

## **Pneumatology - Lesson 8: Cessationism**

### **I. Introduction**

This doctrine marks a divergence from Grudem's position, though there are some coincidental agreements. Other men we have cited likewise hold to some variant of the position refuted in these notes (John Piper, Sam Storms, Matt Chandler). Disagreement on this issue does not necessarily mark true and false believers from one another.

Excerpt from Tom Pennington – [A Case for Cessationism](#) (0:39-4:06)

Cessationism is the view that the charismatic gifts of the Holy Spirit, such as tongues, prophecy and healing, ceased being practiced early on in Church history. Cessationists usually believe the miraculous gifts were given only for the foundation of the Church, during the time between the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost (~33 AD, see Acts 2) and the fulfillment of God's purposes in history, usually identified as either the completion of the last book of the New Testament or the death of the last Apostle.

The charismatic gifts only served as launching pads for the spreading of the Gospel; as affirmations of God's revelation. The gifts of prophecy and tongues *were revelatory* and thus their operation is expected during the period prior to canon completion. Likewise their cessation is expected upon the close of the canon. This is the OT pattern as well. Prophets were in clear operation during the writing of the OT, but ceased at the close of the OT canon (400 years of silence during the intertestamental period).

Cessationism is in distinction from continuationism or the charismatic movement that believe that the apostolic sign gifts continue until the return of Christ. Even if you do not agree with the cessationist argument it is good to know and understand the position so you do not misrepresent the beliefs of your brothers and sisters in Christ who hold to it.

### **II. Why is this Issue Important and Serious?**

There is one of two errors that must be happening in this debate over charismatic gifts...

- 1) People are faking the spiritual gifts and others are deceived into believing the acts of men are miraculous acts of the Holy Spirit
- 2) The Holy Spirit is truly working and much of the church is denying God is doing the works or suppressing the work of the Spirit throughout the church

Both would be incredibly serious errors. Cessationism teaches that the first proposition is in fact the case. It does not content that everyone that believes in continuationism is a liar or deceiver. Not everyone who claims to heal or speak in tongues genuinely realizes they are not actually doing so. The vast majority who claim the practice are obvious frauds and charlatans like those you see on TV such as Benny Hinn or those on TBN (Trinity Broadcasting Network). Such proponents of the charismatic gifts expose themselves by frequent false teaching (Word-Faith movement, Prosperity gospel, denial of the Trinity)

and unbiblical practice (multitude of female preachers, unbiblical worship). They are dangerous wolves.

Lyndon Unger – [The Heterodoxies and Heresies of the Charismatic Movement](#) (48:47)  
Tom Pennington [excerpt on the worship practice of churches that utilize tongues and prophecy](#) (56:30-1:00:14)

One of the hardest parts to believe about continuationism is that the ones that claim the gifts for themselves are the ones with the worst theology and doctrine in the church. We would expect to see the most doctrinally sound churches to be gifted with the charismatic gifts if they were still being given. Instead we see just the opposite.

However, even though heresy is the overwhelmingly dominant characteristic, there is a tiny portion of the charismatic movement that is more orthodox. Unfortunately, their beliefs remove any discernable measure to distinguish the practice of the orthodox and the heretics. All make the same argument for continuationism.

John MacArthur – [An Appeal to Charismatic Friends](#) (57:57)

It must also be noted that cessationists do not deny that God physically heals or works miracles today. While most of God's miraculous works are spiritual healings, cessationists only claim the charismatic spiritual gifts have ceased to be given. Thus, seeing a person healed after prayer and the laying on of hands does not settle the debate. Rather, one would have to claim the gift of healing or miracles and be able to consistently produce the fruit thereof. Similarly, extraordinary events or providences that mimic what revelatory gifts may look like are not the equivalent of the reinstitution of the charismatic gifts (see Spurgeon's stolen gloves and disguised listener accusation, or Piper's 13<sup>th</sup> floor Bible study).

Miracles are actually rare in Scripture but what is even rarer is the unique gifting to individuals to work miracles. Only three periods show such gifting... 1) the exodus era with Moses and Joshua, 2) Elijah and Elisha era, and 3) the apostolic era. Miracles were primarily to confirm the authority and veracity of a divinely appointed messenger.

A cessationist affirms the cessation at the end of the apostolic age of the apostolic sign gifts of apostleship ([Eph 4:8, 11](#)), prophecy, tongues, interpretation of tongues, healing, and miracles. Such gifts were for the revelation of divine truth until the completion of the canon of Scripture and for the authentication for the apostles and their message. A cessationist does not deny that the Holy Spirit still works in subjectively "revealing" to us that Scripture is true or the meaning of Scripture; it is an enlightening (illumination) of the mind unto faith. However, what is denied is new objective revelation or new truths.

