

Have Certain Spiritual Gifts Ceased?

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A Biblical and Logical Response to the “Cessation of Gifts” theory

by Scott Bennett

Introduction

I was recently out with a group of people doing some door to door evangelism, and we had a conversation with a woman who asked about our stance on the gift of tongues. My evangelism partner shared how he believes that the gift of tongues ceased along with certain other gifts when the apostles completed writing the new testament. I ended up sharing how I believe the gift of tongues is still available today, and how I have personally experienced that gift being exercised in a disciplined and biblical manner. We ended up having a good discussion around how this is not a salvation issue and how we can disagree on peripheral issues and still worship together with love and grace.

At the time of the conversation, I had never really given any serious study to the arguments of cessationism because I did not realize how prevalent this view was. Since that conversation, I spent a significant amount of time studying the arguments on both sides and comparing them to what the scriptures have to say on the matter. While it is not a salvation doctrine, it is certainly a topic that can have significant ramifications on how we live out our christian life, and how we conduct ourselves in communal worship gatherings.

During my research, I was determined to avoid “leaning on my own understanding” or interpreting the scripture through my own experiences. Instead, I endeavored to challenge my assumptions and ensure that they are in line with what the scriptures teach. I have used much prayer, careful exegesis of the relevant passages in the Bible, and the generally accepted rules of logic to analyze each of the major cessationists arguments that I have found in my research. I have done my best to be like the Bereans in Acts 17:11, and rely on the scriptures to reveal what is true.

I have challenged my assumptions like this several times before and, in some cases, I ended up changing my stance and adopting a more biblically compelling view on other peripheral doctrine issues. This time around though, I have only become even more convinced that continuationism is better supported by scripture than cessationism. This document is my effort to effectively and clearly communicate my reasoning on how I came to this conclusion.

More importantly, my study of this debate has convinced me that while there are plausible arguments on both sides of this issue, the scriptures are not explicitly clear one way or the other. However, the scriptures *are* explicitly clear on how these gifts should be used in the context of a church gathering. Therefore my main message throughout this document will not be an effort to prove beyond all doubt that these gifts are available today. All I will do is demonstrate that the arguments for cessationism are not 100% conclusive. I believe this is an important distinction to make because there are many cessationists who are assuming that the clear commands of scripture regarding the use of these gifts are no longer applicable.

In Colossians 2, Paul warns against letting plausible arguments, or human traditions distract us or even dilute the clear message of Christ. There are many mysteries that God does not explain, but we should never let our human reasoning on those matters put us in a position where we ignore or disobey the parts of the Bible where God is clear. Therefore, this document will emphasize the parts of the scriptures that are clear, and encourage everyone to follow those teachings no matter where they stand on the more mysterious parts.

I realize that, in my effort to set aside any personal experience or emotions and rely only on scriptures and logic, I run the risk of coming off as ungracious, cold, matter of fact, arrogant, and/or un-loving. So, I would like to say at the outset that it is my earnest desire to “speak the truth in love”, and I am keeping Ephesians 4:15-16 in mind as I write this. It is my desire that we all come to a clear understanding of what the scriptures have to say concerning the use of spiritual gifts.

I would also like to note that I am open to being corrected. If there is anything in this document that is clearly out of line with scripture, or if there is any flaw in my understanding of the cessationists arguments or my

application of logic, please feel free to point it out to me so that I can consider it.

No matter where you stand on this peripheral issue, I believe we can still work together in unity, love, and grace towards the greater goal of spreading the Gospel throughout the world.

Assumptions and Definitions

Defining the Viewpoints

I have been researching the various views, and most of the articles I have read indicate 3 camps: cessationists, open (but cautious), and continuationists. However, I think these groupings do not accurately portray the landscape. Many of the sermons and articles I read from the Cessationists viewpoint have a tendency to lump anyone who practices certain gifts in with those who are obviously undisciplined or charlatans in their practices. This creates a “false dichotomy” that I believe creates a sense of division that is not edifying to the church, and can lead to cognitive bias that prevents us from examining the issue objectively. I am also cautious about lumping everyone who believes in cessationism together, as some are more dogmatic about it than others. Therefore, I have identified 2 primary camps (Continuationists and Cessationists), with the additional distinction that each of those camps can be divided into 2 or 3 sub camps.

- 1) **Cessationists** : Those who believe that certain gifts of the spirit were only available to the early church and ceased with the completion of the New Testament canon of scripture (or shortly thereafter).
 - a. **Doctrinal Cessationists** : Cessationists who hold a firm position that the Cessationist view is the only true view. They write these views into their official doctrines and confessions of faith. They dismiss and sometimes

condemn any modern practice of certain gifts as being clearly unbiblical and fake. They strictly forbid any practice of these gifts in their congregations.

- b. **Moderate Cessationists:** Cessationists who don't believe these gifts are for today, yet do not hold their stance so firmly as to consider it a doctrine. They may feel strongly that they are correct, but recognize that their position is not explicitly supported by scripture and therefore are open to the possibility that they could be wrong and do not dismiss or condemn those who practice gifts in a disciplined way.

