

A N D R E W W I L S O N



SPIRIT AND SACRAMENT



AN INVITATION TO
EUCCHARISMATIC
WORSHIP

FOREWORD BY MATT CHANDLER



CHAPTER 5

CHARISMATIC

Zealously Desire Spiritual Gifts

There is a sense in which this book so far has begged the question. Some of you, especially those from more conservative backgrounds, may be exasperated that a biblical defense of charismatic practice has been deferred until now. It is quite intentional, however: Blaise Pascal persuaded me awhile ago that theological arguments do not take place on a blank canvas, and that before demonstrating that something is true, you have to first show that it is worthy of respect and then make people want it to be true. Only then can you expect to be heard when you argue that it is.¹

Nevertheless, for most readers, vision casting and anecdotes will not be enough. What is needed now is an explanation of why charismatic practice—the pursuit of both the gifts and the experience of the Holy Spirit—is biblical. Here goes.



The early church was a charismatic community. Of that there can be no doubt. From the day of Pentecost onward, the book of Acts is a story of Spirit baptism, speaking in other languages, prophesying, healing, casting out demons, angelic encounters, miraculous prison breaks, visions, dreams, evangelistic preaching, buildings shaking, the dead being supernaturally brought to life (and, on occasion, the living being supernaturally brought to death), boldness in the face of persecution, joy, and even teleportation. I have read a fair few accounts of miracles and revivals, some of them fairly extreme, but I have never seen any claims that compare to Acts in scope, frequency, or drama.

Acts is not an anomaly. Admittedly, it could seem like one. Luke, like any historian, naturally selects the events he sees as most significant, and this selectivity could create the impression that the first generation of the church was a breathless string of astonishing miracles, eloquent speeches, and evangelistic breakthroughs. A more careful reading reveals another side to things: the people who were not spared from death, the months of voyages where (to our knowledge) no miracles

occurred, Paul's lengthy imprisonment and trial. Yet even if we take the miraculous high points and then turn to the Epistles, we find—perhaps to our surprise—that they reflect strikingly similar expectations of the Christian life (although, alas, without the teleportations).

The believers in Rome are urged to use the gifts, or *charismata*, they have been given, including prophesying in proportion to their faith.² The Galatians have such a clear experience of the Spirit working miracles among them, whatever those miracles were, that Paul can use it to ground his argument about faith and works of Torah.³ The Ephesians are commanded to be filled with the Spirit rather than getting drunk on wine, and to pray in the Spirit at all times.⁴ The Thessalonians are told not to quench the Spirit or despise prophecies, but rather to test everything and hold fast to what is good.⁵ Timothy is encouraged to wage spiritual warfare according to prophecies made about him.⁶ Hebrews appeals to the evidence of signs, wonders, miracles, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit, in order to warn a congregation on the verge of backsliding.⁷ James urges the sick to call the elders for anointing with oil and proclaims that the prayer of faith will heal them.⁸ If Acts gives us the headlines and the heroes, the Epistles demonstrate, almost incidentally, just how widespread the gifts of the Spirit were in the early church.

Not just the gifts of the Spirit, either: Paul takes it for granted that his readers will share his *experience* of the Holy Spirit. He has never visited the church in Rome, but he is absolutely certain that they have experienced the Spirit of

adoption crying out “Abba! Father!” from deep within them, simply because having received the Spirit is what makes a person a believer.⁹ He knows that they share his experience of the Spirit praying for them with groans that cannot be expressed in words.¹⁰ He assumes that believers know what he is talking about when he tells them to be filled with the Spirit or pray in the Spirit or sing spiritual songs.¹¹ He knows Christians have experienced the Spirit shedding abroad the love of God into their hearts and sealing them for future glory, like a deposit, like a guarantee. Reminding them of this fact becomes his main way of giving believers assurance.¹²

The Spirit, for Paul, is at the center of Christian discipleship. Repeatedly, where modern evangelicals might be inclined to point people first to the Bible, or the gospel—pray in the Bible, rejoice in the gospel, be led by the Bible, find assurance in the gospel, experience God’s love through the Bible, keep in step with the gospel, and so on—Paul points people first to the Spirit.¹³ The chief actor in the sanctification of the believer is not a message, but a Messenger: a person who can be grieved or honored, not just a word that can be rejected or believed. The third person of the Trinity, for Paul, was a dynamic, experienced reality.¹⁴

It is abundantly clear from the New Testament that this expectation, both of spiritual gifts and spiritual experience, was for ordinary believers and not just for the apostles. I say that partly because of the very matter-of-fact way in which Paul refers to both miracles and experiences in the lives of his converts, as we have seen, and partly because of the named in-

dividuals, like Stephen, Philip, Ananias, and Agabus, who work miracles without being apostles. But I also say it because of the (otherwise inexplicable) phenomenon of anonymous miracles. This point is often missed in discussions of this subject, but it deserves a moment's reflection.

Miracle stories typically point to miracle workers. Outside of Scripture, miracles usually highlight the unique powers of the individual performing them; in the Old Testament and the Gospels, they frequently validate a person's God-given ministry and message. At Pentecost, however, things change somewhat. On several occasions, certainly, the apostles are specifically identified as the ones through whom many signs and wonders are performed. But in a number of other texts, miraculous gifts are given to ordinary members of the church: people so ordinary that not only are they not apostles, they are not even named. Of the one hundred and twenty people who spill out into the streets speaking in unlearned languages, we know the names of at most twenty, and none of them are regarded as having worked the miracle—rather, as Peter is at pains to point out, it is the ascended Jesus who is responsible for pouring out what people now see and hear.¹⁵ The same is true a few chapters later when an unknown number of Cornelius's relatives and friends begin speaking in languages.¹⁶ The twelve disciples of John the Baptist who end up prophesying and speaking in languages are never named.¹⁷ Neither are Philip's four daughters who prophesied.¹⁸ Neither are the elders who prophesied over Timothy and, apparently, imparted his gift to him.¹⁹ Miraculous gifts, in the New Testa-

ment, are not just for the apostles or even just for prominent, named individuals. They are for ordinary, anonymous, regular people.



This is without mentioning 1 Corinthians. If the apostles are at one end of the impressive Christianity spectrum, the church in Corinth are at the other. Not because of their very ordinary backgrounds—although, as Paul reminds them, that too—but because they seem to have worked their way through the entire body of Christian doctrine and praxis, and made a pig’s ear of all of it. There is division, not unity, about virtually everything: leadership, baptism, marriage, idol food, spiritual gifts, eschatology. The foolishness of the cross has been traded for the wisdom of worldly rhetoric and self-important boasting. A prominent individual is living incestuously, and the church is proud of it. Church members are suing each other. Some are visiting prostitutes. Some are participating in idolatrous worship. Corporate gatherings are a weekly debacle and do more harm than good: license-flaunting dress codes, drunkenness at the Lord’s Supper, self-indulgent spirituality, total chaos. Even the future resurrection of believers is being denied. We quote the letter at weddings—“If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal”²⁰—but it’s easy to forget that Paul wasn’t speaking hypothetically; he was talking about the church in Corinth.

Frankly, it is hard to imagine a church less apparently qualified to receive miraculous gifts.

Yet there they all are. “You are not lacking in any gift,” Paul tells them in his (breathtakingly confident) opening paragraph, “as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.”²¹ You are not lacking in any *charismata*. Collectively, you have *all* of them. And this to a church of nobodies, bunglers, squabblers, and boasters. It almost beggars belief.