RC Sproul - [The Fatal Flaw of the Charismatic Movement](#) (1:58)

Continuationists will frequently cite experience, to the point where it begins to trump everything else including attention to careful exegesis or proper hermeneutics. This

methodology is the same as when Mormons claim certainty based on a burning in the bosom. In fact, some continuationists will claim a similar physical feeling that they attribute to the Holy Spirit in spite of the fact that no such experience is communicated to us in Scripture. The idea that the Holy Spirit creates supernatural physical sensations like in paganism and cults is a modern phenomenon created by modern mysticism. The Bible gives us absolutely no such expectation.

### **III. A Brief History of the Charismatic Movement**

Prior to 1901 the church at large unanimously recognized the absence of tongues, healings, and prophecy. Outside of heretical sects, no one practiced the charismatic gifts. Heretical sects had been doing so but such movements are blatantly false and not a part of the church. There are examples of leaders like Ann Lee claiming to be part of the Trinity or of certain Shakers convulsing so violently under the power of the Holy Spirit to the point of breaking their own necks in church. Also, these "gifts" were being given to unbelievers within such movements so that is an obvious problem. Other leaders claimed to be the prophet Elijah or one of the angels to the churches like in Revelation.

Near the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century there was rise in cults and a corresponding increased expectation that we were in the end times and so a greater expectation that we would see a renewal or outpouring of the charismatic gifts. Ideas of baptism of the Spirit like at Pentecost were promoted in conjunction with Christian perfectionism.

In Topeka Kansas in 1901, the modern Pentecostal movement started with Charles Parham. They were convinced they recovered the gifts of tongues, which by the way they considered to be real human language. One woman thought she was gifted with Chinese, until she went to China to use her gift and it was useless. The realization that modern tongues did not produce real languages led to a later shift to tongues being understood as a made up "angelic" language. Pentecostalism grew rapidly (see Azusa Street Revival). The Azusa church had chaotic services including "holy rollers" and wild out of control behavior. Cops were called regularly. Unbelievers were physically lifted up and thrown out of the building. Multiple denominations grew out of this movement in the following decades (Four Square, Assemblies of God, etc).

1946-47 marks the start of the faith healer movement and "Latter Rain movement," which claimed that God restore the office of apostle and prophets. They started the "impartation" idea that they could pass on the gifts of the Spirit or healing or the Holy Spirit Himself by touch. Oral Roberts, the father of the prosperity gospel and the concept of seed-faith, came from the faith healer movement. In this era charismaticism leaked into broader evangelicalism through associations with popular evangelists such as Billy Graham. Mainstream denominations began to pick up on charismatic practices for the first time.

In 1965 the Roman Catholicism charismatic movement started at Duquesne University (Pope Francis was a part of this movement). Massive multimillion dollar ministries started under popular personalities such as Oral Roberts, Jim Baker, Pat Robertson, Paul

Crouch, and Jimmy Swaggert. The Jesus movement among hippies added to the massive growth and we saw the rise of churches like the Calvary Chapel movement under Chuck Smith and the Vineyard movement under John Wimber in the early 80's.

In the 80's there were endless scandals (as has always been the case in the charismatic movement) involving adultery, prostitution, fraud, embezzlement, false prophecy, etc. Apparent revivals also arose in various areas such as in Toronto and Brownsville. More recently there was the Lakeland revival under Todd Bentley who healed people by punching or kicking them. He was found to be an alcoholic and cheating on his wife like so many other charismatic leaders. Bill Johnson in Redding California has also started a movement at Bethel Church that has revived some pagan practices such as "grave soaking." One of the newest movements is the New Apostolic Reformation which combines all the worst of the charismatic teaching and practice.

Historically it is a fact that continuationism has been practiced and promoted almost entirely in the worst churches with the most blatantly false doctrine led by false teachers who constantly get exposed for engaging in severe sin.

Lyndon Unger - [The History of the Charismatic Movement](#) (48:58)

Gary Gilley - [The History of the Charismatic Movement](#)

#### **IV. Where in Scripture does the argument from cessationism come from? (a defense of cessationism through biblical exegesis)**

*Acts 2:42-43 And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles.*

The cessationist claim is that wonders and signs are apostolic gifts that accompanied the apostles' message to validate it. In Acts 2 we see that the apostles are the ones performing such miracles, not the rest of the church. Apostolicity and the sign gifts are linked.

*2 Corinthians 12:12 The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with utmost patience, with signs and wonders and mighty works.*

*Hebrews 2:1-4 For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it. For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty, how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will.*

Notice the writer to the Hebrews claims the signs and wonders confirmed the message with the apostles, not with them. These two verses offer further proof that the signs and miracles accompanied apostolicity. As we all recognize apostles are gone so we would

expect to see the signs and wonders that proved their message to cease with them. "If you acknowledge that the canon is closed and the gift of apostleship has ceased, you have already conceded the heart of the cessationist argument."