2) **Continuationists** : Those who believe that all the gifts of the Holy Spirit that were manifested in the *general population* of the early church after the day of pentecost are still generally available to Christians today , and continue to be dispensed by the Holy spirit whenever and wherever it aligns with God's will.

- a. **Practical Cessationists:** This group includes those who are ignorant of this debate, those who are undecided (open but cautious), and Continuationists who have never desired, pursued, experienced, or participated in the use of these spiritual gifts.
- b. **Disciplined Continuationists:** Continuationists who have desired, pursued, experienced , and/or participated in the proper use of these gifts.
- c. **Undisciplined Continuationists:** Continuationists who have desired , pursued, or exercised these gifts in an improper way by either faking them, or exercising them in a chaotic/undisciplined manner .

There also seems to be some smaller variations among these camps in regards to which specific gifts have ceased/continued, and whether or not they ended abruptly or faded over a period of time after the 12 Apostles died. I did not directly address those variations directly in this article, but the gifts I see most commonly included in lists of "ceased" gifts are tongues, interpretation of tongues, healing, prophecy, and words of knowledge. We can and should all agree that the writing of scripture

through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit ended with the completion of the new testament.

A Note on My Own Disposition.

My personal experience with the disciplined use of spiritual gifts has an impact that I cannot deny. I have made every effort to think objectively, ignore my personal bias, and refrain from using first hand stories or examples as any basis for my reasoning. However, I also must acknowledge that my personal experiences inevitably have some influence on where I stand on this issue. I have tried to approach this with humility, and I am willing to be proven wrong if there is conclusive Biblical proof. Having been a christian for 32 years, I am well accustomed to letting the scriptures tell me I am wrong. My research on this topic started with an effort to challenge my assumptions and to ensure I am understanding the scriptures correctly. In the process, I found that my original understanding was Biblically valid, and my conclusions were reasonably deduced from scripture. I will also admit that I can see how moderate cessationists can infer some of their ideas through inductive reasoning. My primary goal in writing this article is to demonstrate that while there is certainly some evidence that *appears to suggest* certain gifts might have ceased already, that evidence is not conclusive. This evidence may be *persuasive* for some, but it is not conclusive and should not be treated as conclusive.

I will also acknowledge that there is no scripture that explicitly states every single one of the gifts listed in the Bible will continually be distributed by the Holy Spirit until Jesus returns. Obviously, if there were conclusive Biblical proof for either side, there would not be such a polarizing debate on this issue.

So my goal here is not necessarily to prove that cessationists are *wrong* , only that they *might* be wrong and therefore should exercise caution in how they apply their opinions. In the process I will endeavor to explain why I believe the Biblical and logical evidence for continuationism is more compelling. Lastly, I will also discuss why I believe that, even if you find cessationism more compelling, the guidance that is provided to us in 1

Corinthians 14 is still the best approach for handling a situation where someone feels compelled by the Holy Spirit to practice one of these disputed gifts in the context of a church gathering.

Foundational Doctrines

I am assuming every true Christian (regardless of their stance on this issue) is in agreement with the core doctrines of Christian faith and I will not be listing all of those here. However, I am listing a few foundational beliefs and assumptions that I will utilize as a basis in my responses.

- 1) The Bible is the inspired, infallible, inerrant Word of God. As such it is also our ultimate authority as a source of doctrine. (1 Timothy 3:16)
- 2) The doctrine of the perspicuity of scripture affirms that scriptures are able to be understood. There are certainly passages that require more effort to understand than others, but the passages I will use in my arguments are all plain and easily understood.
- 3) There are mysteries about God that He has not revealed to us, and we should not presume to know those things which He has not revealed to us.
 - a. Deuteronomy 29:29 “ *The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law* ”
 - b. Job 38:4 “ *Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding .* ”
 - c. Isaiah 55:8-9 “*For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.*”
 - d. 1 Corinthians 2:11 “ *For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.* ”

- 4) Key points from the doctrines of the fallen nature of man and salvation.
- a. Man by nature is in a state of spiritual death, he has a nature that is inclined towards sin, and has no way of changing that on his own. He doesn't even desire to change it or pursue God on his own.
 - b. In order for a man to be saved, God must intervene on his behalf through an act of the Holy Spirit. God alone, through the power of the Holy Spirit, can overcome a man's fallen nature and give them the ability to:
 - i. Recognize his fallen nature for what it is
 - ii. hear and believe the Gospel message
 - iii. have the *will/desire* to obey and the *ability* to repent and live out the Christian faith. (Philippians 2:13)
- 5) The Bible makes it clear that we should not go beyond the scriptures for our theology.
- a. 1 Corinthians 4:6: *" I have applied all these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, brothers, that you may learn by us not to go beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up in favor of one against another. "*
 - b. Colossians 2:8: *" See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. "*
 - c. I agree with the statement *" We speak where the Bible speaks, and we are silent where the Bible is silent."* That is not to say we can't draw conclusions from scripture that are not explicitly stated in scripture, but it is to say that we should not consider those human conclusions to have the same authority as scripture . If our conclusions contradict the clear message found in scripture, then they are wrong.

Logical Rules & Fallacies

I have also listed some definitions for rules of logic and relevant logical fallacies that I will be using as the basis of my logical responses.