It is not until chapter twelve that we start to get an idea of what these spiritual gifts are.²² Paul, eager that the Corinthians not be “uninformed” on the subject, explains that “to each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good,” and then mentions a bunch of examples: the utterance of wisdom, the utterance of knowledge, faith, gifts of healing, the working of miracles, prophecy, the ability to distinguish between spirits, various kinds of tongues, and the interpretation of tongues.²³ We can be fairly sure that this is not an exhaustive list.²⁴ Nothing Paul says here indicates that there is anything anomalous, or weird, about the fact that the Corinthians have these gifts. Far from it: he grounds it all in their conversion (12:2–3), the Trinity (vv. 4–6), the common good of the church (vv. 7–11), the gift of the Spirit to all believers (vv. 12–13), and the interdependence of the church body (vv. 14–31).

So whatever else we may say about the experience and gifts of the Spirit, it is clear that to be a Christian in Greece in the AD 50s meant at least five things. One: you had already been

baptized, or drenched, in one Spirit into one body. Two: you had been given one Spirit to drink. Taken together, these two images are highly experiential—if you are drenched, or have a drink, you really know it—and suggest that the experience of the Spirit is both initiatory and ongoing.²⁵ Three: you had been given some gifts (or manifestations) of the Spirit for the common good, whether gifts of wisdom, knowledge or prophecy, healing or miracles, languages or their interpretation, faith or distinguishing between spirits, or whatever else. Four: you had not been given all of these gifts, and nor were any gifts common to all believers. Five: as a result, you were called to serve the other members of the body with your gifts, just as you needed them to serve you with theirs. That meant you had to see your gifts as a means of exercising love for others, rather than a means of spiritual gratification or showing off, a point which Paul then develops at some length, both in principle (1 Corinthians 13) and in practice (chapter 14).

It is worth pointing out that those five things present challenges to certain forms of charismatic Christianity today. They problematize readings of Paul that identify two types of believer: those who drink of and are drenched in the Spirit (Pentecostals or charismatics), and those who don't and aren't (everyone else).²⁶ They challenge the use of any one gift as a shibboleth to mark out those who are truly full of the Spirit, as Pentecostals have traditionally done with the gift of languages. They show that the gift of healing is a *gift*, given to some in particular measure, rather than something that all believers would be able to do on demand if they simply had enough faith

or prayed a certain way or adopted a particular technique. In centering on the metaphor of a human body, and the need to love and serve one another, they also call all believers to repent of using the gifts in service of sectarianism, individualism, division, or pride, let alone the greed and falsehood that can be found in so much “prosperity” Christianity.

At the same time, they reveal two striking features of the New Testament church. Unless the Corinthians were a strange anomaly in this respect—and, as we have seen, both Acts and the other epistles indicate that they were not—normal Christianity involved emphatic encounters with the person of the Holy Spirit, such that metaphors like “filling,” “drinking,” and “drenching” seemed appropriate, and an expectation of spiritual gifts like prophecy, healing, languages, or miracles. Neither of these things were reserved for the superstars or the key leaders or the eyewitnesses of the resurrection. They were part of the everyday experience of ordinary Christians, everywhere.



So were angels and demons.

This might seem too obvious to need mentioning. After all, spiritual beings appear in virtually every book of the Bible, whether they are called angels, the sons of God, the divine council, archangels, cherubim, seraphim, Satan, the devil, demons, principalities, powers, thrones, dominions, rulers,

authorities, spiritual forces of evil, strongholds, or anything else. When they do, they are not mere metaphors for existentialist or spiritual struggle, or whatever patronizing modernist claptrap might be in vogue at the moment; they are presented as real spiritual beings with genuine agency in the world of space and time. In the world of the New Testament, angels and demons are as real, ordinary, and commonplace as animals.

Then again, perhaps this point does need to be mentioned after all. Everybody reads Scripture in light of their experience, and the reality is that an awful lot of contemporary churches operate with no expectation whatsoever of angelic or demonic interaction with our world. Consequently, even when we read about it in the Bible (let alone in church history), we either don't notice it at all or read the relevant stories through a different lens altogether.²⁷ Pauline scholars take the language of thrones and authorities and apply it to empires and social structures, as opposed to angels or demons.²⁸ Preachers may speculate on whether demonization in the Gospels is "really" a matter of epilepsy or schizophrenia. Pastors can stress the importance of fighting sin or idolatry or the flesh or the world, but not the devil. Counselors and therapists might emphasize that our struggle is not against principalities and powers, but against neurons and chemicals, flesh and blood. As for the passages in which the preaching of the gospel is accompanied by the driving out of demons, they are more likely to be met with an embarrassed cough or a baffled silence than with a summons to go and do likewise.

This is not always, or even usually, from bad motives. We genuinely seem to find it hard to believe in both angels and anesthetics at the same time. Scientific explanations, with all their logical tidiness and predictive power, seem to render unnecessary the need for spiritual ones, and there are obviously all sorts of conditions that can be treated with prescriptions as well as with prayer. On the other hand, especially in WEIRD²⁹ societies, this “as well as” can quickly become “in preference to,” and ultimately “instead of.” The result is a spirituality that is functionally naturalistic. As C. S. Lewis expressed so winsomely in *The Screwtape Letters*, it is tremendously helpful for demons when we disregard their agency altogether and act as if we have grown out of believing in them. The greatest trick the devil ever pulled was convincing the world he didn’t exist.³⁰

A brief glance at the history of the church in previous centuries, or even at the parts of the world where the gospel is making the greatest impact in this one, will expose how unique this phenomenon is to late modern, mostly white, European Christianity. If you read a random sample of patristic writings, you will quickly notice it: the church fathers believed not only in the existence of angels and demons, but in their agency, their power, their influence and intentionality, and they talked about it all the time. The Athanasius who confronted Arius over the divinity of Christ, and shaped the canon of Scripture that we have to this day, is also the Athanasius who wrote this of St. Anthony (360):

The demons made such a racket that the whole place was shaken, knocking over the four walls of the tomb; they came in droves, taking the form of all kinds of monstrous beasts and hideous reptiles. . . . They all were making a terrible noise. Groaning in pain, St. Anthony faced the demons, laughing: “If you had any power, only one of you would be enough to kill me; but the Lord has taken away your strength, so you want to frighten me by your number. The proof of your powerlessness is that you are reduced to taking the form of senseless animals. If you have any power against me, come on, attack me! But if you cannot do anything, why torment yourselves unnecessarily? My faith in God is my defense against you.” But all of a sudden a bright light illuminated the tomb; at that moment, the demons vanished.³¹

Augustine’s *City of God* (426), hardly a marginal text in the Western canon, contains four books on the subject of angels and demons, out of a total of twenty-two.³² Spiritual beings occupy one fifth of the first part of Thomas Aquinas’s *Summa Theologica* (1265–74), including a fascinating discussion of “whether men are assailed by the demons” and “whether demons can lead men astray by means of real miracles.”³³ (Spoiler alert: yes, and yes.) Luther’s wranglings with demons, and often with the devil himself, are sufficiently vivid to make the most dyed-in-the-wool Pentecostal raise their eyebrows. Angelic and demonic beings are ubiquitous in Eastern and Western painting, which will be immediately obvious to any-

one who has ever walked around an art gallery for a few minutes. All of which is to say that, from a historical perspective, let alone a global one, the relative disregard for angels and demons amongst evangelical Christians in WEIRD cultures is, in a word, weird.

