of relationships between lines and/or parts of lines.²¹

In his book, *The Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism*, Adele Berlin further elaborates:

. . . the essence of parallelism . . . is a *correspondence of one thing with another*. Parallelism promotes the perception of a relationship between the elements of which parallelism is composed, and this relationship is one of correspondence. . . . [I]n general it involves repetition or the substitution of things which are equivalent on one or more linguistic levels.²²

The parallelism of 1 Corinthians 13:8-12, is comprised of a three-part constant (prophecies, tongues, and knowledge) paralleled with a two-part variable (now present / but will cease).²³ Therefore, what is said for one part of this constant is true for all three parts—even if all three are not always mentioned. And they aren't. In verses 1, 2, and 8 all three are mentioned. In verse 9, only know and prophesy are mentioned. In verse 12, only know is mentioned.

Not Four Declarative Statements

The NIV poorly translates vs. 8 as four declarative statements: “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.” So does the RSV: “Love never ends; as for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away.”

Ironically, the Italians have an interesting saying, “traduttore, traditore.” It literally means, “translator, traitor.” Or more freely, “all translators are traitors.” In this vein, here's a revealing tidbit: Three of these four statements are not declarative nor facts as maintained by cessationists. In the original Greek language, this verse is composed of one declarative statement and three conditional clauses. Here's the exegetical support.

The declarative statement we all agree on is: “Love never fails.” But the other three statements all begin with the Greek particle of conditionality—*etie* (pron. i' teh – *Strong's* #1535). It does *not* mean “where” or “as.” It means: “if or whether.” KJV uses “whether” three times. NAS uses “if” three times. These are better but still do not convey the original meaning. BAGD – Bauer, Gingrich, & Danker's Greek Lexicon of the New Testament – recommends that “but if” and “if” are preferred. They carry the meaning of “may or may not.”

This translation changes the entire complexion of this verse and passage. It takes these three statements out of the declarative mode and context and places them squarely into the hypothetical mode and context. The purpose then for this construction is to stress “love never fails,” and not the cessation of these hypothetical constants.

Furthermore, *etie* is derived from Greek word *ei* (pron. i – *Strong's* #1487). It's also a conditional particle used to denote indefiniteness or uncertainty. Likewise, Paul used another and similar conditional particle—derived from *ei* (i) in 1 Cor. 13:1; 6:4—*ean* (pron. eh an – #1437).

²¹ *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol. 5 (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 155.

²² Adele Berlin, *The Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism* (Bloomington, IN.: Indiana University Press, 1985), 2.

²³ Another parallelism is found in 1 Corinthians 15:22: “For as in Adam all died, so in Christ all will be made alive.” For more about parallelisms, see Noë, *Hell Yes / Hell No*, 188-193.

It also means “though or if” and denotes “may or may not.” Interestingly, *etie* is used later in 1 Corinthians 14:27 and is more correctly translated as “if” in NIV, KJV, NAS (also used in 1 Cor. 3:22; 8:5; 10:31; 12:13, 13; 12:26; 14:7; 15:11.)

Additionally, as BAGD points out, when *etie* is coupled with *de* (deh) as in the first conditional clause, it should be translated as “but if” or “and even if.” In a Greek-English Interlinear it’s literally translated as “but whether.”²⁴

Thus, a more accurate, grammatical, and literal translation of 1 Corinthians 13:8 would be this: “Love never fails, but if (whether) prophecies, they will be abolished; if tongues, they will cease; if knowledge, it will be abolished.” These are big “ifs,” and hypotheticals, not declarative facts. Big difference!

Exegetically, what we have in this verse is *one* declarative statement that is dramatically emphasized by the literary device of *three* conditional, hypothetical, and hyperbolic clauses. Thus, this construction utilizes three absurdities to dramatize Paul’s main point throughout this passage of the supreme value of love—i.e., “But if (whether) . . . love never fails.”

In addition, this usage is not an isolated instance. We find similar utilizations elsewhere in Scripture. In Job’s famous statement: “Though he [God] slay me, yet will I trust/hope in him . . .” (Job 13:15a), the word “though” is the Hebrew word *im* (pron. eem) *Strongs* #518. It, too, is a conditional particle meaning “if, although,” or “Oh, that.” This conditional word also introduces a hypothetical and hyperbolic clause of absurdity. It’s employed here to emphasize Job trusting and hoping in God no matter what happens to him. Then what’s the absurdity? Obviously, if God did slay him, how could Job continue trusting and hoping?

Similar hypothetical statements are employed in other Old Testament books citing cataclysmic destruction to emphasize the magnitude of divine blessings and realities. Here are two examples:

“Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change,
though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea;
though its waters roar and foam,
though the mountains tremble with its tumult.
There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,
the holy place where the Most High dwells.” (Psalm 46:2-4)

“For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed,
but my steadfast love shall not depart from you,
and my covenant of peace shall not be removed,
says the LORD, who has compassion on you.” (Isa. 54:10)

These scriptures are not predicting the end of the world (which is an absurdity because the Bible teaches that the world is without end).²⁵ They are better understood as affirming the concept and reality that *even if* the world did come to an end, God would still be faithful. Today, we use similar expressions of absurdity to emphasize points, such as: “If the world ends tomorrow, I’ll still be loving you.”

Consequently, in 1 Corinthians 13:8 Paul is *not* declaring that these three constant things will cease. He is utilizing three conditional clauses to dramatically emphasize his one declarative point that “love never fails.” Hence, this one verse or entire chapter, *cannot* be used to toss out

²⁴ *Greek-English New Testament – Literal Interlinear* (Washington, D.C. Christianity Today, 1975-1976), 511.

²⁵ See Noë, *The Perfect Ending for the World*, 81-106 and Noë, *Unraveling the End*, 141-169.

everything Paul was talking about in 1 Corinthians 12, 14, and Ephesians 4. After all, in 1 Corinthians 12:28, “the church” is still here, isn’t it? Let’s not make more of 1 Corinthians 13, than Paul did. Yes, it sounds absolute, but these poor translations should warn us about forcing hypotheticals into preconceived absolutes. Instead, we need to better discern how this imagery is used in this and other contexts.