Tom Pennington [excerpt on the cessation of apostleship](#) (30:37-32:46)  
Phil Johnson - [You're Probably a Cessationist, too](#)

*Hebrew 1:1-2 Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days He has spoken to us by his Son, whom He appointed the heir of all things, through whom also He created the world.*

This shows a clear contrast to the old ways of revelation vs. the new way. Prophets will not continue to be sent now that Christ, the prophet par excellence, has come and we are given completed revelation.

*1 Corinthians 13:8-10 Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known. So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.*

Obviously, the debate with focus on the interpretation of what "the perfect" is. The two main arguments are...

- 1) the perfect is Christ and the coming is His return at the end of the age (this is the position typically argued for by continuationists)
- 2) the perfect is the completion of revelation as contained in Scripture—the closing of the complete canon (typically argued for by cessationists)

While this may seem like an open question in the English translation, the Greek grammar does not allow for the first interpretation. "The perfect" in Greek is τὸ τέλειον (the adjective "perfect" with definite article). It is a substantive adjective in the neuter, which means it essentially serves as a noun. The neuter gender is important here because it tells us the perfect refers to an entity or concept rather than a person. If "the perfect" was referring to a person (Christ) then it would be in the masculine and could be translated as "the perfect one/man." We see this sort of use to refer to a personal being in the Lord's Prayer in [Matt 6:13](#) which says, "deliver us from the evil one" (τοῦ πονηροῦ)—simply the adjective evil with the definite article. If the adjective were in the neuter then it would mean deliver us from evil (the general concept) instead of the evil one (Satan). The exact same grammatical construction is used in [2 Thess 3:3](#): *But the Lord is faithful. He will establish you and guard you against the evil one.*

Therefore, it fair to say the grammar points us distinctly to the 2<sup>nd</sup> interpretation with "the perfect" referring to the concept of the canon coming to completion, rather than referring

to Christ. This is easier to grasp once we recognize that the Greek word τελείους conveys the idea of coming to completion or the finishing of something. For instance, when Christ cried out "it is finished" ([John 19:30](#)), He used the verb version of the same adjective (τετέλεσται, from the root τελέω). The idea is the completion rather than flawless perfection.

Andy Woods - [The Meaning of 'Perfect' in 1 Corinthians 13:8-13](#)

During the period of inscripturation we expect to see divine knowledge to continue through the revelatory gifts like prophecy and tongues. Delivering revelation from God demands perfect accuracy. It is far more than just about telling the future; it is primarily about authority. When one speak revelation he speaks with the authority of God Himself, just as the apostles did. Thus when tongues or prophecy are practiced it is authoritative and must be inerrant just like all of God's revelation. God does not speak in any other way.

*Deuteronomy 18:18-22 I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. And whoever will not listen to my words that he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him. But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in my name that I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that same prophet shall die.' And if you say in your heart, 'How may we know the word that the LORD has not spoken?'—when a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word that the LORD has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously. You need not be afraid of him.*

NT prophets are likewise to be tested ([1 Thessalonians 5:19-21](#)).

*2 Peter 1:20-21 knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.*

*Ephesians 3:4-5 When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit.*

Therefore, if tongues or prophecy still exists then the canon is still open and we are continuing to receive revelation. Every message spoken via true tongues or prophecy would be of equal authority with Scripture because both would be direct revelation from God. If it is *not* new revelation then it is not coming from the Holy Spirit and is no different from the everyday expressions of any Christian. In other words, it either conforms to Scripture and is not needed or it disagrees with Scripture and is false.

This truth is seen in the temple imagery used by Paul in [Ephesians 2:19-22](#). Both the apostles and prophets are placed at the foundation level of the household of God with Christ as the cornerstone. Both spoke divine revelation with divine authority. The church

is based on that revelation as captured in Scripture. The foundation is not continually built and re-built, but laid once and for all. Thus we see the office of prophet and apostle ceasing together upon completion of the canon (the coming of the perfect).

Supernatural prophecy and knowledge was only partial and intended to be superseded by a more complete revelation, which is why Paul consistently uses the phrase "in part"...

*1 Corinthians 13:9-12 For we know in part and we prophesy in part, 10 but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. 11 When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. 12 For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.*

The revelatory gifts are fragmented and incomplete in their very nature. But once we have inerrant and sufficient Scripture which gives us a total complete New Testament revelatory picture, such partial revelation passes away. It is no longer needed. The partial and the complete/perfect are held in a parallel tension; they are of the same quality—both revelatory. If "the partial" is clearly revelatory in nature then it makes complete sense that "the perfect" is too. This further reinforces the interpretation that it is the complete revelation of the NT Scriptures. The difference between the two is incomplete revelation versus complete revelation—it is a quantitative difference.