One brief story may illustrate the point. In Acts 12, Peter is broken out of prison by an angel. The Jerusalem church, who have been interceding for him, are gathered in prayer at Mary's house, and suddenly Peter shows up at the door. When the servant girl Rhoda goes to let everyone know the good news, the church dismisses her as mad: "You are out of your mind. . . . It is his angel!"³⁴ Of the many intriguing things about this incident, the one that strikes me is this: the early church considered it more likely that an angel had just appeared at the door, than that Peter had just escaped from prison. *No, it's not Peter, you silly girl; it's only his angel.* Is there a church in the Western world today where that would be considered the more likely explanation? If not, what does that tell us? Are not angels ministering spirits, sent to serve those who inherit salvation?³⁵

Admittedly, it is entirely possible for a church to affirm the existence and agency of angels and demons, and live as if they interact with us on a daily basis, yet at the same time to teach that all the miraculous gifts have ceased. Martin Luther saw no inconsistency between giving traveling fanatical prophets from Zwickau a punch on the nose by day and fighting the devil by night. It is equally possible for a church to hold the opposite: that angels and demons do not interact with us any more, for whatever reason, but that the miraculous gifts continue. But

it would probably be fair to say that today, both of these positions are uncommon, and that generally speaking, the more charismatic a believer is, the more likely they are to recognize the activity of angels and demons in daily life and to pray accordingly. (They are also more likely, at least in Protestant circles, to express the gospel in terms of Christ's cosmic victory over the devil and the forces of evil.)

You can see why. A world in which demons continue to act is more likely to be a world in which Christians are called to cast them out in the name of Jesus. This in turn is more likely to be a world in which the gift of distinguishing between spirits continues and in which there is a smaller gap between the praxis of the New Testament church and that of the contemporary church. The appearance of angels, likewise, narrows the distance between the apostolic age and the digital age and leads us to expect that the miraculous phenomena that accompanied the preaching of the gospel then will continue to accompany it now.

Flipping things around, it is also easy to see how a rejection of miraculous gifts could lead to a rejection of many, if not all, modern miracles as spurious, which in turn could lead to a rejection of many, if not all, accounts of supernatural phenomena as spurious, including appearances of angels and demons. When this happens in a church culture that is doubly suspicious of miraculous claims already—driven both by secularist anti-supernaturalism, and by a centuries-old Protestant skepticism of Roman Catholic superstition—the pressure

to treat angels and demons as spooky, or mere figments of gullible imaginations, could become irresistible.

I stress: none of this proves that the miraculous gifts continue or that cessationism (the belief that the miraculous gifts ceased at the end of the New Testament period) is incoherent. At most, it proves that *if* angels and demons continue to operate in the world, as the church has long insisted they do, then *one particular type* of cessationist argument—that miraculous phenomena in general only occur in specific phases of world history, and have not done so since the apostolic age—is incoherent. Nevertheless, it provides important context for the wider discussion about miracles and gifts. And it suggests that when African Christians talk about their encounters with angels or demons, and North American Christians respond with an eye-roll, the former are closer to both biblical and historic Christianity than the latter.



So the pages of the New Testament reveal a charismatic church, characterized by an experience both of the person of the Holy Spirit—one that could be described in very tangible ways, including drenching, filling, drinking, crying out “Abba!” and so forth—and of angels and demons, languages and interpretation, prophecy and teaching, healing and miracles. No distinction was made between “miraculous gifts” and “ordinary gifts” or between “gifts that could only be used by apostles”

and “gifts that could be used by anyone” or anything like that. Nor, despite occasional claims to the contrary, does the New Testament suggest that miracles gradually tapered off or faded away over time; if anything, the miracles described at the end of Acts (around AD 60), when Paul survives a snake bite, cures a man of dysentery, and then heals an entire island, are even more dramatic and widespread than those described at the beginning of it (around AD 30).³⁶ What Paul told the Corinthians seems to have been true of the early church in general: “You are not lacking any gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Biblical Christianity was charismatic Christianity.³⁷

The claim I am making here, however, is not just that the miraculous gifts were given throughout the New Testament period. That much should be uncontroversial. I am also arguing that they continue to be given today—prophecy, languages, interpretation, teaching, miracles, healing, and the rest—and that, like every good gift that our Father gives us, they should be pursued as a result.³⁸ Put differently, I am arguing that Romans 12:6, 1 Corinthians 12:31, and 14:1 still apply: believers are urged to use, to be zealous for, to earnestly desire, and to strive for spiritual gifts. (This, we could mention in passing, is very different from being “open to” spiritual gifts if they happen to come along. I am “zealous for” time with my wife; if I said I was “open to” it, there would probably be consequences.) This much is highly controversial, of course, as a few minutes on the internet will quickly reveal.³⁹ Even so, I say it for three main reasons.

The first, perhaps surprisingly, is *historical*. That is, one of the best reasons to think the miraculous gifts continued is the fact that, according to many of the church fathers, they did. In the context of contemporary debates, this point is often lost, not least because the gift that has proved the most divisive in the last hundred years or so, namely the gift of languages, is the one over which the patristic evidence is least clear. Charismatics are also, to generalize for a moment, less interested in the fathers than many more conservative branches of Christianity, in part because our narrative is so often presented (unhelpfully) as a bold rediscovery of something the church had lost for nineteen centuries. As a result, cessationists have leaned into the historical evidence, and charismatics have leaned away from it, even though much of it indicates that the gifts continued (a position often called “continuationism”).

Justin Martyr, the first great Christian apologist, put it bluntly in his *Dialogue with Trypho* (160):

*For the prophetical gifts remain with us, even to the present time. And hence you ought to understand that [the gifts] formerly among your nation have been transferred to us. And just as there were false prophets contemporaneous with your holy prophets, so are there now many false teachers among us, of whom our Lord forewarned us to beware.*⁴⁰

In more detail, here is Irenaeus of Lyon (180):

Wherefore, also, those who are in truth His disciples, receiving grace from Him, do in His name perform [miracles], so as to promote the welfare of other men, according to the gift which each one has received from Him. For some do certainly and truly *drive out devils*, so that those who have thus been cleansed from *evil spirits* frequently both believe [in Christ], and join themselves to the Church. Others have foreknowledge of things to come: *they see visions, and utter prophetic expressions. Others still, heal the sick by laying their hands upon them*, and they are made whole. Yea, moreover, as I have said, *the dead even have been raised up*, and remained among us for many years. And what shall I more say? It is not possible to name the number of the gifts which the Church, [scattered] throughout the whole world, has received from God, in the name of Jesus Christ. . . . [41](#)

For this reason does the apostle declare, “We speak wisdom among them that are perfect,” terming those persons “perfect” who have received the Spirit of God, and who through the Spirit of God do speak in all languages, as he used Himself also to speak. *In like manner we do also hear many brethren in the Church, who possess prophetic gifts, and who through the Spirit speak all kinds of languages, and bring to light for the general benefit the hidden things of men, and declare the mysteries of God*, whom also the apostle terms “spiritual,” they being spiritual because they partake of the Spirit, and not

because their flesh has been stripped off and taken away, and because they have become purely spiritual.⁴²

Notice that the gifts mentioned here include prophecy, healing, and languages, the three most often argued to have ceased after the first century. Eusebius, the first great historian of the church, uses this excerpt to demonstrate that “various gifts remained among those who were worthy even until that time.”⁴³

In slightly more bombastic fashion, Tertullian of Carthage (208) throws down the gauntlet to the heretic Marcion, challenging him to produce the same sorts of spiritual gifts—visions, prophecies, interpretations of tongues—as the orthodox church can:

Let Marcion then exhibit, as gifts of his god, some prophets, such as have not spoken by human sense, but with the Spirit of God, such as have both predicted things to come, and have made manifest the secrets of the heart; let him produce a psalm, a vision, a prayer—only let it be by the Spirit, in an ecstasy, that is, in a rapture, whenever an interpretation of tongues has occurred to him; let him show to me also, that any woman of boastful tongue in his community has ever prophesied from among those specially holy sisters of his. *Now all these signs (of spiritual gifts) are forthcoming from my side without any difficulty*, and they agree, too, with the rules, and the dispensations, and the instructions of the Creator.⁴⁴