Critical Objection: “No scholar worth his salt would make the ‘hypothetical’ argument from the Greek. . . . [I]t would be ridiculous for Paul to even presume the hypothetical or to postulate the possibility of those gifts ceasing, if they could not or would not cease at a given time. . . . I’ve debunked the ‘hypothetical’ theory a few times on this very blog before, John, with no explanation of the contrary”²⁶

My Response: Surprisingly, cessationist John MacArthur agrees that this 1 Corinthians 13 passage utilizes hypothetical statements. He writes, elaborates, and admits:

Paul’s theme in 1 Corinthians 13 is love, not spiritual gifts. . . . Paul is describing a hypothetical scenario. . . . Paul was using extreme illustrations and hyperbolic language to emphasize the value of love. . . . Paul’s real point [is]: any selfish use of this gift violated its true purpose—namely, that it be exercised as an expression of loving edification for other believers.²⁷

Paul’s purpose in this chapter was not to identify how long the spiritual gifts would continue into later centuries of church history, as that would have been essentially meaningless to the original readers of this letter. Rather, he was making a point that specifically pertained to his first-century audience: . . . love has eternal value, so pursue love because it is superior to any gift (v. 13).²⁸

To determine the point in church history when the miraculous and revelatory gifts would pass away, we must look elsewhere than 1 Corinthians 13:10, to passages like Ephesians 2:20, where Paul indicated that both the apostolic and prophetic offices were only for the foundational age of the church.²⁹ (See Objections #5 and #6 below).

Thus I, along with MacArthur, am simply contending that Paul’s hypothetical approach is consistently utilized throughout this passage. Which brings us to our next point.

How Did Knowledge Cease after the 1st Century?

What knowledge ceased back then? Did Iron Age knowledge cease? Did agricultural knowledge cease? Did Old Testament or New Testament revelation knowledge cease?

R. Bruce Compton claims that “‘knowledge’ in 13:8 must refer to the spiritual gift Paul lists in 12:8 as a ‘word of knowledge’ since it is “placed in a series with ‘prophecies’ and ‘tongues.’” Yet he admits the “evidence is indirect, but consistent with the force of the other two gifts as communicating direct revelation that is inerrant and divinely authoritative.”³⁰

In my opinion such a limitation of “knowledge” is deductive and arbitrary, at best. Paul here simply speaks hypothetically (once again) of “knowledge” in general. Where as in vs. 12:8 he speaks specifically of the sign/charismata gift of the Spirit “word of knowledge,” as well as the

²⁶ Personal email, 8/27/14.

²⁷ MacArthur, *Strange Fire*, 147.

²⁸ MacArthur, *Strange Fire*, 149.

²⁹ *ibid.*

³⁰ R. Bruce Compton, “1 Corinthians 13:8-13 and the Cessation of Miraculous Gifts,” *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal*, 9 (2004): 119.

“word of wisdom,” and not wisdom in general (see Prov. 1:7, 2:2, for instance). Big difference. Also, the Greek word *gnosis* for “knowledge” says nothing about this being divine inspiration and revelation from Scripture, but would certainly include that. And none of this knowledge ceased.

Critical Objection: That knowledge was the prophetic/revelatory knowledge which allowed people like Paul and John and Peter to pen holy writ. It was infallible knowledge supernaturally given to those men, not the general knowledge.

My Response: Again, 1 Corinthians 13 never claims this or limits that knowledge to only being that aspect of knowledge. Moreover, Paul reveals that the Roman Christians were “complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another.” (Rom. 15:14). What knowledge was that? Did that knowledge pass away thirteen years later? Of course, not.

Let’s rethink it like this. Back then, Paul and others were writing about what they knew. They knew that many prophecies had already been fulfilled. But others awaited a soon-coming fulfillment. Thus, they knew “in part,” were prophesying “in part,” and speaking in tongues “in part.” But post circa AD 70, after those remaining prophecies were fulfilled, they could now know, prophesy, and speak in tongues “fully” from a fulfilled standpoint. They could also see “face-to-face” the fulfillment of all end-time prophecy. No longer was fulfillment a mystery. In this manner, the Holy Spirit-guided expectations of the early Church were precisely fulfilled. And please remember, once again, those inspired expectations were the ones God was authenticating, back then and there, with signs, wonders, and miracles following.

I’d also suggest that seeing “face to face” (1 Cor. 13:12) means: 1) seeing all prophetic fulfillment—God’s plan of redemption—precisely and historically completed with the removal of the Old Covenant system circa A.D. 70. 2) Seeing Jesus as He is today (see Rev. 1:9-18f). This is the view I hold.³¹ That expression is also an idiom that tradesmen back in those days would use in their refining of gold. The refiner would smelt the gold in a pot and skim off the dross as it floated to the surface. He would continue this process until he could see his face reflecting in the shiny gold. Also, back then, mirrors were typically made of polished bronze and gave off a darkened and often wavering reflection.

Here’s another illustration that might prove helpful. Imagine a glass of water half full—i.e., it is full “in part.” Then, we take a pitcher of water and fill the glass up to the brim. Where now is the “in-part” located? Correct, it’s part of the “fully.” Dittos, for “in part” knowledge, “in part” prophesying, and “in part” speaking in tongues. Hence, the “in part” is superseded by the “fully,” and the “in part” is now resides within the “fully.” It’s another aspect of the increase of Christ’s ever-increasing kingdom, and not a cessation. Big difference!³²

Thus, Paul later writes, “And I hope that, as you have understood us *in part*, you will come to understand *fully* that you can boast of us just as we will boast of you in the day of the Lord Jesus” (2 Cor. 1:13b-14 – *italics mine*).

The Support of Paul’s Child-man Analogy

In perfect harmony with the above understanding is Paul’s child-adult analogy in vs. 11: “When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me.”

³¹ For more, see Noë, *The Greater Jesus: His glorious unveiling*.

³² Again see Noë, *The Perfect Ending for the World* and Noë, *Unraveling the End*.

The same-natured progression from being a child to a man follows the same-natured continuity of Jesus' ever-increasing kingdom. They continue to contain the same elements and distinctions. If Paul had intended to illustrate discontinuity, he should have used a *different* analogy—like a child to a cow, or a child to a man with three appendages missing. But that cessation would be ridiculous, wouldn't you agree?

Plainly and simply, to summarize, both futurist and preterist cessationists have taken one verse (1 Cor. 13:8) out of its hypothetical and love-emphasizing context.

Forthtelling and Foretelling

The Jewish prophetic tradition consisted of two aspects or types of prophesying:

1. *Forthtelling* – proclaiming from Scripture why Israel wasn't living up to their covenant with God—i.e., idolatry and injustice. Today, it's calling us back to Christ as He was and is today and the ongoing realities of fulfilled Scripture.³³
2. *Foretelling* – declaring what was going to happen in the future.