This is why Paul's analogies work—both highlight a quantitative difference. Tongues are the equivalent of speaking as a child, knowledge is the equivalent of understanding as a child, and prophecy is the equivalent of reasoning as a child. Thus, when the church is in its infancy it utilized such gifts. Once they received full revelation (a complete canon) they put such "childish ways" behind them. Thus, the partial revelation passes away and we cling to the complete revelation.

Scripture is that complete revelation for the church. This truth highlights why continuationists tend to downplay Scriptural sufficiency. They are creating a need for ongoing revelation. They make it appear as if the Bible is not enough and therefore we need tongues and prophecy, when in reality the doctrine of Scripture contradicts such ideas. Scripture tells us everything we need for life and godliness.

[1689 London Baptist Confession, Ch. 1 Of the Holy Scriptures, paragraph 1,6:](#)

1:1 The Holy Scripture is the only sufficient, certain, and infallible rule of all saving knowledge, faith, and obedience... those former ways of God's revealing His will unto His people being now ceased.

1:6 The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down or necessarily contained in the Holy Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelation of the Spirit, or traditions of men.

A strong doctrine of Scripture goes hand in hand with cessationism.

*2 Timothy 3:16-17 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.*

If the Bible is enough for all of that, including every good work, then what need is there for prophecy and tongues? None. The fact that the church in the NT was operating only on "partial" revelation during the inscripturation process might explain the lack of spiritual maturity we see in churches like Corinth, Galatia, and the churches in both Acts and Revelation. The very early church during the apostolic age was no golden era. It was wrought with heresy, fragile faith, false teaching, and sin. Once Scripture is completed the church takes a giant leap forward in combating such problems. This is why we see the church practice *sola scriptura* (the final authority of Scripture alone). They *always* defended the truth by Bible's authority, never via ongoing apostolicity, prophecy, or tongues. They have the completed canon and no longer need partial revelation.

### **A. The Abiding of Faith and Hope After Christ?**

The close of 1 Corinthians 13 also confirms that "the perfect" is not Christ...

*1 Corinthians 13:13 So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.*

This fact can be easily missed but faith and hope do not actually continue upon the return of Christ. Instead, they will come to fulfillment. The object of faith and hope is Christ, so when He returns both will be fully realized.

[2 Cor 5:6-7](#) says we walk by faith not by sight because we are absent from the Lord. Once we are present with the Lord at His return the reverse will be true—we will walk by sight and not by faith. Likewise, [Rom 8:24](#) says that hope that is seen is not hope, for we don't hope in what we see. Once we are present with the Lord we will see Him and no longer merely have hope in Him.

Therefore, if hope and faith are said to remain after the coming of "the perfect" it only makes sense during the church age, but not after the return of Christ. This is just like OT positive law that is abrogated upon its fulfillment in Christ. Faith and hope are abrogated in Christ's return. Unlike faith and hope, love never ends ([1 Cor 13:8](#)). Such is not said of faith and hope because both get realized and fulfilled.

### **B. When “the Perfect” Comes Chronologically or Geographically?**

One difference you might find among cessationists is the understanding of what may constitute “the coming” of the canon. Even if they agree on what “the perfect” of 1 Cor 13:10 is, they may have slight disagreement over whether the revelatory gifts cease all at the same time (chronologically) or in the same place (geographically). In other words, can the 1<sup>st</sup> century scenario be recreated in a particular location so that in

essence “the perfect” has not come yet simply because Scripture is not yet accessible? According to a geographic understanding, it may have come to America or other locations since Scripture is easily available, but not yet to remote foreign mission locations or closed countries. In such areas the Bible may not be translated into the native language or access is heavily restricted by governmental forces (Muslim or Communist countries). Some cessationists are open to the possibility that revelatory gifts may still be given *in such locations* until Scripture is accessible to those areas.

We will not take a hard line on which understanding is correct, but it is worth noting this potential difference among cessationists. However, even if certain locations were to see revelatory gifts it would still not be normative practice for established churches, especially in America.

### **C. Did Agabus Err in His Prophecy?**

For those unfamiliar with this issue... some say NT prophecy is of a different nature than OT prophecy in that it is a mixture of truth and error. The prophecy of Agabus about Paul's arrest is the defense of that position. However, that argument is proven false quite quickly.