Forty years later (248), at the opposite end of the empire to Irenaeus, Origen of Alexandria argues:

We have to say, moreover, that the Gospel has a demonstration of its own, more divine than any established by Grecian dialectics. And this diviner method is called by the apostle the manifestation of the Spirit and of power: of the Spirit, on account of the prophecies, which are sufficient to produce faith in any one who reads them, especially in those things which relate to Christ; *and of power, because of the signs and wonders which we must believe to have been performed, both on many other grounds, and on this, that traces of them are still preserved among those who regulate their lives by the precepts of the Gospel.* . . . And there are still preserved among Christians traces of that Holy Spirit which appeared in the form of a dove. *They expel evil spirits, and perform many cures, and foresee certain events,* according to the will of the Logos. . . . And the name of *Jesus* can still remove distractions from the minds of men, and expel demons, and also take away diseases.⁴⁵

He later elaborates:

And some give evidence of their having received through this faith a marvellous power by the cures which they perform, revoking no other name over those who need their help than that of the God of all things, and of Jesus,

along with a mention of his history. For by these means we too have seen many persons freed from grievous calamities, and from distractions of mind, and madness, and countless other ills, which could be cured neither by men nor devils. . . . God desired to commend the doctrine of Jesus as a doctrine which was to save mankind, and which was based, indeed, upon the apostles as foundations of the rising edifice of Christianity, but which increased in magnitude also in *the succeeding ages, in which not a few cures are wrought in the name of Jesus, and certain other manifestations of no small moment have taken place.*⁴⁶

A century after that, we find Basil the Great describing the work of the Spirit in striking terms:

Through the rebirth from above . . . the Spirit enlightens all, *inspires prophets*, gives wisdom to lawmakers, consecrates priests, empowers kings, perfects the just, exalts the prudent, *is active in gifts of healing*, gives life to the dead, frees those in bondage, turns foreigners into adopted sons.⁴⁷

Around the same time (350), Cyril of Jerusalem was catechizing new disciples like this:

And though He is One in nature, yet many are the virtues which by the will of God and in the Name of Christ He

works. For He employs the tongue of one man for wisdom; *the soul of another He enlightens by Prophecy; to another He gives power to drive away devils;* to another He gives to interpret the divine Scriptures. He strengthens one man's self-command; He teaches another the way to give alms; another He teaches to fast and discipline himself; another he teaches to despise the things of the body; another He trains for martyrdom: diverse in different men, yet not diverse from Himself, as it is written.⁴⁸

Another century later, Augustine dedicated an entire chapter of his *City of God* (426) to the continuation of miracles, indignant at the suggestion that they ceased with the apostles. He claimed to have witnessed a number himself, and lists an extraordinary range of healings from blindness, rectal fistula, breast cancer, gout, paralysis, hernia, demonization, and even death.⁴⁹ Augustine's testimony is particularly significant because of his enormous impact on the Western Church: it would not be an exaggeration to say that *City of God* was the most influential book in Europe for the next thousand years. When we add his comments to those of Justin, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Origen, Eusebius, Basil, and Cyril—and I am deliberately omitting a number of more controversial references—we have a huge spread chronologically (from the mid-second century to the early fifth), charismatically (prophecy, visions, languages, interpretations, exorcisms, healings, miracles), and geographically (in the far East and far West of the empire, and north and

south of the Mediterranean).⁵⁰ In other words, the patristic period was far more charismatic than is often recognized.

There are, admittedly, a few references in the post-Nicene fathers to the disappearance of some, or even all, of the gifts. Augustine, before writing his spirited defense of miracles in *City of God*, argued that the gift of languages had served its purpose and then finished.⁵¹ John Chrysostom (349–407) spoke of the loss of the miraculous gifts somewhat wistfully, comparing it to a woman who used to be wealthy but now retains only the symbols of her former prosperity.⁵² But we should be careful not to use passages like this to filter out all the other evidence. Late fourth- and early fifth-century claims that particular gifts no longer operate, even when accompanied by a theological rationale, do not trump testimony from the previous three centuries that they do, despite the conversation-stopping finality with which they are sometimes parked on cessationist websites.⁵³ If I was to write today that nobody has fired a cannon since the death of Cromwell, and then you were to read descriptions of cannons being fired from various eighteenth- and nineteenth-century historians, you would be well-advised to read my argument through the lens of their testimony, not the other way around.

In other words, if we want to find out whether the miraculous gifts continued after the apostles died, we should ask the people who lived after the apostles died. On balance, based on the evidence we have, the answer is yes.⁵⁴

The second reason for pursuing the gifts today is *hermeneutical*. Put simply, this is the principle that explicit

New Testament instructions to Christians should be followed, unless there is a clear reason from the context why they should not be. This presumption of obedience, it seems to me, should be a fairly uncontroversial rule of thumb for anyone who follows Jesus; we are under the same covenant as our first-century brothers and sisters, and as such, we should assume that what the apostles taught them, they would also teach us. In other words, the burden of proof should always be on the person who says we don't have to obey an apostolic instruction, rather than on the person who says we do. If we flip that round, we quickly end up in pick-and-choose territory.

Sometimes this burden of proof can be met. No Christians in history have made it their business to go to Troas and look for Paul's coat, for instance, because it is obvious from Paul's letter that his request only applied to Timothy.⁵⁵ Nor have we followed Jesus's instruction to "go nowhere among the gentiles," because it is clear from the wider context of Matthew's gospel that this instruction was for the specific period before Jesus's ascension and does not apply to subsequent generations.⁵⁶ In these cases, and various others, the limited scope of the instruction is clearly indicated in the text. But if there is no such indication in the text—if an instruction is given without being clearly confined in scope in some way—we should assume it also applies to us.

This has big implications when it comes to the pursuit of the gifts. "Zealously desire spiritual gifts," Paul says.⁵⁷ Or, fourteen verses earlier, "Zealously desire the greater gifts."⁵⁸ Or, later in the same discussion, "Zealously desire to proph-

esy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues.”⁵⁹ Or, as part of his exhortation to humility in Romans, “Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith.”⁶⁰ Or, in his conclusion to 1 Thessalonians, “Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies, but test everything; hold fast what is good.”⁶¹ Sometimes the debate over the pursuit of the gifts can look like a no-score-draw, with continuationists pointing out that the New Testament never says the gifts will cease, and cessationists responding that it never says they won’t, either. But in light of the hermeneutical principle we would normally use—and I tend to call it the Presumption Of Obedience, although I am not wild about the acronym—the reality is different. Our default setting, if you like, should be one of obeying these passages, and eagerly desiring spiritual gifts, unless a clear case to the contrary can be made from the text.

Two ways of making this case—that, although there are apostolic instructions to pursue the miraculous gifts, we should not do so—are particularly common. The first relates to the “low quality” of contemporary miracles. Jesus and the apostles (so the argument goes) healed totally, instantaneously, and irrevocably; modern healings are rarely, if ever, like that. The languages at Pentecost were earthly and comprehensible; the modern gift of languages, usually, is not. Agabus accurately prophesied a famine; modern prophecies are more hit and miss. Evidently, there are a variety of responses that a charismatic could make to this. Such comments usually come from within a Western, functionally materialist society,

which misses out on much of the global, and often far more charismatic, picture. Jesus himself didn't always heal instantaneously.⁶² There are actually far more instantaneous and dramatic miracles these days than we may realize.⁶³ Tongues in Paul's letters were probably a prayer language rather than an earthly language.⁶⁴ Paul didn't heal everyone—in at least one case, he wasn't healed himself—and arguably Jesus didn't either.⁶⁵

The best response, however, is to grant the central point, and then show that it does not matter. Yes, the apostles were more successful at healing and prophecy than we are. There is, indeed, a discrepancy between our experience and what is described in the New Testament. But the apostles were also far more successful at evangelism. And church planting. And leadership. And cross-cultural mission. And church discipline. And teaching. And standing firm under persecution. And handling disappointment. Yet in none of these cases do we conclude that the gulf is so wide, their “success” so much greater than ours, that to tell people how to share the gospel or teach or lead more effectively, is to encourage people to be satisfied with sub-biblical Christianity. Rather, we acknowledge the disparity and seek to learn from it. What did they do? How did they do it? What can we learn? What are we missing? Which contemporaries of ours is God using in this area at the moment? What can we learn from them? The same, surely, should apply to the miraculous gifts.