The first comprised about 90 percent of prophesying content in the Old Testament; the latter about 10 percent. Today—if you can receive it—we enjoy the superior vantage point of being able to look back on this fulfillment, and prophesy “fully” from a “forthtelling” standpoint. Again, how so? Simply put, we are “to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the faith” (Jude 3).³⁴

Lastly—if you can receive it—allow me to prophesy in a foretelling manner. The next great awakening and reformation of Christianity will be the reformation of end-time biblical prophecy and its central component of the everlasting kingdom. When will this happen? It's already happening. Back in 1999, Dr. James Earl Massey, Former Sr. Editor, *Christianity Today* and Dean Emeritus, School of Theology, Anderson University wrote and I quoted (with permission) on the back cover of one of my books: “Noe's book just could be the spark that ignites the next reformation of Christianity.”³⁵

If that book was the “spark,” then I am foretelling that the synthesis of the four major end-time views presented in my later book, *Unraveling the End: A balanced scholarly synthesis of four competing and conflicting end time views*, along with my book, *A Once Mighty Faith*, will someday fan that spark into a flame of this next great awakening and reformation, so help us God.

Of course, this occurrence may not happen in my or your lifetime. But one of my driving purposes is to build a body of knowledge (numerous books, website, etc.) that will transcend me and possibly contribute to bringing all this about someday. Yes, I believe that our “once mighty faith” stands in further need of major reform. My book, *A Once Mighty Faith: Reclaiming the central teaching of Jesus, reengaging the miraculous* is part of this effort.

³³ See Noë, *The Greater Jesus*.

³⁴ Jude was written just prior to AD 70. But he was speaking proleptically here—i.e., it was so close that it was spoken of as already present. Jesus spoke proleptically in John 17:4. Paul spoke proleptically in 2 Tim. 4:7.

³⁵ See: John Noë, *Beyond the End Times* (Seaward, PA.: IPA, 1999), back cover. And on its revised, expanded, and re-titled edition: Noë, *The Perfect Ending for the World*, back cover.

Objection #3 – The Evidence Demand

It's the second most-voiced objection by cessationists today. And, it's a philosophical one.

Below are a few examples of how this demand is variously voiced; sometimes arrogantly and often with vitriol, ridicule, and contempt. After spending over twenty-five years interacting with both cessationists and charismatics, let's hear it in their own words, (anonymously, of course):

- “If all this is true and these miraculous gifts, powers, signs, and wonders are for today, then why aren't we seeing them in operation in our midst?”
- “The easy, simple way to validate your claim is to provide the evidence.”
- “You claim miracles and spiritual gifts are for today, demonstrate it, validate it, document it, or else this is YOUR problem. It's a cut and dry issue!”
- “Let's see you do this. Let's see an example.”
- “Show me a miracle, then I'll believe.”
- “Prove it to me! Go down to the hospitals in your town and empty out the beds!”
- “Find patients with verifiable MAJOR problems (like missing limbs, spinal deformities, massive tumors, etc.) and then heal them on the spot and with video, then this would bring more attention to the truth of the power of God through these men, and millions would believe. . . . There is a good reason this stuff doesn't happen.”
- “Take me somewhere. I would love to see true Christians performing miracles, foretelling and forthtelling the future, speaking new languages in matters of seconds without having learned them, and giving new inspired doctrine and messages from God!”
- “Why don't you go down to Kentucky or West Virginia and start handling poisonous snakes and drinking poison?”
- “Show me a guy who can heal somebody/prophesy/raise the dead!”
- “If you are right you need to incarnate it.”
- “It is your lack of evidence . . . that simply CONFIRMS the exegetical evidence.”
- “If you showed me a genuine miracle, I'd believe anything you say.”
- “Nothing was hidden or ambiguous about the supernatural abilities of those in the first century. It was out in the open for all to see, up close and personal.”
- “But no one has this ability beyond A.D. 70 . . . no one. Anyone claiming to have it, or to have seen it is a liar, or confused, or is seeing things.”

Further compounding this unbelief are these confounding observations:

- “After forty-plus years of experiencing Pentecostal services, I have never heard an interpretation of tongues that was any more profound in substance than the message in a fortune cookie.”³⁶
- “Tongues is the easiest gift to counterfeit. Many manufacture it. It can be a learned behavior. It all sounds the same. I know. I did this for 5 1/2 years” (mine).

³⁶ Facebook, February, 1, 2014.

- Unfortunately, many prophecies I've also witnessed are so general anybody with a small amount of Bible knowledge could have uttered them without any Holy Spirit empowerment. Rutz concurs that "the majority of prophecies are so innocuous and generic that they don't need any more evaluation than a nod of the head."³⁷ Here's one example of a "Prophetic Word of the Lord" given by an elder in a local Pentecostal church. It was reprinted and handed out to the congregation the following week:

I live on the inside of thee, yea, everything I am is inside thee today. Reach out to me in this hour, dare to believe me. Look not around at the circumstances. Look not at the situations but know that I am the Almighty One that will take thee and lead thee and guide thee. I will bring thee to the higher depths and the higher heights. I will take thee into my realm of my Spirit, saith the Lord. Dare to believe me in this hour for surely I am in thy midst, I am with thee.³⁸

My Responses: There are some significant and inherent reasons for these major deficiencies.³⁹ Furthermore, neither I nor you are going to convince anyone. If we could, somebody else could come along and convince them otherwise. Only the Holy Spirit can convince someone, scripturally and/or experientially.

Nevertheless, the arrogant attitude and demanding demeanor of some cessationists is similar to that of the soldiers "mocking and beating" Jesus after his arrest. "They blindfolded him and demanded, "Prophecy! Who hit you?" And they said many other insulting things to him" (Luke 22:63-65; also see Acts 2:13). So how did Jesus respond? He remained silent.

No question, the great advantage the cessationist position enjoys is they don't have to provide any hard evidence. Theirs is essentially an argument from silence and non-visibility. That's because there is nothing for them to provide to demonstrate that something doesn't exist anymore. All they have to do is point to the errors and excesses of charismatics and Pentecostals (of which there are plenty) to "substantiate" their case of non-existence.

The cessationists are also correct that the burden of proof is upon those saying these supernatural gifts exist today. We must be the ones to demonstrate and validate them, openly and honestly. As Kurt M. Simmons notes: "The miracles in the Bible were of such a quality that even the enemies of Christ could not deny them. Obviously, nothing like that exists today."⁴⁰

Regarding the "empty-out-the-hospitals" challenge. For one, Jesus never did this. Nor did Paul, or any New Testament person. Nor did Jesus heal everyone all the time. He admitted that He could only do what He saw the Father doing (John 5:19-20). He also said, "blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed (John 20:29). What's more, many who did see Jesus and his miracles still did not believe. Some Pharisees even accused Him of driving out demons by demonic power, "by Beelzebub, the prince of demons" (Matt. 12:24). In contrast, Jesus equated this deliverance with "the kingdom of God has come upon you" (Matt. 12:28).