"Agabus didn't make a mistake in prophesying that Paul would be bound by the Jews and handed over to the Romans ([Acts 21:10-11](#)). To say he erred demands more precision than prophecies warrant. Furthermore, after Paul was arrested he appealed to the words of Agabus, saying he was handed over to the Romans by the Jews ([Acts 28:17](#)), so it's clear he didn't think Agabus made a mistake. Agabus spoke the words of the Holy Spirit ([Acts 11:28](#); [21:11](#)), so we have no example in the NT of prophets whose prophecies were mixed with error." – Thomas Schreiner, [Why I Am a Cessationist](#)

### **V. Tongues**

Only two books in the Bible talk about tongues—Acts and 1 Corinthians. At Pentecost we actually get to see them being practiced. This provides the model for what tongues were—rational, normal, but foreign, human languages.

*Acts 2:1-13 When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.*

*Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. And they were amazed and astonished, saying, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt*

*and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.” And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” But others mocking said, “They are filled with new wine.”*

It is clear Peter considered tongues to be a revelatory gift (essentially a type of prophecy) because he said in [Acts 2:16-21](#) that Pentecost was a fulfillment of [Joel 2:28-32](#) (a prophecy of future prophecy). And it is clear the gift of tongues was the ability to preach using a foreign language previously unknown to the speaker. The speaker did not even know what he was saying because he did not know the language in which he spoke (the gift of tongues is not the ability to know a language you have not studied, but speaking a language you do not know before or after).

### **A. Walkthrough of 1 Corinthians 14:1-25**

Context: This is in regard to regular/formal church worship services, particularly in a church that had a chaotic and disorderly worship service. For instance, they were having too many people speak in tongues and without an interpreter. Paul spends the 1<sup>st</sup> 25 verses explain tongues and prophecy and then gives them instructions on how to structure their service in an orderly fashion (i.e. don't offer to speak in tongues if interpretation is not available, see [v. 27-28](#))

*1 Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy. 2 For one who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but to God; for no one understands him, but he utters mysteries in the Spirit. (Paul is referring here to un-interpreted tongues speaking, remember from lesson 3 on Christology that the NT concept of mystery is things once hidden but now revealed. When Paul spoke of “mysteries” he was not referring to mystical or ecstatic experiences, but to revelatory content.) 3 On the other hand, the one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation. (This is because in contrast to un-interpreted tongues the congregation can know what the speaker is saying) 4 The one who speaks in a tongue builds up himself, but the one who prophesies builds up the church. 5 Now I want you all to speak in tongues, but even more to prophesy. The one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets, so that the church may be built up. (So once tongues are interpreted they are on par with prophecy because then everyone can be edified by the message) 6 Now, brothers, if I come to you speaking in tongues, how will I benefit you unless I bring you some revelation or knowledge or prophecy or teaching? 7 If even lifeless instruments, such as the flute or the harp, do not give distinct notes, how will anyone know what is played? 8 And if the bugle gives an indistinct sound, who will get ready for battle? 9 So with yourselves, if with your tongue you utter speech that is not intelligible, how will anyone know what is said? For you will be speaking into the air. (This is all un-interpreted tongues that really are no good for the church since no one even understands them—they are unintelligible) 10 There are doubtless many different languages in the world, and none is without meaning, 11 but if I do not know the meaning of the language, I will be a foreigner to the speaker and the speaker a*

foreigner to me. (Clearly Paul has in mind regular human languages) 12 So with yourselves, since you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit, strive to excel in building up the church.

13 Therefore, one who speaks in a tongue should pray that he may interpret. 14 For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays but my mind is unfruitful. (They could be encouraged at the gift being given to them but they do not benefit in any mental capacity because they don't know what they are saying without an interpretation. That's why he wants them to pray they might be able to do just that.) 15 What am I to do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will pray with my mind also; I will sing praise with my spirit, but I will sing with my mind also. 16 Otherwise, if you give thanks with your spirit, how can anyone in the position of an outsider say "Amen" to your thanksgiving when he does not know what you are saying? (Again, clear evidence he is referencing un-interpreted tongues) 17 For you may be giving thanks well enough, but the other person is not being built up. 18 I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you. 19 Nevertheless, in church I would rather speak five words with my mind in order to instruct others, than ten thousand words in a tongue. (A statement that shows un-interpreted tongues are essentially useless in comparison to understandable instruction. He spoke in tongues a lot because he was a missionary, but not so much in church)