The other main way of making the cessationist case, and by far the stronger one, is built on the perceived tension, or

incompatibility, between ongoing prophetic revelation and a closed New Testament canon.⁶⁶ (1) Old Testament prophecy, it is argued, was revelatory, foundational and infallible, and (2) New Testament prophecy is no different (Ephesians 2:20 is crucial here). (3) But with the death of the apostles and the closure of the New Testament canon this kind of foundational, infallible revelation has stopped being given (and claims to the contrary would inevitably reopen the canon, whether in the form of papal pronouncements, new inspired texts, or whatever). (4) Therefore the gift of prophecy has ceased. (5) Therefore the gift of languages, which functions very much like prophecy in 1 Corinthians 14, has also ceased. In most versions of this argument, (6) healing and miracles—which are given to confirm the validity of the message when it is first proclaimed—have ceased as well.

But notice how many things need to be granted for this argument to work. We need to know that all prophecy in the Old Testament was infallible divine revelation.⁶⁷ We need to know that all prophecy in the New Testament period was also infallible divine revelation, the purpose of which was to establish the foundation of the church (because if any of it was not, then the door would be open for subsequent prophecy that did not conflict with the completion of Scripture).⁶⁸ We need to know that the gift of languages, properly interpreted, was also foundational and infallible revelation (for the same reason).⁶⁹ We need to know that the only purpose of healing and miracle gifts was to confirm the validity of the message when it was first proclaimed (because if they served any other purpose that

might still apply today, then they may have continued).⁷⁰ And we need to be confident enough of these things to reassure people that in spite of Paul's instruction to pursue the *charismata*, we shouldn't.⁷¹ Each of these steps faces its own difficulties; accepting all of them, despite my respect and affection for my cessationist friends, is beyond me.

Having said that, it is interesting that much of the debate here is about terminology, rather than reality. The terminology matters, of course, otherwise I would not be writing this; you can either exhort people in your congregation to earnestly desire prophecy, or you can't. But the difference may not be as large as it seems. As an example, here is a remarkable comment from Charles Spurgeon. It comes straight after his account of telling a shoemaker, whom he had never met, exactly how much money he had pilfered the previous week:

I could tell as many as a *dozen* similar cases in which I pointed at somebody in the hall without having the slightest knowledge of the person, or any idea that what I said was right, except that I believed I was moved by the Spirit to say it; and so striking has been my description, that the persons have gone away, and said to their friends, "Come, see a man that told me all things that ever I did; beyond a doubt, he must have been sent of God to my soul, or else he could not have described me so exactly." And not only so, but I have known many instances in which the thoughts of men have been revealed from the pulpit. I have sometimes seen persons nudge their neighbours

with their elbow, because they had got a smart hit, and they have been heard to say, when they were going out, “The preacher told us just what we said to one another when we went in at the door.”⁷²

The striking thing about this story is that Spurgeon did not believe that the gift of prophecy was available to him. Yet the phenomenon he describes fits exactly the description that modern charismatics would give of prophecy (and is one I have experienced personally on a number of occasions): he was moved by the Spirit to say something that, though he did not know it at the time, was both timely and accurate, and led to people having the secrets of their hearts exposed and recognizing the presence of God. For me, the best New Testament word to describe this phenomenon would be *prophecy*, or perhaps (as Spurgeon himself implies) *revelation*.⁷³ But even those who disagree with this can presumably agree on the phenomenon itself, in which the Spirit speaks to us, apart from Scripture, yet without it thereby becoming infallible revelation (not least because our hearing is not as good as it could be).⁷⁴ We might even be able to agree that earnestly desiring such things would be helpful, both for the church and for the world she is there to reach.

The third argument for pursuing spiritual gifts today, and in my view the most compelling one, is *eschatological*. The gifts of the Spirit, and prophecy in particular, are seen by the apostles as characterizing the entire era between Pentecost and Parousia, the coming of the Spirit and the return of Christ. The

kingdom of God is currently spreading throughout the earth like the little stone of Daniel's vision, dethroning kings and crushing empires before it, but it has not yet fully arrived. As long as we still live between the inauguration and the consummation of the kingdom—between D-day and VE-day, in Oscar Cullmann's famous analogy—we should continue to expect, and pursue, all the spiritual gifts.⁷⁵

This expectation is clear on the day of Pentecost itself. These people aren't drunk, explains Peter; they're doing exactly what the prophet Joel predicted: "Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy."⁷⁶ It is interesting that here, right at the start of the first sermon ever preached by a Christian, Peter so explicitly connects the last days, the pouring out of the Spirit on all nations, and the gift of prophecy. The "last days," between the ascension of Jesus and his return, are described in the New Testament as a period of sinfulness in the world and difficulty for the church.⁷⁷ But they are also, according to Peter, a period both in which the Spirit is poured out on all flesh and in which male and female, slave and free, will prophesy, see visions, and dream dreams. The latter, in fact, will be a clear sign of the former. So the Pentecost story itself leads us to expect that as long as we are still in "the last days," we should expect the pouring out of the Spirit, accompanied by prophecy.⁷⁸

Paul's letters also affirm that spiritual gifts have been given until the return of Christ. As Paul thanks God for the Corinthians, he reminds them that "the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you—so that *you are not lacking in any gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ*, who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 1:6–8, emphasis added). Paul's gratitude is grounded in past, present, and future realities: the confirmation of the testimony about Christ among them (past), and their possession of spiritual gifts (present) as they wait for the day of the Lord Jesus Christ (future). The *charismata* are theirs while they wait for Jesus to be revealed. Had Paul anticipated the withdrawal of spiritual gifts before the return of Christ, his comments here simply would not have taken this form. It is hard to escape the conclusion that, in Paul's view, spiritual gifts will continue until the end.

Similar things are true of the famous ending to the "love chapter" (which was not originally written as fodder for wedding homilies, but to convince the Corinthians that love was more important, and more permanent, than the spiritual gifts they were so obsessed with): "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."⁷⁹ Paul believes in the cessation of the gifts. He believes there is a time when—unlike love, which never ends—they will have served their purpose and will pass away (13:8). As Karl Barth put it,

“Because the sun is rising, all lights go out.”⁸⁰ The question is: When?