- 1) The logical law of Non-Contradiction. “ *Something cannot be and not be at the same time and in the same relationship* ”
- 2) Evidence of Absence
 - a. Evidence of absence is evidence of any kind that suggests something is missing or that it does not exist. It is often distinguished from absence of evidence - see “argument from ignorance” fallacy below.
- 3) Logical Fallacies
 - a. “Non sequitur”
 - i. When the conclusion does not follow from the premises. In more informal reasoning, it can be when what is presented as evidence or reason is irrelevant or adds very little support to the conclusion.
 - b. “False Equivalence”
 - i. When someone incorrectly asserts that two or more things are equivalent, simply because they share some characteristics, despite the fact that there are also notable differences between them. This will take the form of “ *Thing 1 and thing 2 both share characteristic A. Therefore, things 1 and 2 are equal.* ”
 - c. “Appeal to tradition”
 - i. Using historical preferences of the people (tradition), either in general or as specific as the historical preferences of a single individual, as evidence that the historical preference is correct. Traditions are often passed from generation to generation with no other explanation besides, “ *this is the way it has always been done* ”—which is not a reason, it is an absence of a reason. The appeal takes

the form of " *this is right because we've always done it this way* ".

- d. "Argument from ignorance"
 - i. The assumption of a conclusion or fact based primarily on lack of evidence to the contrary.
- e. "Contextomy"
 - i. Removing a passage from its surrounding matter in such a way as to distort its intended meaning. (Also known as: fallacy of quoting out of context)
- f. " Package-Deal Fallacy "
 - i. Assuming things that are often grouped together must always be grouped together, or the assumption that the ungrouping will have significantly more severe effects than anticipated.
- g. "Stacking the Deck"
 - i. The term stacking the deck is a fallacy in which any evidence that supports an opposing argument is simply rejected, omitted, or ignored.

Arguments for Cessationism and Responses

There are several arguments that I found in my research, however these 4 represent what I would consider the main/foundational arguments. Argument 1 seems to be the most foundational argument with the others acting as support for the first.

I will briefly summarize the core reasoning behind each of the cessationists arguments as I understand them. I will then provide a Biblical response, and a logical response. The Biblical responses are the result of me carefully considering what the scriptures say about the topic, then articulating why I believe the Bible doesn't support the argument. The logical responses are my own human reasoning to demonstrate the inconclusiveness of the argument.

I was initially tempted to demonstrate the inconclusive nature of these arguments primarily from a logical perspective, because that is just

the way my brain works, and I could plainly see some logical flaws in how cessationists are drawing their conclusions. Then God, in His sovereign providence, timed my nightly reading of scripture to my wife in such a way that I happened to be reading Ecclesiastes 8 on the day that I *thought* I had finished writing my response. If you are not familiar with that passage, please stop now and read it carefully. Then pray about it. Then read it again.

Whenever I see indicatives about “the wise” or “the fool” in the Bible's wisdom literature, I try to read it with the mindset that Christ is “the wise” and I am “the fool”. Any time that I can see the indicatives of “the wise” being present in my life, it is actually Christ working in me, not me being wise on my own. I find that mindset to be quite helpful in combating my natural tendency to think I am now “the wise”, and that “the fool” is someone else who is not a mature Christian like I am.

Try it yourself with Proverbs 1:7 - “ *The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.* ”

Did you read that as: “ *because I am wise, I fear the Lord and have knowledge; other people that despise wisdom and instruction are fools* ”?

Or did you read it as: “ *The fear of the Lord (that was given to me through the work of the holy spirit making me more like Christ) started me on my path towards true knowledge; but I still tend to despise wisdom and instruction due to my foolish fallen nature* ” ?

So we can see that a person who is legalistic, moralistic, self justifying, or has a sinful pride in his own wisdom and good deeds might read the book of Proverbs with a very different *mindset* than a person to whom the Holy Spirit has opened their eyes to their true state of foolishness. Our human minds can be deceived by our own perspective and have a great impact on how we understand the scriptures. Every true Christian recognizes that they are fools without Christ. The intent of the book of proverbs is not to inflate the egos of the proud. It is meant to guide the fools and simple people of the world (that’s all of us) towards greater conformity to the wisdom of Christ. Understanding Proverbs original intent, literary style, and seeing “the wise” as the personification of Christ, and the “fool” as ourselves without Christ is essential if we are to interpret that book correctly.

As I pondered Ecclesiastes 8 (which lead me to ponder wisdom and knowledge in general) there were several truths that came to my mind that I believe we should always keep in mind when interpreting scripture:

- 1) No matter how wise and smart we think we are... we are still ignorant and prone towards foolishness when compared to Christ.
- 2) Wisdom and knowledge start with the fear of God.
- 3) We grow in wisdom and knowledge by reading and applying God's word to our lives
- 4) We should take seriously the commandments that are clearly articulated to us in scripture. As Jesus said in John 14:5: "*If you love me, you will keep my commandments*"
- 5) Every imperative in scripture directed towards Christians, is a command from Jesus, as Jesus is the word made flesh (John 1). There are indeed some old testament dietary and ceremonial laws that God has revealed are no longer applicable to us, that does not negate any of the direct commands that Jesus spoke to his disciples, or the commands that the Holy Spirit inspired to be written in the new testament epistles.
- 6) Ecclesiastes 8:16-17 says: "*When I applied my heart to know wisdom, and to see the business that is done on earth, how neither day nor night do one's eyes see sleep, then I saw all the work of God, that man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun. However much man may toil in seeking, he will not find it out. Even though a wise man claims to know, he cannot find it out.*" God is clearly telling us that man has no idea what kinds of work He is doing that we can't see. We know only that which He has revealed to us. Even if a person that we deem wise or intelligent professes to know something about God that God has not directly revealed, he can't actually know it with certainty. Therefore we should be cautious about asserting anything about God that is not clearly written in scripture, and we should prioritize what is clearly written in scripture over our own human reasoning.