Regarding taking a cessationist somewhere to show them these gifts in operation. This would be difficult for two reasons. For one, I don't know any place I could take a cessationist where I could be sure this would happen on that day and at that time. Secondly, if that person went with me, their unbelief could squelch anything miraculous that might have happened.

³⁷ James Rutz, *Mega Shift* (Washington, D.C.: WND Books, 2011), 182.

³⁸ August 23, 2015.

³⁹ See Noë, *A Once Mighty Faith*, Chapter 7.

⁴⁰ Kurt M. Simmons, "The Sword & The Plow," Newsletter of the Bimillennial Preterist Association, Vol. XVI, No. 7 – July 2013, 15.

Regarding handling poisonous snakes and drinking deadly poison (a la Mark 16:17-20). I confess, I'm scared of snakes; and don't have that much faith. When I was in college I worked for two summers on a survey crew cutting access roads into a new lake project (Monroe Reservoir) through the thick brush and forests of Southern Indiana. I still have the skins from two 6-foot-long timber rattlesnakes (of many) that we crossed paths with during those days.

But scripturally, and even though this passage appears only once and is a manuscript discrepancy, I don't know how literal we should take Mark 16:17-20. After all, Jesus used the word "serpents," figuratively. In Matthew 23:33, He called the Pharisees, "you serpents/snakes, you brood of vipers." In Luke 10:19, when Jesus sent out the seventy or seventy-two, He gave them "authority to trample on snakes and scorpions, and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you." In the next verse He explained that He was talking about "the spirits" submitting to them (Luke 10:20).

Regarding the drinking of deadly poison. I have no idea how to explain that or where to go in Scripture for any clarification.

This we also should know. Arrogance, contempt, ridicule, or condemnation on either side of this divisive and highly emotional issue (by some) is inexcusable. Humility should be our virtue as we must realize that we are not God and could be wrong.

Kendall's Trifecta of Wisdom, Admonishment, and Advice

Those who are faithful believers in Jesus's power today are more likely to see His healing miracles than those who say, 'I will believe it when I see it.' . . . So could it be that God withholds the lack of hard evidence to skeptical people for *our* sake? . . . Will you and I still be faithful without our cessationist friends seeing God's manifest power for themselves? Many of us would so *love* to be openly vindicated. But what if God is behind the withholding of His manifest power to our critics in order that we get our vindication not from people's approval but from the Father alone? . . . My point is simply this. Let us not live for the vindication of our theological views. God wants us to receive the praise that comes from Him alone (John 5:44). If we became openly vindicated of our position that God manifests His power and glory today through the gifts of the Spirit, we might succumb to the praise of people. We could. We all have fragile egos.⁴¹

Fortunately, the cessationist perspective did not hit the third world before the gospel spread into Latin America, South America, Africa, or Indonesia. Or Singapore. Malaysia. China. Christianity has invaded these countries with a tremendous surge of power in recent decades. Virtually all of them are charismatic or Pentecostal and practice the gifts of the Holy Spirit unhindered. Are we to think it is strange fire that has broken out in these nations? Or is it not holy fire?⁴²

Cessationists erected a doctrine to justify the absence of miracles, even implying that God never intended signs and wonders and miracles to extend beyond a certain period. As a consequence of this teaching, cessationists sometimes feel forced to deny anything that smacks of the supernatural. I know some are so defensive for their cessationism that they choose to call anything supernatural demonic! . . . Some are ready to affirm the demonic, but not the Holy Spirit. . . . *it must be of Satan* because God doesn't perform miracles today!⁴³

⁴¹ Kendall, *Holy Fire*, 115-116.

⁴² Ibid., 121.

⁴³ Ibid., 122.

Objection #4 – Only 3 Appearances in Scripture

Supernatural signs, wonders, and miracles were explicitly mentioned and normative only three times in Scripture. During: 1) the Exodus, 2) Elijah's testing the false gods vs. the real God, 3) The ministry of Jesus and the Apostles. Therefore, it's further deduced, these miraculous manifestations were only part of God's plan during those three historical periods. And that's it.

My Response: I agree with Deere, "There are a number of difficulties with this argument, and it seems that most cessationists no longer use it. . . . [T]here are simply too many supernatural events occurring outside of these three periods for the theory to be meaningful. A quick survey of the Old Testament will reveal how commonly miraculous events occurred."⁴⁴

Likewise, the history of early Church writings documents continuance of the miraculous works of the Holy Spirit throughout the 2nd and 4th into the 5th centuries. One source is Eddie L. Hyatt's list of testimonies. Original source references are provided in his chapter:

Justin Martyr (AD 100–165) "For the prophetical gifts remain with us even to the present time. Now it is possible to see among us women and men who possess gifts of the Spirit."

Irenaeus (AD 125–200) "In like manner we do also hear many brethren in the Church who possess prophetic gifts and through the Spirit speak all kinds of languages. . . . Yes, moreover, as I have said, the dead even have been raised up, and remained among us for many years."

Tertullian (AD 150–240?) "For seeing that we too acknowledge the spiritual *charismata*, or gifts, we too have merited the attainment of the prophetic gift . . . and heaven knows how many distinguished men, to say nothing of the common people, have been cured either of devils or of their sicknesses."

Novation (AD 210–280) "This is he [the Holy Spirit] who places prophets in the church, instructs teachers, directs tongues, gives powers and healings, does wonderful works . . . and arranges whatever gifts there are of the *charismata*; and thus making the Lord's Church everywhere, and in all, perfected and complete."

Origen (AD 185–254) "Some give evidence of their having received through this faith a marvelous power by the cures which they perform, invoking no other over those who need their help than that of the God of all things, along with Jesus and a mention of his history."

Augustine (AD 354–430) In his work, *The City of God*, Augustine tells of healings and miracles that he has observed first hand and then says, "I am so pressed by the promise of finishing this work that I cannot record all the miracles I know."

Hyatt thus concludes that "these testimonies clearly demonstrate that spiritual gifts continued to be common in the church from the Day of Pentecost and up to the beginning of the fourth [sic – fifth] century."⁴⁵ But he also highlights that "while some articulate a theory of cessation to

⁴⁴ Deere in Graves, ed., *Strangers to Fire*, 209, 211.