20 Brothers, do not be children in your thinking. Be infants in evil, but in your thinking be mature. 21 In the Law it is written, "By people of strange tongues and by the lips of foreigners will I speak to this people, and even then they will not listen to me, says the Lord." 22 Thus tongues are a sign not for believers but for unbelievers, while prophecy is a sign not for unbelievers but for believers. 23 If, therefore, the whole church comes together and all speak in tongues, and outsiders or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are out of your minds? (These outsiders/unbelievers also do not know the languages of tongues and their impression would be that a bunch of people are together in church talking in foreign languages no one understands—they are out of their minds to do so. This is similar to the accusation of being drunk at Pentecost because they saw a group of men speaking all sorts of languages they didn't know.) 24 But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or outsider enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all, 25 the secrets of his heart are disclosed, and so, falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you. (The outsider or unbeliever in this case—one that speaks the same language as the rest of the church—comes in and hears the same message but this time in a language they understand and so it convicts them as they hear the truth)

## **B. Are Tongues Ever Unknown Language of Angels?**

Nathan Busenitz - [Are Tongues Real Foreign Languages? A Response to Four Continuationist Arguments](#)

The term used for tongues (γλῶσσα, glossa) is simply the word for language. Grudem explains this well: "It is unfortunate, therefore, that English translations have continued to use the phrase 'speaking in tongues,' which is an expression not otherwise used in ordinary English and which gives the impression of a strange

experience, something completely foreign to ordinary human life. But if English translations were to use the expression 'speaking in languages,' it would not seem nearly as strange, and would give the reader a sense much closer to what first century Greek speaking readers would have heard in the phrase when they read it in Acts or 1 Corinthians." (pg. 1069)

However, some regard the primary use of tongues to be a mysterious angelic language. This notion comes from Paul's clear use of hyperbole (intentional exaggeration) to make the point of the importance of love in 1 Cor 3:1.

*1 Corinthians 13:1-3 If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.*

No one understands all mysteries and knowledge; no one has all faith. These are obviously impossible. This is clear use of hyperbole, not something Paul actually experienced. The scenarios he lists are hypothetical. They are not an indication that there is a secret unknown language of angels that tongues speakers ever practiced. This understanding is reinforced by [1 Cor 14:10](#) where Paul makes clear he is still considering tongues that are unintelligible speech to be regular worldly languages.

In spite of this, modern "tongues" speakers do so exclusively in this so-called angelic language, the vast majority of time without even an attempt at translation (which is forbidden by Paul). This is further proof that the gifts as they are supposedly practiced today do not fit the biblical description of these gifts.

"There is no evidence in secular Greek of classical or koine times, nor in pre-Christian Judaism, nor in the biblical Greek of the Septuagint that *glossa* (language/tongues) was used to mean ecstatic unintelligible speech. Such speech, although common to pagan religion, was not described by *glossa* but by other terms such as *phtheggomai* (verb, to make unintelligible utterances) which were available in the Greek language... The New Testament [also] uses the word *glossa* in the normally accepted sense of the physical tongue or human language... *Laleo* (verb, to speak) is used approximately 295 times in the New Testament; 60 of these are in the book of Acts. Excluding the 30 instances where *laleo* is used of 'speaking in tongues,' 265 instances remain. None of these seem to refer to ecstatic unintelligible speech."<sup>1</sup>

Take careful note of the above quote. There was a Greek word available to the writers of Scripture to describe the type of "tongues" many continuationists advocate for. Yet they chose not to use it and instead utilized the standard word for everyday languages. Again the continuationist argument fails grammatical and exegetical analysis.

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas R. Edgar, *Satisfied by the Promise of the Spirit*, 126, 130.

Also, it should be noted that continuationists that believe in an "angelic" language do agree that it will cease in the eternal state. However, that is the only time it would make sense to exist since we will be there with the angels and communication with them would actually be justified.

### **C. What Did the Early Church Believe About Tongues?**

The collective writings of the early church fathers overwhelmingly suggest that they associate tongues-speaking with a supernatural ability to speak rational, authentic foreign languages. That proposition is directly supported by Irenaeus, Hippolytus, Hegemonius, Gregory of Nazianzen, Ambrosiaster, Chrysostom, Augustine, Leo the Great, and implied by others (such as Tertullian and Origen).<sup>2</sup> They even consider the "private prayer language" some claim to practice as authentic foreign language.<sup>3</sup> It is also worth noting that not one church father claimed to personally speak in tongues and they do not consider it a normative part of the Christian experience.

The fathers agreed with the standard definition that the gift of tongues was supernaturally endowed ability, given by the Holy Spirit to select Christians, enabling those believers to speak in previously unlearned, rational foreign languages. The intended use of the gift involved either the translation of the message (by an interpreter) for the general edification of fellow believers, or the translation of the message (by the hearer who heard it in his own tongue) for the evangelism of unbelievers.

It is worth noting that the Reformers had unanimous agreement on this same definition of tongues along with the early church fathers.