Therefore, I would like to emphasize that each of these arguments for the cessation of gifts represent the reasoning of men that I believe are

earnestly seeking the truth. It is my hope that my responses likewise be read as the reasoning of a man seeking the truth. I ask that anyone reading this do their best to lay down their own personal bias and consider carefully my responses to the merits of each argument, then study the scriptures and let them be your guide.

Argument 1: “Miracles that break the natural law are primarily used by God to confirm the ministries of Biblical authors”/AKA “Cluster Theory”

Some variation of this general argument appears to be the primary basis for most of the Cessationists articles that I have read and most of the sermons I have listened to. Supporters of cessationism will typically start this argument by categorizing the miracles found in the Bible into two groups.

- a) miracles that break natural law
- b) miracles that don't break natural law

They will then assert that there is a pattern found in scripture showing how miracles that break natural law tend to “cluster” around writers of scripture. They will say that these clusters of miracles are meant to validate that those performing the miracles had authority to write scriptures.

They will then draw the conclusion that since certain gifts (like words of knowledge, prophecy, tongues, interpreting tongues, and miraculous healings) break natural law, that the Holy Spirit no longer dispenses those gifts now that the full canon scripture is completed. Since we now have all the scriptures, God is done revealing things to us, and we don't need these revelatory gifts anymore.

Biblical Response to Argument 1:

The “Cluster Theory” argument is a theory devised by men. It is the reasoning of men, looking at patterns in how miracles are used by God in Scripture, then drawing conclusions from those patterns about how God works and doesn't work. While it is not bad to draw conclusions in this

manner, we do need to *validate* our conclusions against the clear teachings of scripture.

There is no scripture where God reveals to us that He *only* does miracles that break the laws of nature to validate authors of scripture. There is a passage where Jesus tells a specific group of people that the Holy Spirit will bring to their memories everything he taught them (John 14:26), and I would agree that only those apostles whom Jesus personally commissioned were given authority and inspiration required to write scriptures. There are indeed passages that indicate the working of signs and wonders affirmed the ministry of the Apostles. However, the Bible also shows that there were signs and wonders being performed by people who were not among the 12 apostles and not writers of scripture (Stephen in Acts 6 for example).

The Bible provides clear teachings on the intended *purpose* of the spiritual gifts dispensed by the holy spirit to *everyday believers* who did not write scripture. That purpose is the edification of the body (1 Corinthians 12:7, Ephesians 4:11-12). Since the stated purpose of these gifts in the scripture is that they are dispensed for the edification of the body, we can be assured the validation of scripture writers is not the *only* reason the Holy Spirit dispensed these gifts in the first century church.

There is also no scripture that says any gift will cease at any specific time before the coming of Christ. (If you think 1 Corinthians 13 is that scripture, hold that thought until we get to Argument 2 as I will expand on this topic further).

There are also unambiguous imperatives in scripture telling us “*Earnestly desire to prophecy, and do not forbid the speaking in tongues*” (1 Corinthians 14:39) and “*Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies, but test everything; hold fast what is good.*” (1 Thessalonians 5:19-21). Paul even specifically calls out that he was writing scriptural commands from the Lord in 1 Corinthians 14:37-38: “³⁷ *If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord.* ³⁸ *If anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized.*” In 1 Corinthians 12-14, God reveals to us clear teachings on the supremacy of the gift of agape love, how within the context of corporate worship we should use whatever gifts we are

given to benefit others in the body, and how to properly use our gifts during our gatherings. He goes into great detail, contrasting the proper and improper use of the gifts of tongues, interpreting tongues, knowledge, and prophecy in the context of a church gathering. These are very plain teachings in scripture where God has revealed His commands on how to use these specific spiritual gifts in an orderly manner to edify the body and not to forbid or despise them.

If indeed God intended for these gifts to cease with the completion of the canon, He would not have included those commands and instructions *in the canon*. If these gifts were only for the scripture writing Apostles to use, then Paul would have written to the Corinthians something more like: “*stop pretending to have the powers of apostles and acting like chaotic fools. Those gifts aren’t for just anyone, they are for scripture writers, and you are all false prophets*”. Instead, we see Paul encouraging them to continue to use them in a disciplined way. He also instructs them to test their prophecies against the scriptures, and make sure there is an interpretation of a tongue so everyone can be blessed.