⁴⁵ Hyatt in Graves, ed., *Strangers to Fire*, 7-8. Also, Hyatt points out that "Augustine's views on this matter changed with time and he later fully embraced the continued work of the Holy Spirit and His gifts in the church." Ibid., 8.

explain the lack of miracles and spiritual gifts [subsequently], others throughout history have acknowledged that the problem has been a lack of faith and holiness within the church.”⁴⁶

Objection #5 – The ‘Until’ Argument of Ephesians 4:11-13

Deere rightly recognizes that this passage (see again page 2) is “the only reference in Paul’s writings that I have found that specifically mentions the ‘duration’ of the apostles’ ministry is the ‘until’ of Ephesians 4:13.”⁴⁷

My Response: But let’s re-explore five key components of this passage:

1) This text encompasses apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. If apostles and prophets ceased, why not evangelists, pastors, and teachers? But there is no textual justification to bifurcate this list. They all work for the same purpose “to prepare God’s people for works of service” (Eph. 4:12a). Nevertheless, MacArthur simply asserts without clarification or textual support that “the other three offices—evangelist, pastor, and teacher—have continued throughout church history.” And that “believers are still gifted by the Holy Spirit for the purpose of building up the body of Christ—through gifts of teaching, leadership, administration, and so on.”⁴⁸ Once again, it’s a pick-and-choose, deductive hermeneutic.

2) Even preterist cessationist Don Preston recognizes that “it need not be thought that the word (‘until’) is always used in the sense of ‘up to the point of and not after.’ Very often in Scripture the word is used in a transitional sense without the sense of termination.”⁴⁹

3) This passage does not specify that this duration would only last one generation. It would be “until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (Eph. 4:13).

4) I agree with Deere’s closing assessment: “At present it is difficult to view the church as having reached the level of maturity described in verse 13.”⁵⁰ And this maturity may never be reachable as new people enter the Church every day and have been doing so for over nineteen centuries and counting.

Perceptively, in this author’s opinion, Deere summarizes:

No specific text of Scripture prevents Jesus from appearing to and commissioning others in an apostolic office. . . . [However] I do not know of anyone today whom I would want to call an apostle in the same sense that I would call Paul as apostle. I am not willing, however, to rule out this possibility, because I do not think the Scriptures rule it out. Even if apostles have ceased, that would prove nothing in regard to the ministry of signs and wonders or of the miraculous gifts of the Spirit.⁵¹

5) The proverbial “800-pound-gorilla-in-the-room” problem here is, nowhere does the New Testament say apostles and prophets will cease to function, least of all in Ephesians 2:20-22. For

⁴⁶ Ibid., 8-9. Also see Gary Steven Shogren, “Christian Prophecy and Canon in the Second Century: A Response to B.B. Warfield,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 40/4 (December 1997) 609-626.

⁴⁷ Deere in Graves, ed., *Strangers to Fire*, 203.

⁴⁸ MacArthur, *Strange Fire*, 206.

⁴⁹ Don Preston, “Until He come,” *The Living Presence*, April, 1991, 9.

⁵⁰ Deere in Graves, ed., *Strangers to Fire*, 203.

⁵¹ Ibid., 207.

if they do cease, this “foundation” crumbles and “the whole building . . . a holy temple in the Lord” collapses. Which is where cessation theology eventually leads and leaves us.

Objection #6 – The Things that Mark an Apostle

Much confusion exists over who and what is an “apostle.” Billy Graham explains that “the word ‘apostle’ literally means ‘one who is sent out,’ and it was first applied to the little band of 12 disciples who were with Jesus during His earthly ministry. . . . only someone who’d known Jesus personally could be called a true apostle.”⁵² Others say an apostle is one who plants churches and raises up leaders.

MacArthur contends that “it would be impossible for any contemporary Christian to meet the biblical qualifications required for someone to be considered an apostle.” He cites “at least three necessary criteria: (1) an apostle had to be a physical eyewitness of the resurrected Christ (Acts 1:22; 10:39-41; 1 Cor. 9:1; 15:7-8; (2) an apostle had to be personally appointed by the Lord Jesus Christ (Mark 3:14; Luke 6:13; Acts 1:2, 24; 10:41; Gal 1:1); and (3) an apostle had to be able to authenticate his apostolic appointment with miraculous signs (Matt. 10:1-2; Acts 1:5-8; 2:43; 4:33; 5:12; 8:14; 2 Cor. 12:12; Heb. 2:3-4).” He, therefore, concludes that “those qualifications alone conclusively demonstrate that there are no apostles in the church today.”⁵³

My Response: Well, I know Jesus personally. I know several people who plant churches and raise up leaders. I also know people who claim to have physically seen Jesus. And, as we have seen, God is the One Who appoints “first of all apostles, second prophets,” etc. “in the church” (1 Cor. 12:28). Likewise, God was also authenticating the message of others, besides the apostles, with miraculous signs during those New Testament times.

Deere concurs as he questions: “Does that mean that only the few were intended to plant churches and that when Paul died, church planting also died? . . . the conclusion is false, because it contradicts New Testament commands to evangelize and disciple the world (see Matt. 28:18-20; Luke 24:47; and Acts 1:8).”⁵⁴

Objection #7 – Tongues Were Known Languages

MacArthur, who totally opposes the “premise that *everything* that happened in the early church ought to be expected and experienced in the church today,”⁵⁵ insists and emphasizes in italics that “tongues in the Bible were *authentic foreign languages*. . . . [And] if Scripture had been their [Pentecostals/charismatics] highest authority, they would have abandoned the practice altogether—recognizing the fact that what they were doing did not match the biblical precedent. Instead, they radically changed their interpretation of the New Testament, manipulating the text in order to justify and preserve a counterfeit. . . . as *nonsensical gibberish*”⁵⁶ He warns that “true believers should avoid such spiritual frauds at all costs.”⁵⁷

⁵² Billy Graham, “My Answer,” “You had to know Him,” *The Indianapolis Star*, 9/8/15, 4E.

⁵³ MacArthur, *Strange Fire*, 92

⁵⁴ Deere in Graves, ed., *Strangers to Fire*, 182.

⁵⁵ MacArthur, *Strange Fire*, 91.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 72.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 81.