The answer is when “the perfect” comes. Paul expresses this in four contrasts: the partial versus the perfect (vv. 9–10), childhood versus maturity (v. 11), dimness of sight versus clarity (v. 12a), and partial knowledge versus fullness (v. 12b). The spiritual gifts are for the age of imperfection, infancy, blurred vision, and partial knowledge; love, on the other hand, will endure even when we experience the perfect, adulthood, face-to-face vision, and fullness of knowledge. Prophecy, languages, and knowledge are great for now, but one day we will no longer need them. Why? Because perfection, maturity, and fullness will have come, and we will know face-to-face. Despite occasional exegetical gymnastics to try to prove the contrary, this can only really refer to the return of Christ.⁸¹

When we read Paul with this eschatological framework in mind—recognizing that believers live in the “last days,” between Pentecost and Parousia, characterized both by the gift of the Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit until the return of Christ—we see it everywhere. We notice that the gifts of the ascended Jesus are given to build up his body “*until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood*, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children . . .” (Ephesians 4:13–14, emphasis added). We read that Paul characterizes the present age as one in which believers have been blessed with “every spiritual blessing,” which in context presumably includes all the *charismata*.⁸² We observe that Paul’s exhor-

tation to “be filled with the Spirit,” characterized by (among other things) singing “spiritual songs,” is given as long as “the days are evil.”⁸³ We notice that the exhortation to use spiritual gifts in Romans applies, like the rest of chapters 12–13, to the period between Jesus’s resurrection and return: the time during which believers need not to be conformed to the pattern of this world, as their salvation gets ever nearer.⁸⁴ We see that the command not to quench the Spirit or despise prophecy, likewise, appears in the context of living godly lives as we wait for Jesus to return.⁸⁵ Some of these texts are more explicit than others, but it seems clear that Paul anticipates spiritual gifts remaining with the church until the coming of Christ—at which point they will no longer be needed.

Spiritual gifts, in that sense, are like manna. Both manna and spiritual gifts are given for a specific purpose, for a specific period in history. They are meant for people in the wilderness, that awkward period between slavery and promise, Egypt and Canaan, redemption and inheritance. Israel did not need manna in Egypt, because they had melons and garlic. Neither would they need it in the promised land, because they would have milk and honey. (No Israelite, on finally reaching the land after forty years, would think of heading out in the morning to scoop white flakes off the ground; they would be too busy planting crops and harvesting grapes.) In the meantime, however, they needed manna and quail and water from the rock to sustain them on their desert travels.

We too are on a slow and difficult pilgrimage from past rescue to future rest. We have been set free from slavery to sin

and death, but we await the day when we can settle in our true homeland. In the past we did not use spiritual gifts, because the Spirit had not yet been poured out. In the new creation we will not need to, because what is mortal will have been swallowed up by life. No Christian, on finally reaching the new creation, will be pursuing gifts of prophecy or languages or healing; we will be too busy worshiping the One to whom all prophecy, language, and healing points. But in the meantime, since the journey is long, God provides us with heavenly presents—which are themselves manifestations of his heavenly presence—to unite us, make us strong, and sustain us on our desert travels.⁸⁶



It should not need to be said (although sadly, it probably does) that the Spirit does not act in conflict with the Word, but only in harmony with the Word, and therefore that we should always pursue spiritual gifts according to the guidelines laid out in the New Testament: that we should weigh prophecies carefully against the testimony of Scripture, bringing correction if needed; that languages should be interpreted or not brought at all; that all gifts should be used to benefit the whole church, not just the individual, and exercised in such a way that enquirers and unbelievers can understand; that giftedness should not circumvent character, recognized church government, or both; that the true test of spirituality should be love for God and love

for neighbor, rather than any particular gift or manifestation; that gifts should be used to draw attention to the death and resurrection of Jesus, rather than to any individual, ministry, or church; that prosperity theology should be thoroughly debunked whenever it appears; and that everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way.⁸⁷

Sadly, there are countless examples of these principles being ignored in the contemporary church, with any amount of unbiblical nonsense being justified in the name of being spiritual. Nevertheless, this is an argument for proactive biblical *discernment*, not reactive hesitant *caution*.⁸⁸ I find it ironic that perhaps the most common evangelical approach to spiritual gifts, especially in North America, is the one approach that simply cannot be defended from Scripture: that the miraculous gifts continue, but that we should not particularly pursue them! It is possible, and in fact required of us, *both* to earnestly desire spiritual gifts—knowledge, wisdom, faith, prophecy, languages, interpretation, distinguishing spirits, teaching, healing, miracles, helping, administrating, leading, giving, showing mercy—*and* to do so with scriptural wisdom, so as to build up the body, serve the common good, love one another, and exalt the risen Christ. All these gifts are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.



There is much more that we could say about all of this, and many have.⁸⁹ But for the purposes of this book, the defense rests. The New Testament church was a thoroughly charismatic community, both in their use of spiritual gifts and in their experience of the Holy Spirit himself. Miracles and revelations, angels and demons, dreams and visions were commonplace. When we ask whether the New Testament leads us to expect this to change at the end of the first century or to continue in some form until the return of Christ, it seems there are good historical, hermeneutical, and eschatological reasons for believing the latter. As a result—not in spite of our commitment to the authority of Scripture, but precisely because of it—the church today should continue to zealously desire, and to use, spiritual gifts.

¹ Blaise Pascal, *Pensées* (London: Penguin, 1995), 4.

² Romans 12:6.

³ Galatians 3:5.

⁴ Ephesians 5:18; 6:18.

⁵ 1 Thessalonians 5:19–21.

⁶ 1 Timothy 1:18.

⁷ Hebrews 2:3–4.

⁸ James 5:14–15.

⁹ Romans 8:9, 14–17; Galatians 4:1–7.

¹⁰ Romans 8:26–27.

- 11 Ephesians 5:18–21; Colossians 3:16.
- 12 Romans 5:5; 2 Corinthians 1:21–22; 5:5; Ephesians 1:13–14.
- 13 Ultimately there is no dichotomy here, of course, since the Spirit speaks through the Scriptures—but there remains a difference of emphasis. The Bible is authoritative because of God the Holy Spirit, not vice versa.
- 14 The classic study of this theme remains that of Gordon Fee, *God's Empowering Presence* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994).
- 15 Acts 2:32–33.
- 16 Acts 10:44–48.
- 17 Acts 19:1–7.
- 18 Acts 21:9.
- 19 1 Timothy 4:14.
- 20 1 Corinthians 13:1.
- 21 1 Corinthians 1:7.
- 22 Although Paul briefly refers to singleness, and by implication also marriage, as a *charisma* from God (7:7).
- 23 1 Corinthians 12:7–10.
- 24 The fact that the list is not exhaustive seems clear from a comparison with other lists in Paul, including 1 Corinthians 12:27–30 (apostles, prophets, teachers, miracles, gifts of healing, helping, administrating, various kinds of tongues) and Romans 12:6–8 (prophesying, serving, teaching, exhorting, giving, leading, showing mercy).

- 25 This combination of initiatory and ongoing experience is also apparent from the accounts of filling with the Spirit in Acts (2:4; 4:8, 31; 9:17; 13:9, 52), Paul's exhortation to the Ephesians (5:18), and Jesus's language in John's gospel (cp. 4:14 and 7:37–39).
- 26 An influential example of this sort of reading can be found in the expository sermons of Martyn Lloyd-Jones on Romans (8:14–17) and Ephesians (1:13–14).
- 27 For a strident, if not always persuasive, account of this phenomenon, see Michael Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible* (Bellingham: Lexham, 2015), especially parts I and II.
- 28 The problem here is not applying such language to earthly empires, but failing to apply it to spiritual beings.
- 29 WEIRD stands for Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic.
- 30 Compare Graham Greene's comment in *The End of the Affair* (New York: Penguin, 2004), 47: "I have never understood why people who can swallow the enormous improbability of a personal God boggle at a personal Devil."
- 31 Athanasius, *Life of St Anthony*, 9–10.
- 32 Augustine, *City of God*, Books IX–XII.
- 33 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, first part, Q114 (see also Q50–64, 106–13).
- 34 Acts 12:15.
- 35 Hebrews 1:14. Interestingly, Acts 12 concludes with a third angelic story, in which Herod is struck down by the angel of the Lord for accepting blasphemous praise. The frequency with which

angels appear in Acts may help us understand why the Jerusalem church jumped to the conclusion they did.