Therefore we can deduce from the scriptures themselves that these gifts were not *only* dispensed for the purpose of validating scripture authors. We see that these gifts, when exercised by laymen in the church, were primarily dispensed for the purposes of edifying the body, and to aid in the proclamation and spreading of the gospel. Since validating scripture authors is not the *only* purpose of these gifts, there is no reason to assume they would stop when the scriptures were completed. Since the primary purpose of all gifts being practiced among laymen is the edification of the church body, there is no reason to assume that any particular gift would stop as long as there is a church body that can be edified by them.

Since the scriptures tell us that there was more than one intended purpose for these gifts, we cannot use the cluster theory to conclusively deduce from the Bible that these gifts will end until such a time as all of those purposes are fulfilled. As long as there is a body that can be edified, and as long as there are unbelievers that can still be reached with the Gospel, there is a potential for the Holy Spirit to continue to dispense these gifts wherever and whenever it aligns with God’s plan to expand His kingdom and spread the message of the Gospel. Our human reasoning is

not greater than the word of God, and we cannot know what God has not revealed to us (Deuteronomy 29:29, Isaiah 55:8-9).

Logical Response to Argument 1:

From a logical perspective this theory basically hinges entirely on the fact that when some scriptures were written, there were “clusters” of signs, wonders, and miracles displayed by those who authored the scriptures to validate that their message was from God.

It is indeed clear that there are many instances of natural law-breaking miracles recorded in scripture that God used to validate the ministries of scripture writers. However, the “cluster” theory employs the “False Equivalence Fallacy” by asserting that because certain revelatory gifts like prophecy, words of knowledge, or speaking in/interpreting tongues appear to share the trait of breaking natural law, that they are somehow equivalent with the extraordinary signs and wonders that the Holy Spirit performed through Moses, Elijah, the 12 Apostles, and a few other scripture writers. It is clear from scripture that there are differences in the frequency, the magnitude, and the scope of the gifts that the common believers in Corinth were practicing when compared to the miraculous works the Holy Spirit dispensed through the 12 Apostles and old testament authors. It is also stated in scripture that the purpose for the gifts of the spirit is the edification of the body (1 Corinthians 12:7, Ephesians 4:11-12).

Additionally, to assert that because “ *The ministries of the authors of scripture are usually validated by miracles that break the laws of nature* ” means that “ *God wouldn't break the laws of nature when dispensing gifts today (or whatever other reasons He may deem necessary to accomplish His will)* ” is to employ the “Package-Deal Fallacy”.

In order to use the cluster pattern to conclusively prove that God does not break the laws of nature today, you would have to prove beyond any doubt that God *only ever* breaks the laws of nature to validate the ministries of the authors of scripture, and that Scripture writing is *always* validated by these miracles. You would therefore need to prove *both* of the following:

- 1) Every single book included in the canon of scripture was written by an author whose ministry was validated by natural law-breaking miracles
- 2) Every single act of God doing a miracle that breaks natural law is primarily for the purpose of validating the ministries of the authors of scripture

Number 1 cannot be proven since a) not every one of the known authors of the Bible have recorded miracles in the scripture and b) there are books of the bible that we do not even know the author or the timing of. For example, since we don't know the author or the timing of the book of Job, we cannot verify if there were any miracles that validated that author as a writer of scripture. Unless you are prepared to remove the book of Job from the canon of scripture (along with any other book where we don't have clear evidence of the author and their miracles) then you will need to admit that your logical argument is not conclusive.

Number 2 cannot be proven either because a) we have no idea how many times God has broken natural law and not documented it in scripture and b) not *every recorded* instance of God breaking natural law is accompanied by the writing of scripture. In Genesis 5:24 we read about how God broke natural law by taking Enoch without waiting for him to die. That is quite a miracle for someone whose writings are not included in the canon of scripture. I don't think any cessationist would argue that the Book of Enoch should be included in the canon. c) the scriptures themselves state more than one purpose for the working of these miracles

I would also like to point out that the primary work of the Holy Spirit is to *overcome human nature*. 1 Corinthians 2:14 says: "*The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.*" It is in every fallen person's *nature* to reject God (see also Ecclesiastes 7:20, Romans 3:10). The natural man cannot even understand the gospel if the Holy Spirit does not first *supernaturally reveal* the truth of it to them. The very ability for us to even desire God and to keep his commandments is a clear working of the Holy Spirit to give us spiritual life and change our nature (John 3:1-8, Ezekiel 36:26-27, Philippians 2:13). 2 Corinthians 5:17 says: "*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.*" Therefore,

every time a person is brought to salvation, natural law is broken when the Holy Spirit creates in us a new spiritual life that goes to war against our natural life. The process of sanctification is a process where the Holy Spirit continuously overcomes and changes the very nature of each and every true Christian. God does indeed supernaturally reveal His truth to us and the Holy Spirit is *constantly* breaking the natural law outside the scope of validating the ministries of scripture writers. If not, then the church would have ended when the last apostle died.

It is clear from scripture that God chooses how and when He breaks the rules of nature to accomplish His purposes. It is clear from scripture that every act of salvation is breaking with human nature. Therefore, there are innumerable examples of God breaking with nature to accomplish His will compared to only 87 or so examples of God breaking natural law to verify authors of scripture.