MacArthur further charges that “the charismatic quest for extra-biblical revelation, ecstatic experiences, subjective guidance, unrestrained emotionalism, and material prosperity represents a massive danger. In the same way a child should avoid matches, believers ought to stay away from the strange fire of unacceptable charismatic worship and practice.”⁵⁸

My Response: Pentecostals and charismatics scripturally counter that “tongues . . . described by Paul in 1 Corinthians 12 and 14. . . . were for worship, edification, prophecy, etc. and not the same as tongues in Acts 2.”⁵⁹

Let’s recall that there are “differences of administrations” and “diversities of operations” within each gift (1 Cor. 12:5-6 – KJV). NIV says: there are “different kinds of service” and different kinds of working.” This is true for all the gifts including tongues. Certainly, at Pentecost (Acts 2) Jews from every nation heard the Gospel “in his own language” (Acts 2:6b). But there are other types, purposes, and workings of tongues (see 1 Cor. 14:2-19).

Kendall also grants that “tongues is the only gift of the Spirit that challenges your pride I sometimes think that some church leaders would be willing to drop their theological view that the gifts have *ceased* if tongues were not included in the list of gifts.”⁶⁰

Objection #8 – Tongues Were a Sign for Unbelievers and Nothing Else

In 1 Corinthians 14:21-22, Paul quoted the Old Testament and then stated that: “Tongues, then, are a sign, not for believers but for unbelievers; prophecy, however, is for believers, not for unbelievers.”

My Response: Indeed, this is true. But the “nothing else” deduction is without scriptural merit. This objection is a classic example of a partial truth parading as the whole truth, which is a lie. Once again, as we saw in Objection #7, tongues were not limited only to this application. They were also “given for the common good” (1 Cor. 12:7b). That certainly included believers.

Again, let’s re-emphasize. There are “differences of administrations” and “diversities of operations” within each gift (1 Cor. 12:5-6 – KJV). NIV says: “different kinds of gifts” (vs. 4), “different kinds of service” and “different kinds of working.”

Six Preterist Objections

These six objections are employed primarily by preterist cessationists. Like the previous “big eight,” they, too, are deductive. We’ll briefly mention each and respond accordingly. They are not prioritized in any particular order.

Objection #9 – Addressed to Them Not Us

“There are no miraculous manifestations of the Spirit today. These belonged to the age of the apostles and have long ceased to exist. . . . The work of the Holy Ghost today is to convince the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment (Jn. 16:7-11). The Spirit began this work with miracles to testify to the truth of the apostles’ message, but today he uses just the word.”⁶¹

⁵⁸ Ibid., 82.

⁵⁹ William De Arteaga in Graves, ed., *Strangers to Fire*, 32.

⁶⁰ Kendall, *Holy Fire*, 145.

⁶¹ Simmons, “The Sword & The Plow,” 15.

“They were only for the immature state of the church during the transition period (30-70 AD), to get them through the tribulation until the Kingdom was firmly established.”⁶²

My Response: Notably, everything Jesus and the New Testament writers said and wrote was addressed to them, back then and there. So how many of the other things are we going to toss out based on this same reasoning? That is, where and how does one arbitrarily stop ceasing things? At some point this cessationism becomes ludicrous. For instance, some preterists now believe the Church is no longer here and the Great Commission no longer applies. Then by what text or hermeneutic do we not stop the seeking of the kingdom (Matt. 6:33), doing the works of Jesus (John 14:12), or obeying the moral requirements today? As long as we are ceasing things based on this objection, let's get rid of all this other stuff as well.

Also, as readers of *A Once Mighty Faith* saw in its Chapter 8, the everlasting form of the kingdom arrived fully established. And the events of circa A.D. 70 were part of its increase. Likewise, the Church will always contain immaturity as long as new believers arrive daily and old ones sit, soak, and sour.

Objection #10 – We have Christ, We Don't Need Anything Else

Preterist Edward E. Stevens unpacks this cessationist objection thusly: “They had the *temporary and partial* indwelling and empowering of the ‘comforter.’ But we now have something even better, the *permanent fullness* of Christ Himself. The Holy Spirit’s work is done. Christ has returned. We live in Christ’s presence, and He dwells in us.”

He compares this change to being “like manna in the wilderness. Once they crossed the Jordan River into the promised land, the manna ceased. They didn’t need (nor want) the manna to continue. They had the better things (the milk and honey) to eat. Now that Christ has brought His kingdom, we have the better things and the better country. . . . Why would we want the manna (the Paraclete) when we’ve got Christ Himself (the true Milk and Honey) present with us? Has Christ returned, or is the Comforter (the Paraclete) still with us? Which would you rather have, the hope or the fulfillment of that hope? The partial temporary things of the Paraclete or the abiding presence of Jesus Christ?”

To his credit, Stevens does admit that: “I might have misunderstood these things.”⁶³

My Response: Indeed, he has. For one, they had Christ living with them, back then and there, too (see Matt. 28:20b; 18:20; 1:23; Mark 16:20; Rev. 1:13; and more).⁶⁴ And this idea that we today have “no need.” What about these two needs? We Christians here in America are losing the culture and our kids in droves! The facts are that the cessationist position, whether from the preterist or futurist viewpoints, results in a staid, stagnant, and stilted version of Christianity. On the other side of this coin, of course, are the Pentecostal and charismatic tendencies toward fabrications, misuses, and embarrassing excesses of the gifts.

Not surprisingly, therefore and sadly, I agree with Jim Cymbala: “Too many churches have ‘programmed out’ the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. . . . Even God would have a difficult time breaking into that tight schedule. . . . Time for openness to the Spirit, free-flowing praise or prayer—this is anathema to contemporary church philosophy. . . . No wonder so many

⁶² Edward S. Stevens, “Is It Consistent to be a ‘Partial Charismatic’ Preterist?” International Preterist Association, Seaward, PA., n.d., 14.

⁶³ Ibid., 17-18.

⁶⁴ For more, see: “He Never Left” in Noë, *The Greater Jesus*, 26-31.

are leaving the church and Christianity is declining. We don't seem to want God Himself to visit us! We would rather have the human than the divine.”⁶⁵

Objection #11 – Confined to the ‘Last Days’

“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. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days and they will prophesy. I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire will be turned to darkness” (Acts 2:17-19, quoting Joel 2:28-30).