36 Acts 28:1–10.

37 This is acknowledged beautifully in perhaps the best cessationist book I have come across, namely Richard Gaffin, *Perspectives on Pentecost* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1979), 48: “Biblically speaking, ‘charismatic’ and ‘Christian’ are synonymous. The Christian life in its totality is (to be) a charismatic life. Christ’s church as a *whole* is *the* charismatic movement.”

38 Sharp-eyed readers will note that I have not included apostles in this list. There are three main reasons for that. (1) On the two occasions where Paul self-consciously lists the *pneumatika* or *charismata* that believers should use for the common good, he does not include apostleship among them (Romans 12:6–8; 1 Corinthians 12:4–11). When he mentions apostles in 1 Corinthians 12:27–31, he describes them as that which God has appointed in the church—as a way of illustrating his point about the interdependence of the body—but not as an example of *pneumatika* or *charismata*. Ephesians 4:11, likewise, is not a list of gifts that individual Christians should aspire to; the gifts are individuals who have been given to the church by the risen Christ. (2) All interpreters recognize that the word *apostolos* is used in quite different ways in the New Testament, ranging from the very specific (the Twelve in Acts 1:26) to the very general (the unnamed brothers who collect the offering for the poor in 2 Corinthians 8:23). Clearly, the former *apostoloi* are unique to the first century, and the latter are not—in that sense we are all cessationists regarding the former, and we are all continuationists regarding the latter—which means that statements about the gift of apostle

today require immediate clarification. For my own argument on the subject, see my “Apostle Apollos?” in *JETS* 56.2 (June 2013).

(3) The *charismata* or *pneumatika* that Paul tells the Corinthians to be zealous for (1 Corinthians 12:31; 14:1) almost certainly do not include apostleship, and few (if any) interpreters have argued that they do (cf. 9:1–2; 15:8–9). This is not to say that Paul did not regard his apostleship as a grace-gift, since he clearly did (Romans 1:1–7); it is simply to say that it does not appear to be one of the gifts he urges his converts to pursue (1 Corinthians 12:31; 14:1) and to use (Romans 12:6). To include it here, therefore, would muddy the waters.

[39](#) Probably the most forceful recent response to the charismatic case made here is that of John MacArthur, *Strange Fire: The Danger of Offending the Holy Spirit with Counterfeit Worship* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2013).

[40](#) Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 82 (emphasis has been added to all the quotations in this section).

[41](#) Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 2.32.4.

[42](#) Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5.6.1.

[43](#) Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 5.7.1–6; cf. also 5.17.4, quoting Apollinaris: “for the apostle thought it necessary that the prophetic gift should continue in all the Church until the final coming.”

[44](#) Tertullian, *Against Marcion*, 5.8.

[45](#) Origen, *Against Celsus* 1.2, 46, 67; cf. also 2:8; 3:3; 7.8; 8:58. Origen is sometimes quoted in support of cessationism, but it seems clear from *Against Celsus* that he regarded miraculous signs and gifts, including prophecy, healings, and the casting out of demons,

to have diminished since the time of the apostles, but not to have ceased.

[46](#) Origen, *Against Celsus* 3.24, 28.

[47](#) Basil, Homily 3, translated in Mark DelCogliano, *St Basil the Great: On Christian Doctrine and Practice* (Yonkers: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2013), 238.

[48](#) Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* 16.12.

[49](#) Augustine, *City of God* 22.8.

[50](#) More controversial references would include Didache 11 (since its date is unclear), Mark 16:9–20 (since its authorship is unclear), and Tertullian's defense of the Montanists (as they were eventually seen as heterodox).

[51](#) E.g., Augustine, *Homilies on the First Epistle of John* 6.10.

[52](#) Chrysostom, *Homilies on First Corinthians* 29.1; 36.7. There is also an ambiguous comment from Theodoret of Cyrus (393–466) about the visible signs of grace “in former times” and the fact that grace in his day “may not take the same form as it did in those days.”

[53](#) It is also worth reflecting on the reasons for such claims of cessation in their historical contexts, from Judaism to Montanism, and on into Aristotelian metaphysics (Aquinas), Roman Catholic piety (the Reformers), and the Enlightenment (through to today); see Jon Mark Ruthven, *On the Cessation of the Charismata: The Protestant Polemic on Post-Biblical Miracles* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993).

[54](#) Historical studies show that the sign gifts were also practiced in medieval Europe, including languages, healings, miracles, and

prophecy; see, e.g., Stanley Burgess, *The Holy Spirit: Medieval Roman Catholic and Reformation Traditions* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), introduction: the miraculous gifts “were referred to constantly in medieval hagiographic literature (that is, accounts of the lives of the saints)—indeed, so frequently and so uncritically that many modern scholars have come to discredit all such accounts. In doing so, however, skeptics have failed to consider that these reports of the paranormal were believed by virtually all pre-Renaissance Christians.” See also his more recent *Christian Peoples of the Spirit: A Documentary History of Pentecostal Spirituality from the Early Church to the Present* (New York: NYU Press, 2011).

55 2 Timothy 4:13.

56 Matthew 10:5; cf., e.g., Matthew 28:19–20.

57 1 Corinthians 14:1.

58 1 Corinthians 12:31.

59 1 Corinthians 14:39; cf. also 14:31: “For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged.”

60 Romans 12:6.

61 1 Thessalonians 5:19–21.

62 Mark 8:22–26.

63 Craig Keener, *Miracles: The Credibility of the New Testament Accounts*, 2 vols (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012).

64 The gift of languages on the day of Pentecost and the gift of languages in the church at Corinth are almost certainly different. This is true whether or not we see Paul as alluding to the difference in his famous comment about “the tongues of men,

and of angels.” The former were immediately understood by those who heard; the latter required interpretation. The former demonstrated blessing, as those who speak other languages understand, in reversal of the curse of Babel; the latter demonstrated judgment, as those who speak other languages do not understand, in fulfilment of Isaiah. The former is assumed to function like prophecy by Peter; the latter is explicitly differentiated from prophecy by Paul. The former had a declarative, even evangelistic, purpose, and is aimed at people: “We hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God” (Acts 2:11). The latter is described in terms of prayer, song and thanksgiving, and is aimed at God. The purpose of the former is the edification of the hearer; the purpose of the latter, if there is no interpreter, is the edification of the speaker. The two are, therefore, highly likely to be different in form. If Paul was addressing the use of the Pentecost-style gift of languages in Corinth, I suggest, he went about it in a very strange way. For the opposing case, see Thomas Schreiner, *Spiritual Gifts: What They Are and Why They Matter* (Nashville: B&H, 2018), 125–29.

65 2 Timothy 4:20; Galatians 5:13–14 (cf. the more ambiguous case of 2 Corinthians 12:1–10); John 5:1–9.

66 For a succinct, gracious, and carefully argued version of this argument, see Schreiner, *Spiritual Gifts*, 93–146, 155–69 (though Schreiner is more cautious about argument [6], and calls his view a “nuanced cessationism”).

67 For a number of fascinating reasons to doubt this—from an Old Testament professor at a conservative Presbyterian seminary, no less!—see Iain M. Duguid, “What Kind of Prophecy Continues? Defining the Differences between Continuationism and Cessation-

ism,” in John Frame, Wayne Grudem, and John Hughes (ed.), *Redeeming the Life of the Mind: Essays in Honor of Vern Poythress* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2017), chapter 7. Duguid highlights a number of instances where the word *prophet* or *prophesying* is used, yet “there is no suggestion of anyone listening to or being instructed by authoritative pronouncements”; rather, the person in view may be engaged in prayer, ecstatic speech, leading worship, or writing court history, and in such cases “prophecy functions not to convey divinely inspired information but to identify divinely indwelt individuals” (e.g. Genesis 20:7; Numbers 11:25–29; 1 Samuel 10:6; 19:20–23; 1 Kings 18:4; 2 Kings 2:3; 4:38; 6:1; 9:1; 17:13; 1 Chronicles 25:1–3; 29:29; 2 Chronicles 9:29; 12:15; 13:22).