Who is man to say that God has not violated the laws of nature in countless ways that no human has noticed or documented? One cannot prove that one way or another, and we should be very cautious about presuming to know anything about God that God has not clearly revealed to us.

You may *suspect* that certain types of miracles have ceased, but you cannot know it with certainty because God has not revealed it, and it cannot be objectively proven. Therefore one who believes in cessationism based on this argument could at best defend themselves as a “Moderate Cessationist”, and must leave some room for the fact that they could be wrong in their conclusions.

Argument 2: “Various Interpretations of 1 Corinthians 13”

2A: “The Perfect - τέλειος”

Some will focus on 1 Corinthians 13:10 as scriptural support by saying that the “Perfect” is talking about the completion of the canon of scripture and saying that these gifts will end with the completion of the New Testament.

2B: “The Tense of the Verbs παύσονται & καταργηθήσεται”

Some will focus on 1 Corinthians 13:8 as scriptural support and make the argument that the different tenses of the verbs for “cease” and “pass away” indicate that the tongues will cease at a different time than knowledge and prophecy. They will note that the verb use for tongues “cease” is παύσονται, which is the “Future Middle Indicative” tense of “παύω” (pauō, G3973). They will also note that the verb used for “pass away” is καταργηθήσεται, which is the “Future Passive” tense of “καταργέω” (katargeō, G2763). They will then argue that the different tenses indicate a different cause of ending. Then they will draw the conclusion that since they have different causes, they also will end at different times.

2C: “Changing Lists of Gifts”

Some will focus on how the list of gifts in verse 8 includes 3 gifts (Prophecies, tongues, knowledge), but verse 9 does not include tongues, and verse 12 only references knowledge. They will draw conclusions based on this to argue that the Holy Spirit is inspiring this “reduction” in the list to indicate that the gifts will cease at different times.

Biblical Response to Argument 2:

All of the above interpretations are not seeing the forest for the trees. Each one focuses on some particular nuance of the words or tenses, and ignores the chiasmic structure of the argument that Paul is making. The fact that the logical argument in 1 Corinthians 13:8-12 is formed in an ABCBA chiasm is very important as it gives a greater emphasis to the overall concept than the individual words. Chiasms are a mnemonic device and literary convention used throughout the Bible. They were a common 1st century Hebrew way of thinking and building a logical argument. Whenever we see chiasms in scripture, we should be particularly careful to observe them as a whole concept rather than try to break them apart or reinterpret them in such a way that the chiasm becomes meaningless.

A. Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away.

B. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away.

C. 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.

B. 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.

A. So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

When encountering a logical argument in scripture that is in an ABCBA chiasm, it is usually more intuitive for us (modern english speaking people) to read them from the center out (C, then Bs, then As). This is because the center of a chiasm is the central idea that the rest of the argument hinges on. In this case, Paul is stating a logical premise in (C) that when we become adults, we stop understanding and thinking like children. (Bs) He adds another logical premise to that line of reasoning by stating that when Jesus comes and we see him face to face, we will again have our ability to know and understand increased to the point where we have attained perfect clarity in our knowledge, understanding, and communion with God. He then uses those premises to draw two conclusions (As) 1) that we will no longer need the gifts of prophecy, knowledge, and speaking/interpreting tongues so they will end, and 2) that the gift of agape love is the greatest, because that gift will be eternally available to us.

This passage and its surrounding context is intended to demonstrate the idea that agape love is the greatest gift. That is how the Corinthians would have understood this passage and it cannot mean something completely different to us then it would have meant to its originally intended recipients. There is not any clear contextual support for the idea that Paul was trying to hint at some other timing of the cessation of tongues, and the only timing offered for the cessation of any non-eternal gifts is the second coming of Christ.

Response to 2A: “The Perfect - τέλειος”

The Greek word for “Perfect” in 1 Corinthians 13:10 is τέλειος (telios , Strong's G5046). This word is used 19 times in 17 verses in the New Testament. In all but 3 of these instances, it is clearly being applied to the perfection and maturity that can be developed through a saving relationship with Christ. This perfection can only be attained through Christ, and we will not fully attain it until we die, see Christ face to face, and get our perfected bodies.

The first outlier verse (James 1:25) refers to the “perfect law”, but even then it is within a greater context of encouraging people to conform to God’s perfect law rather than just hearing it and continuing in sin. The second outlier verse is James 1:17 which is describing how “every good and perfect gift” is from God. The third and final outlier is Hebrews 9:11 where “perfect tent” clearly is referring to Christ's body which was not corrupted by human nature (the type of body we will receive when we see Him face to face). None of these outliers appears to give any weight to the notion that 1 Corinthians 13:10 means the gifts will cease when the new testament is completed.

The chiastic structure of 1 Corinthians 13:8-12 makes these verses inseparable in their meaning and joins “the perfect” with being face to face with Jesus in the second premise of his argument. Paul's conclusions in the chiasm tie all 3 of the gifts that will end to the concept that we won’t need them when we get to heaven.

Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones made the following observation in his book “*Prove All Things*” about what it would mean for you and me if “*when the perfect comes*” meant “*when the new testament is complete*”:

“It means that you and I, who have the Scriptures open before us, know much more than the apostle Paul of God’s truth....It means that we are altogether superior... even to the apostles themselves, including the apostle Paul! It means that we are now in a position in which... ‘we know, even as also we are known’ by God... Indeed, there is only one word to describe such a view, it is nonsense.”

Matthew Henry in his Commentary on 1 Corinthians 13 says:

“ God is to be seen face to face; and we are to know him as we are known by him; not indeed as perfectly, but in some sense in the same manner. We are known to him by mere inspection; he turns his eye towards

us, and sees and searches us throughout. We shall then fix our eye on him, and see him as he is, 1 John 3 2. We shall know how we are known, enter into all the mysteries of divine love and grace. O glorious change! To pass from darkness to light, from clouds to the clear sunshine of our Saviour's face, and in God's own light to see light! Ps 36 9. Note, It is the light of heaven only that will remove all clouds and darkness from the face of God. It is at best but twilight while we are in this world; there it will be perfect and eternal day. "

Response to 2B: "The Tense of the Verbs παύσονται & καταργηθήσεται"

I agree that the different tenses of these two verbs *may* indicate a difference in *cause* but that does not prove any difference in *timing* .

I believe that it is more likely that the cause of tongues ceasing will be due to a reversal of the confusion of tongues that occurred at the tower of babel. When God created the world initially, everyone spoke in one tongue. After the Flood, mankind quickly started to get up to the same old things as before, so God confused their tongues and scattered them to prevent them from being unified in their rebellion against Him. In heaven, we will be unified in our obedience to Him, so it stands to reason that we will all speak to each other in one universal language. We can see that this is going to be the case in Zephaniah 3:9. *"For at that time I will change the speech of the peoples to a pure speech, that all of them may call upon the name of the Lord and serve him with one accord."* If we all speak the same language, the gift of tongues becomes useless.

The gifts of knowledge and prophecy on the other hand, would have a very different cause for ceasing. That will be caused by our perfected heavenly minds and bodies being able to see, know, and understand God with such clarity that we no longer need the help of those gifts.

Since the languages that we use have more to do with how we relate to each other, and the gifts of knowledge and prophecy have more to do with how we understand God, it makes sense there would be a difference in causality. However, as long as there is more than one language in existence on earth, and as long as there are human languages that the Bible has not been translated into, the gift of tongues has a potential for application that cannot be denied Biblically or logically.

This explanation of different causation occurring at the same time fits both the tense of the verb and the premises Paul used as the basis of his conclusion. Therefore, the tense of these verbs cannot be used to prove that tongues will cease at a different time than the other two. The tense itself doesn't add any weight to either side of the debate on when tongues will cease. All the tense indicates in terms of timing is that it would occur after Paul wrote it. Therefore the tense of these verbs is irrelevant to either conclusion.

Response to 2C: "Changing Lists of Gifts"

The difference in lists is mitigated by the chiastic structure of Paul's argument, because the chiasm unifies them in the As as one conclusion. Indeed if you read the contents of the chiasm in the CBBAA order, the list gets bigger in the conclusions than in the premises. I would also argue that there are likely other gifts of the Holy Spirit, not in this list, that we won't need in heaven (healing, exhortation, mercy, etc). Paul likely used these few gifts to include in his conclusions (As) because those were the particular gifts that were causing divisions in Corinth. Paul's ultimate goal in this passage was to establish the superiority of agape love over the other gifts before he moved on in chapter 14 to instruct them on how to exercise those gifts properly.

Logical Response to Argument 2

To argue that "the perfect" in 1 Corinthians 13:10 should be interpreted as the completed canon of scripture(2A), or to argue that the changing list of verbs indicates different timing (2C) requires you to use the logical fallacy of "Contextomy". You must ignore the context and chiastic structure of the argument Paul is making in order to apply a meaning to that passage that is more favorable to your position. The context of verses 8-12 indicates that when we see Jesus face to face, there are gifts we won't need anymore, therefore we should prioritize Love which is eternal. The only timing offered for when any of the gifts will end is when we see Jesus Face to Face. Any other time does not have any clear biblical support.

To argue that the tense of the verbs in verse 8 somehow indicated different timing (2B) is a non-sequitur. “You can’t get there from here”. The tense of these verbs only indicates a potential difference in *how* they will end. The tense has no impact on *when* they will end (beyond that it will happen after Paul wrote it) so it is irrelevant to our debate.

When we consider the full context and chiasmic structure in chapter 13, we can see that Paul uses two premises to prove the superiority of love. We can also use those same two biblical premises (found in the C and Bs of the chiasm) to deduce that we will continue to be in a state of imperfect knowledge and understanding where we could benefit from gifts like prophecy, words of knowledge, and tongues *until* we see God face to face. Just as children need adults to help them understand things better, we still need the Holy Spirit to give us clarity on things because we still do not see things with perfect clarity. If we did see things with perfect clarity, there would be no debates on this or any other peripheral doctrine. Therefore, the very fact that any doctrinal debate continues greatly weakens any argument that concludes with the idea that we don’t need these spiritual gifts now that we have the full Bible. Since we still need them, the Holy Spirit will provide them as needed to accomplish the Father’s will.