### **D. Further Evidence Against the Modern Practice of Speaking in Tongues**

Recordings of someone speaking in tongues presented to various interpreters always produce completely different translations. This will always be the case. The debate would essentially end if a single recording were translated identically by multiple interpreters. Not only that but linguistic analysis by scholars detects no patterns of actual language. Modern charismatic speaking in tongues is mere gibberish. It shows no sign of being a real language at all (in spite of it necessarily having to be if it was interpreted). It lacks any form of grammar or syntax. Linguistic analysis proves it is a façade of a language made up of various repetitive sounds cobbled together in arbitrary sequences. The ability to mimic the sounds is acquired over time by those that listen to it frequently enough—speaking in tongues is faked, manipulated, or self-induced. It is nothing but nonsense.

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<sup>2</sup> Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5.6.1; Hippolytus, *Apostolic Constitutions* 8.1; Hegemonius, *The Acts of Archelaus* 37; Gregory of Nazianzen, *The Oration on Pentecost* 15-17; Ambrosiaster, *Commentary on Paul's Epistles*, see his comments on 1 Cor 13:1; John Chrysostom, *Homilies on First Corinthians* 35.1; Augustine, *The Letters of Petilian, the Donatist* 2.32.74; Leo the Great, *Sermons* 75.2; Tertullian, *Against Marcion* 5.8; Origen, "Preface," *Origen de Principiis* 3.1.

<sup>3</sup> Chrysostom, *Homilies on First Corinthians* 35.5-6, cited from Schaff, NPNF, First Series 12:211 in reference to 1 Cor 14:13-15.

John Kildahl explains how this manufactured process works: "There are five steps in the process of inducing someone to speak in tongues... From a psychological point of view, the first step seems to involve some kind of magnetic relationship between the leader and the one who is about to attempt to speak in tongues. Second, the initiate generally has a sense of personal distress—usually involving a profound life crisis. Third, the initiate has been taught a rationale for understanding what tongues-speaking is. Fourth, the presence of a supporting group of fellow believers enhances the possibility of eventually speaking in tongues. Fifth, somewhere in the process there is an intense emotional atmosphere."<sup>4</sup> In other words, tongues may be more closely linked to peer pressure and self-expectation than Spirit-endowment and a true gift of grace.

It is not surprising then that studies have shown that people can be trained to imitate the Pentecostal version of tongues without detection. And, maybe most significantly, "There are numerous former members of the Pentecostal movement who retain the ability to speak in tongues, even though they have no belief that their speech is a gift of God."<sup>5</sup> In fact, pagan groups and false religions employ the same practice of tongues speaking that is essentially indistinguishable from what we see from Christian groups.

Modern tongue speakers from all religions then are seen practicing an act that "is, actually, a learned behavior, learned either unwarily or, sometimes, consciously"<sup>6</sup> and "the tongue speaker is the product of considerable instruction."<sup>7</sup> As long as the New Testament gift of tongues that is supposedly practice today is equated with mere ecstatic unintelligible utterance, it can be easily explained apart from the miraculous or from the Holy Spirit. (see [Marjoe](#) documentary expose in which an apostate evangelist allows a film crew to follow him as he makes money at revivals speaking in tongues and healing people, [excerpt](#))

Continuationists are susceptible to such scams because they have no way to distinguish between true tongues and false tongues since they think they are not authentic languages. Nor can they detect true or false miracles because it is never objective outward healings. Limbs are not regenerated, eyes are not reconstituted, dead are not raised, the lame do not walk, the blind do not see, the deaf do not hear. Rather it is back or knee pain that disappears or some other undetectable "healing." Such pains often disappear with rushes of adrenaline. Athletes experience this common occurrence all the time. It is not unusual then to expect some genuine diminishment, albeit temporary, in pain in the midst of the flurry of a "healing."

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<sup>4</sup> Kildahl, "Six Behavioral Observations about Speaking in Tongues" 74.

<sup>5</sup> Kildahl, "Behavioral Observations" 76.

<sup>6</sup> Felicitas D. Goodman, "Glossolalia," in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade (New York: Macmillan, 1987) 5:563-64.

<sup>7</sup> William J. Samarin, *Tongues of Men and Angels* (New York: Macmillan, 1972), 74.

The debate over speaking in tongues, just as with all the other sign gifts, would not even exist if cessationism were not true. Every church would have some distribution of charismatic gifting granted to their members because the Holy Spirit gives gifts to the church as He sees fit. Like our faith, the reception of spiritual gifting is not by our own doing. No amount of human exertion, initiation, or training can aid in acquiring what is endowed only by the Holy Spirit.

*1 Corinthians 12:4-7 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.*

“Paul is emphatic in asserting that the distribution of gifts is not to be attributed to human causes as if they were achievable by men. The varied gifts of the Holy Spirit and the grace of the Lord Jesus are the work of one and the same God.”<sup>8</sup>

Thus, the gifts (including tongues) did not involve any prior human effort or ability to attain. That is not to say that speaking in tongues results in a lack of self-control, but rather that it truly was a gift given by the grace of God to whomever He willed. No training, education, or personal achievement was necessary.