68 Clearly this is the role of prophecy that Paul is referring to in Ephesians (2:20; 3:5), but it is far from clear that this is its only purpose. In 1 Corinthians 14 alone, we hear of prophecy being given to encourage, console, and edify other believers in the local church (14:3), bring unbelievers under conviction (14:24), witness to the presence of the Holy Spirit in the assembly (14:25), and enable the congregation to learn and be encouraged (14:31). It remains difficult to read 1 Corinthians 14 if we assume that Paul is speaking of infallible, foundational revelation throughout (with numerous Corinthian prophets chipping in, such that they had to be limited to two or three per meeting, often talking over each other, with their prophecies weighed by those sitting down, and none of it ever recorded or transmitted to another church), and there is a broad scholarly consensus that he is not. Nor do we have any indication that every instance of prophecy in Acts, some of which are not recorded at all, represented infallible and foundational revelation (11:27–30; 19:6; 21:9; compare also 21:10–

11 and 21:33 on the question of who “bound” Paul); the same is true for the personal prophecy we find in the Pastoral Letters (1 Timothy 1:18; 4:14). For a better working definition of prophecy in Pauline theology, see Anthony Thiselton’s *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 956–65, 1087–94, especially at 965: “Prophecy, as a gift of the Holy Spirit, combines pastoral insight into the needs of persons, communities, and situations with the ability to address these with a God-given utterance or longer discourse (whether unprompted or prepared with judgment, decision and rational reflection) leading to challenge or comfort, judgment, or consolation, but ultimately building up the addressees. . . . While the speaker believes that such utterances or discourses come from the Holy Spirit, mistakes can be made, and since believers, including ministers or prophets, remain humanly fallible, claims to prophecy must be weighed and tested.” This has, quite rightly, become a standard definition in the secondary literature; see, e.g., David Garland, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, 1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 583; Roy Ciampa and Brian Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 581.

69 This is an even more difficult case to make, since it faces all the problems we saw in the previous point, in addition to the fact that Paul describes the gift of languages as “prayer” (1 Corinthians 14:14) and “thanksgiving” (14:16–17), which builds up the speaker (14:4), and which Paul does himself more than anyone (14:18).

70 Again, this is clearly part of their purpose in the New Testament period (e.g., Hebrews 2:4), but to say that it is the only purpose seems a stretch. Healings are also given for the common good (1 Corinthians 12:7) and for the care of the whole body (12:24–

25), as well as—lest we forget—to make sick people better (James 5:14–15). In response to the claim sometimes advanced that miracles in the Old Testament only occurred in specific phases of redemptive history, we need look no further than Jeremiah 32:20 (emphasis added): “You have shown signs and wonders in the land of Egypt, *and to this day in Israel and among all mankind*, and have made a name for yourself, *as at this day*.” For the historical development of this particular argument, especially in the work of B. B. Warfield, see Ruthven, *On the Cessation of the Charismata*.

71 It is likely that at least part of the application of Paul’s famous body metaphor in 1 Corinthians 12 (cf. also Romans 12:3–8) is that those with prestigious and apparently valuable gifts cannot say to those with other gifts “I have no need of you” (1 Corinthians 12:21). Since all believers risk elevating some gifts above others (Pentecostals might value tongues above administrating, Reformed churches might value teaching above healing, and so on), this is an important challenge for the contemporary church.

72 Charles Spurgeon, *The Autobiography of Charles H. Spurgeon* (Cincinnati: Curts & Jennings, 1898–1900), 2:226–27.

73 Spurgeon was steeped in Scripture, of course, so it is not surprising that there are echoes of a number of biblical texts in this paragraph, some of which explicitly refer to prophecy (John 4:29; 1 Corinthians 14:25; cp. his remarks on being moved by the Spirit with Acts 13:2; 19:21; 20:22; 21:4).

74 We could say similar things about Augustine’s famous conversion story, in which he hears a voice speaking to him, then hears children singing a song that he has never heard, then flicks to a supposedly random page of Scripture, and is saved. Charismat-

ics would be more comfortable using language of “revelation,” “prophecy,” and “the Spirit speaking” than cessationists or even Augustine himself. But the phenomenon itself is not in question. See Augustine, *Confessions*, Book VIII.

75 Oscar Cullmann, *Christ and Time: The Primitive Christian Conception of Time and History* (London: SCM Press, 1962).

76 Acts 2:17–18.

77 2 Timothy 3:1; James 5:3; 2 Peter 3:3; cf. 1 Corinthians 10:11 (the phrase here is “the end of the ages”); cp. also Hebrews 1:2.

78 For a thorough defense of the idea that the period from Pentecost onward is “the last days” in biblical (and certainly Lukan) theology, see G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 129–60.

79 1 Corinthians 13:8–13.

80 Karl Barth, *The Resurrection of the Dead* (New York: Arno Press, 1977), 81.

81 The best cessationist interpreters concede this (e.g., Gaffin, *Perspectives on Pentecost*; Schreiner, *Spiritual Gifts*), and the scholarly consensus is extremely strong, as a glance at a random sample of commentaries will indicate; see, e.g., Joseph Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians* (New Haven: Yale, 2008), 498: “It has undoubtedly something to do with the *eschaton* or what Paul calls ‘the Day of the Lord’ (1:3; 3:13; 5:5) or with the *telos*, ‘end’ (of the present era), as in 15:24.” This case would be further strengthened if, as is very possible, Paul intends in v. 13 to contrast faith and hope, both of which are no longer needed since their goal has been realized, with love, which never ends.

82 Ephesians 1:3. Later in the chapter Paul describes the Spirit as having been given as a deposit until we acquire possession of our full inheritance (13–14) and prays for the Ephesians to be given the Spirit of wisdom, revelation, knowledge, and enlightenment of the mighty power that is at work within them, which raised Christ Jesus from the dead (1:17–21). It is notable that all four of these things (wisdom, revelation, knowledge, and power) are spoken of as *charismata* in 1 Corinthians 12–14; cf. also Colossians 1:9–12.

83 Ephesians 5:15–19.

84 Romans 12:3–8, like the rest of Paul’s ethical teaching in 12:9–13:10, is sandwiched in between 12:1–2 and 13:11–14, which clearly place it in the context of the church age.

85 1 Thessalonians 5:19–21; cf. 5:1–11, 23–24.

86 These last two paragraphs were originally published in my article, “Our Spiritual Gifts Have an Expiration Date,” *Christianity Today* (June 2017).

87 In other words, that the numerous parameters given with respect to the exercise of the gifts in 1 Corinthians 12–14 be observed carefully.

88 I owe this distinction to Francis Chan, in personal conversation.

89 Books that express the arguments especially well or influentially include the following. On the cessationist side: B. B. Warfield, *Counterfeit Miracles* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1983); Gaffin, *Perspectives on Pentecost*; Sinclair Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1996); MacArthur, *Strange Fire*; Schreiner, *Spiritual Gifts*. On the continuationist side: D. A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987); Ruthven, *On the Cessation of the Charismata*; Jack Deere, *Surprised by*

the Voice of God (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996); Fee, *God's Empowering Presence*; Wayne Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2000). The most useful single volume treatment of the debate remains Wayne Grudem (ed.), *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today?* (Grand Rapids: IVP, 1996), with essays representing cessationist, "Open but Cautious," Third Wave, and Pentecostal perspectives.