Both futurists and preterists use this passage but apply it differently. Many futurist charismatics believe we are now living in those “last days.” Jon Ruthven is one. He maintains that “to see we are in the last days, refer to 2 Tim. 3:1; Heb. 1:1-2; 2 Pet. 3:3).”⁶⁶ Some Pentecostals believe these gifts ceased but returned “in the early morning hours of New Years’ Day 1901 . . . [at] the beginning of the modern Pentecostal Movement.”⁶⁷

Preterist cessationists believe the biblical “last days” began and ended in that 1st century. They coincided with the transition period in the change of covenants and ages—from the Old to the New Covenant and from “this present age” to the “age to come.”⁶⁸ In further support, Hebrews 1:2 is cited: “but in these last days he [God] has spoken to us by his Son”

My Response: I subscribe to the preterist view of these “last days” being confined to the 1st century.⁶⁹ But I do not subscribe to the deduction of confining the supernatural gifts and powers of the Holy Spirit to only that time period. Here’s why. Inductively, Scripture reveals that these gifts and miraculous powers belonged not to the “last days” but to the “age to come.” The writer of Hebrews emphatically speaks of those in the 1st century as being “who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers (*dunamis* – miraculous powers) of the age to come” (Heb. 6:5; also see Eph. 1:21-23; 3:20-21; Rom. 11:29).

Here’s how that worked. During that “this present age” (i.e., the age of Moses, the Old Covenant age), the new age of the New Covenant, called the “age to come,” was in-breaking into human and redemptive history. This was the time of transition between those two covenants and two ages. Thus, two ages and two covenants were present and overlapping at the same time. That is why Paul wrote during that time period: “Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come” (1 Cor. 10:11 NAS). Note: it is “ends” and “ages” plural. That is: the back end of “this present age” and the front end of the “age to come” were both present. But when “this present age” ended circa A.D. 70, the “age to come” continued. And these *dunamis* powers belonged to and were possessive of that “age to come.” Hence, they were not confined to those “last days” as some preterists contend. And when “age to come” continued, so did its constituent elements. These powers did not cease. They are also part of Jesus’ same-natured, fully established, everlasting, and ever-increasing kingdom. Hence, these *dunamis* powers spanned both ages and were not a temporary interlude.

⁶⁵ Jim Cymbala, “Why Many Churches Exclude the Holy Spirit on Sunday,” *Charisma*, February 2015, 50-52.

⁶⁶ Jon Ruthven in Graves, ed., *Strangers to Fire*, 14.

⁶⁷ MacArthur, *Strange Fire*, 19-20, 251.

⁶⁸ For more on “The Two-age Jewish View of Time,” see: Noë, *The Perfect Ending for the World*, 111-112.

⁶⁹ See *Ibid.*, 171-202 and Noë, *Unraveling the End*, 213-236.

Objection #12 – Canon of Scripture

Preterist cessationists deduce that if the gift of prophecy is still operative today, then the canon of Scripture is not closed and new books of the Bible could and should still be being written. But that's an anathema to them and to most Christians. It's further deduced that if the canon of Scripture is closed (to which most Christians agree), then all prophecy must have ceased when all was fulfilled circa A.D. 70.⁷⁰

My Response: The fact that the Holy Spirit operated back in Bible times to inspire a completed body of truth (the Bible) does not mean that the gift of prophecy was limited to only that application. Certainly, “prophecy of Scripture” (2 Pet. 1:20-22) existed in Bible times. But there were also other types of prophecy. Thus, the continuance of prophesying and the other gifts does not demand or necessitate an open canon. Graves agrees that “prophecy and revelation exists [sic] beyond the written word, although it is consistent with the written word.”⁷¹ Here are four good reasons why this contingency or linkage is not necessitated:

1) Again as we have seen, there are “differences of administrations” and “diversities of operations” within each gift (1 Cor. 12:5-6 – KJV). NIV says: “different kinds of service” and “different kinds of working.”

2) The writing of Scripture was one of those “different kinds of administrations” and “operations” or “services/workings.” Therefore, in Scripture we see both “prophecy of Scripture” (2 Pet. 1:20-21) and prophecy and prophesying “not of Scripture.”

3) For example:

- In Acts. 19:6-7—these twelve weren't prophesying Scripture.
- In Acts 11:27; 21:9-11—the prophet Agabus prophesied but did not write Scripture.
- In 1 Corinthians 14:1-5; 39 and Romans 12:6—these verses were not written to encourage brothers who would be used to write Scripture.
- Paul's prophecy about his current sea voyage in Acts 27:10—was a personal prophecy and non-canonical, even though it was later included in Scripture by Luke.
- The same might be said of the prophecy given to Paul by an angel in Acts 27:23-27.

4) Paul did not forbid extra-biblical, non-canonical prophesying and revelation. He encouraged it (see for example 1 Pet. 4:10). Possibly, Paul might even have known he was writing Scripture (see 1 Cor. 14:37-39).

In sum, the contingency or linkage of the inspired writing of Scripture with all other different kinds of service, workings, administrations, operations of these gifts (including prophesying) is arbitrary, assumptive, deductive, and not necessitated in Scripture.

Additional Insights of Others

R.T. Kendall – “There are levels of prophecy, pointing out that canonical prophets or biblical writers—the highest level—will not be duplicated ever again, just as Scripture is final and complete. What must be avoided in any case is people saying ‘Thus saith the

⁷⁰ The fact that the canonical process can never be repeated is essentially a moot point about whether or not other books should have been included or some included should not have been.

⁷¹ Graves, ed., *Strangers to Fire*, xxxvi.

Lord’ or “The Lord told me.’ Speaking like this is not only highly presumptuous but is taking the name of the Lord in vain. . . . It is using God’s name—the worst kind of name dropping—to elevate our own credibility.”⁷²

Jim Cymbala – “Those who deny our need of the Holy Spirit’s direction and help today because ‘the canon of Scripture is closed’ totally miss the point. It’s not new truth or doctrine He brings. We already have God’s unchangeable truth in Scriptures, but what we need is the Spirit’s life and power! . . . we need to invite the Spirit into our churches and make room for Him in our lives throughout the week. When He comes, He makes Jesus Christ real and strengthens us to face every difficult challenge before us.”⁷³

Craig S. Kenner – “Continuing prophecy is not opposed to a fixed canon Prophecy, like history, worship songs, or laws, is merely one genre in Scripture, and is by no means coextensive with it. Most prophecies in biblical times do not appear in Scripture: thus, for example, we read of a hundred prophets whose prophecies are not recorded anywhere (1 Kgs. 18:13), and multiple prophecies in weekly house church meetings (1 Cor. 14:29-31) that in the first few decades of early Christianity may have altogether numbered in the tens of thousands. Prophecy, then, could occur independent of Scripture; revelation in that broader sense was never limited to Scripture. [Hence], The meaning of ‘canon’ is not all that God has ever said, but the critically agreed-on measuring stick for evaluating other revelation. Further, when we speak of God speaking today most of us are speaking not of new doctrine, but of personal intimacy with God or personal guidance from him.”⁷⁴

Objection #13 – Daniel 9:24 – ‘to Seal Up Vision and Prophecy’

This is another verse deductively utilized by preterist cessationists for claiming the cessation of all the charismatic gifts. By “seal up,” they take this to mean:

1) All New Testament books had been written by A.D. 70 (I agree).