This is why the argument fails when continuationists explain the absence of charismatic gifts by asserting that the church somehow muzzled the Spirit's work after the apostolic age (for even they recognize that those gifts have not been in operation throughout church history). Indeed it could be believed that perhaps a few isolated believers sinfully quenched the Spirit in not practicing their gifting. But it is beyond absurd to believe that the entire church and all its members somehow squelched the charismatic gifts exclusively for no apparent reason for nearly 2000 years. Why would they do such a thing? There was no negative connotation to tongues or healings like in our modern day when such practices are prevalent almost entirely amongst charlatans and frauds. There is zero incentive to hide or withhold such gifts in the church were they still being given.

We don't see any of the early church martyrs raised from the dead or their wounds being miraculously healed in the church. In fact, what we see is a marked diminishment of the charismatic gifts as the apostolic age came to a close. Even Paul, in the face of frequent ailments in the church recommended not healing but medicinal use of wine...

*1 Timothy 5:23 No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments*

*James 5:14-15 Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the*

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<sup>8</sup> Ambrosiaster, *Commentary on Paul's Epistles*, cited from 1–2 Corinthians, ACCS 120 in reference to 1 Cor 12:6.

*prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.*

There is no call to find someone for healing. This is preparation for someone's potential death. The promises are for forgiveness, not miraculous healing.

Tom Pennington [excerpt on the declining frequency of gifts in the apostolic era and the gifts in church history](#) (46:11-54:21)

In other words, if the charismatic gifts were still in operation then it would be patently obvious and undeniable the same way the other spiritual gifts are, like the gifts of preaching and teaching or administration. We don't see apostles today because the gift of apostleship ([Eph 4:8, 11](#)) is over. We don't see tongue speakers entering the mission field and sharing the gospel in foreign countries or translating the Bible into foreign languages for the same reason we don't see faith healers emptying out hospitals or graveyards—they are frauds and charlatans (or at best gravely deceived).

## **VI. Answering a Common Continuationist Excuse About Faith**

Frequently when continuationists are unable to prove their position through objective verifiable healings or speaking in foreign languages they will make the excuse that the person does not have enough faith for the miracle. This argument fails miserably because the faith Christ required to heal was in Jesus. A cessationist's disbelief in one's spiritual gifting to heal has no bearing whatsoever on whether or not they should be able to be healed by a continuationist. They need faith in Jesus, not faith in miracles or in a miracle worker.

## **VII. Conclusion**

The arguments defending continuationism are more emotional and experiential than biblical and exegetical. Many have a romanticized idea of what tongues and prophecy are and thus find it hard to give up the idea that they have ceased and we have better fuller revelation in Scripture. Most of the prophecies offered today are either too generic to even be meaningfully evaluated or are mere internal impressions on someone's heart. But our internal impressions are not revelatory, even if they are Spirit-guided. Again, it is a romanticized view of prophecy that causes one to elevate such subjective feelings to objective revelation.

Most continuationists even admit that no one is replicating the apostolic power we see in Scripture. The signs and wonders of the apostolic era have self-evidently not been duplicated. "In other words, modern charismatics have already adopted a cessationist position. When pressed on the issue, *all* honest charismatics are forced to admit that the 'gifts' they [supposedly] receive today are of lesser quality than those of the apostolic era."

Tom Pennington [excerpt on today's gifts are not the same as the NT gifts](#) (38:16-46:11)

The continuationist movement has born the bad fruit that one would expect if it truly is the false understanding cessationists claim. Continuationism cannot stand the weight of biblical, grammatical, historical, or exegetical examination. The words don't mean what they say they mean. The interpretations they offer fail the test of consistency. The grammar does not line up with the deductions they derive from the text. In every meaningful way, it is cessationism and not continuationism that stands the test of explaining reality via the Scriptures. This is why cessationism is the historic position of the church.

### **Recommended Resources**

[Cessationism.com](http://Cessationism.com) (tons of resources here)

[Monergism.com](http://Monergism.com) [Cessationism Resources](#)

[Strange Fire Conference](#)

John MacArthur books - [Charismatic Chaos](#) and [Strange Fire](#)

John MacArthur - [Charismatic Chaos Sermon Series](#)

Nathan Busenitz - [The Gift of Tongues- Comparing the Church Fathers with Contemporary Pentecostalism](#)

Phil Johnson - [Combating Charismatic Theology](#) (mp3) ([transcript](#))

Walter Chantry – [Signs of the Apostles](#) (book)

John Beardsley – [Speaking in Tongues](#)