2) All of the Holy Spirit’s miraculous ministry would be finished, sealed up, ceased, and pass away (I don’t agree).

My Response: This verse only mentions vision and prophecy. Then by what hermeneutic can this one verse be used to discard all the miraculous ministry of the Holy Spirit? Also, “Where there is no vision, the people perish” (Prov. 29:18a, KJV), has vision ceased? Let’s also remember, once again, that there are “differences of administrations” and “diversities of operations” within each gift (1 Cor. 12:5-6 – KJV). NIV says: “different kinds of service” and “different kinds of working.”

I’d suggest that “to seal up” could mean “to fulfill,” not to abolish or cease. In a similar manner, Jesus came to fulfill vision and prophecy, not to abolish it (see Matt. 5:17). Hence, we today can, should, and “boldly and without hindrance” prophesy from a forthtelling standpoint about “the kingdom of God and the Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 28:31). And we should do so “fully” compared to “in-part” back then.

⁷² Kendall, *Holy Fire*, 150.

⁷³ Cymbala, “Why Many Churches Exclude the Holy Spirit on Sunday,” 54, 58.

⁷⁴ Kenner in Graves, ed., *Strangers to Fire*, 53.

Objection #14 – What Possible Purpose Could There Be for These Miraculous Gifts of the Spirit Today?

My Response: It's exactly the same purpose as back then and there—to turn the world upside down, AGAIN (Acts 17:6). After all, human needs are still the same. We still live in a world filled with sin, brokenness, and imperfection—all in need of reconciliation, healing, and transformation. Cessation theology is surely not the answer. There is only one proper and effective way to practice the Christian faith in our modern-day world. That is, exactly the same way Jesus prescribed and modeled—and by reigning with the contemporary Christ and advancing his same-natured, fully established, unending, and ever-increasing kingdom.⁷⁵ Anything less is less.

A Wrap

My Facebook friend Randy Beavers wraps up this article rather succinctly with these cogent comments. See if you agree with him: “If healings and deliverances are not common place in your church, then you are doing something wrong. It is quite common to have folks healed or delivered of various things in our church ALL THE TIME. I work in the Gifts all the time. So if they have ceased, then someone let me know, for I must not have received the Memo!”⁷⁶

Wholeheartedly, I also agree with Graves as he concludes: “Based on the lack of Scriptural evidence supporting cessationism and the abundance of Scriptural evidence to the contrary, cessationism must be rejected and continuationism adopted, or at least considered—even if one rejects the modern Pentecostal-Charismatic movement. If the authentic gifts are missing from the church [and they are, see again Chapter 7 in *A Once Mighty Faith*], they must be diligently and prayerfully sought, not rejected and denied for lack of evidence. . . . It is God’s divine strategy for growing His Kingdom.”⁷⁷

Likewise, I find Kendall’s summation and parting advice beneficial: “I cannot for the life of me twist the text to prove that the power of God in the supernatural gifts of the Holy Spirit was limited to the times of the early church. . . . But more important than discerning the counterfeit is to be able to recognize the genuine presence of the Holy Spirit. . . . And yet to the degree you are able to recognize and embrace what is real and true, to that degree will you be able to detect and reject what is spurious and false.”⁷⁸

Personally, I cannot see where or how anything promised to the saints in that 1st century was not promised to all in Christ Jesus ever since then. Why men and women would want to rob themselves and others of any of the blessings of life in Christ and his kingdom is beyond me. Cessationism must be termed for what it truly is—a flawed theology that posits a different-natured kingdom from that presented, taught, modeled, and conferred by Jesus. That’s highly problematic for me. And I am far from being alone on this:

⁷⁵ For more on this, see: Noë, *A Once Mighty Faith*, Chapter 12.

⁷⁶ Quote with permission from Facebook comments, 3/31/15.

⁷⁷ Graves, ed., *Strangers to Fire*, 523, 527.

⁷⁸ Kendall, *Holy Fire*, xxxv-xxvi.

I'm with you 100%. I think the combination of lack of faith and lack of practice has almost *totally* led to a disappearance of the miraculous. You're right on there. All it takes is a quick trip to the developing world, where people are not burdened by our modernistic skepticism, and you can see evidence of the miraculous in abundance.⁷⁹

Many who have been influenced to withdraw from pursuing the truth of Jesus . . . may be assisted to renew their convictions and zeal. Others who have been either intimidated or misinformed (or even offended by the arrogance or biblical recklessness of self-righteous charismatics) are increasingly 'hungering and thirsting after righteousness.' . . . [There is] a desperate need for New Testament power.⁸⁰

Regrettably, the bottom-line reality for so many of us Christians, at least here in America, is, we don't see undeniable miracles, fantastic powers, and gifts of the Spirit being manifested in most of our churches. We might hear about them happening elsewhere or receive an occasional report from the mission field. But that's about it.

It has also been my observation that cessationists seldom realize the wonder and power of God. Their faith is something less than abiding in Christ. It's more of a philosophy than a relationship. They formally resist the powerful nature of Christ and his all-powerful kingdom. No, I'm not questioning their salvation, although some may not be saved since they oppose so much of the work of the Holy Spirit. So some may still wonder: does it really matter? It matters if the gifts, which were the distinctive mark of the New Testament believers, are still present and operative today, and we are missing out.

Lastly, cessation theology—from either futurist or preterist perspective—is an attempt to purge Christianity of its deemed “uncontrollable” and “unruly” elements. This reductionism results in lesser, anemic, and ineffective versions of Christianity that are staid, stagnant, and stilted in comparison to our “once mighty faith.” One day I truly hope to experience the charismata in its genuineness and fullness. But, as is addressed in Chapter 7 of *A Once Mighty Faith*, there are foundational and substantive reasons we are not today. Those deficiencies must be corrected and the Church reeducated and re-motivated if we truly desire to reengage the miraculous and see the return of 1st-century caliber (quality and quantity) signs, wonders, and miracles.

Which brings us to the topic of my book's Appendix B. What about the coming “millennial kingdom?”

⁷⁹ Barry Rodriguez, Associate Pastor, Grace Church, personal email, 2/26/13.

⁸⁰ Jack Hayford in Kendall, *Holy Fire*, 192.