In Chapter 14, we see instructions on how to exercise these gifts within the context of a church gathering. If a proper interpretation of 1 Corinthians 13 meant that God was going to stop dispensing these particular gifts of the Spirit after the canon of scripture was complete, it makes no sense for the scriptures to follow that statement with such clear and detailed instructions on how to properly use them.

I contend that the clear meaning of 1 Corinthians 13 is the strongest argument against the Cessationist view, based on the authority of scripture and the law of non-contradiction. Paul's argument states a *premise* that the gifts of prophecy and knowledge will cease when we see Christ face to face. The idea that the gifts of prophecy and knowledge will end at any other time than the second coming of Christ contradicts the obvious meaning of scripture, therefore the idea should be rejected. Since the Bible specifically tells us the gifts of prophecy, and knowledge will end when we see Christ face to face, we can be sure that is when they will end. They

cannot have ended some time in the past and also end when Christ returns.

Since we can logically deduce from scripture that the revelatory gifts of knowledge, and prophecy are not going to end until Christ returns, a strong case can be made that the gift of tongues will also persist. Paul's conclusion adds tongues to the list of gifts that will cease when Christ returns, therefore, the Bible itself strongly implies the same timing. We can also deduce that Tongues will continue to be useful in spreading the Gospel as long as there is more than one human language. I will concede that there is still a *plausible but inconclusive* argument that the gift of tongues could end at a different time, but as long as there are people on earth who speak different languages or who can't read the Bible in their own language, the gift of tongues has a potential utility that cannot be denied.

Argument 3: "Lack of evidence of these gifts used in Church History"

Supporters of cessationism will usually cite patterns they see in their research of church history to draw the conclusion that the revelatory gifts ceased after the 1st century. In their search of church history they will note that there are very few references to gifts being used, and will dismiss the documented reports they do find of gifts being used as faked or unreliable.

Biblical Response to Argument 3:

Please take a moment to open your Bible to Colossians 2, and read the whole chapter. One of the biggest things that the church has always had to battle against has been men who want to supplement the word of God with human precepts, philosophies, traditions, and plausible arguments. In Colossians 2, Paul addresses these types of teachings quite clearly.

In verses 2-4 it says: “² *that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ,*³ *in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.*⁴ *I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments.*” Here we see that we should be looking to Christ for all knowledge and understanding, and that we should not be deluded by *plausible arguments* .

In verse 8 we read: “*See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ.*” Here we are warned against being taken captive by things like human philosophies and *traditions* .

So in Colossians 2 we learn that the ultimate authority we should turn to in order to understand the mysteries of God, is Christ. The best way for us to better know Christ is to study our Bible, read it carefully, and apply it to our lives by obeying the commandments of Jesus. While it can certainly be helpful sometimes to look at the traditional teachings we see throughout church history, we should be careful to discern which of those traditions are directly from the Bible. Just because we see a tradition, or a plausible argument, or a philosophy that comes from Godly men we respect throughout history, does not necessarily mean that those things are actually found in the teachings of scripture.

While a survey of church history may be a “plausible argument” for the cessation of gifts, it is not a conclusive argument (as we will see in the logical response). Instead it is a tradition of certain groups of Christians who are drawing conclusions based on their own reasoning, experiences, and observations. The fact still remains that there is no place in scripture that explicitly offers any timing for the cessation of gifts before we see Christ face to face (1 Corinthians 13). We also see in 1 Corinthians 14:39 clear commands from the word of God indicating that we should “*earnestly desire to prophecy, and do not forbid the speaking in tongues*” . In 1 Corinthians 14:37-38, Pauls explicitly states that those commands in verse 39 are coming directly from the Lord. Jesus said in John 14:15: “*If you love me, you will keep my commandments.*”

Even if you are persuaded by the plausible but inconclusive argument from church history, I would urge you to be very cautious about forbidding the use of tongues or any other gift. It would be far better to implement the discipline and guidelines outlined in 1 Corinthians 14, than to risk quenching genuine works of the Holy Spirit and then find out you were mistaken when you are face to face with Jesus.

Logical Response to Argument 3:

This argument is primarily built on the logical fallacy “Appeal to Tradition”. It is a false assumption to say that the gifts ended simply because the church in general didn’t always practice these gifts, or because the Holy Spirit didn’t deem it necessary to dispense these gifts as frequently after the 1st century.

I would also note that this argument is also an instance of the logical fallacy “Argument from ignorance”. The easiest way to refute this fallacy is a quote by Carl Sagan: *“Absence of evidence is not evidence of absence”*. Just because you couldn’t find any evidence of something, doesn’t necessarily prove it hasn’t happened. In order to use *“Evidence of Absence”* to prove the nonexistence of something, that evidence must be conclusive beyond any reasonable doubt.

I will freely admit that I am not an expert in historical church texts, so I would like to be clear that I am not speaking from a place of authority on this subject. However, in my research I have also observed a consistent tendency toward “Stacking the Deck”, where a significant amount of historical evidence appears to be ignored or dismissed. Articles that I read in favor of continuationism offered many references to documented instances throughout church history of things like miraculous healings, and gifts of tongues being used on the mission field. Cessationists articles tended to only list a few sources that appeared biased or framed to favor cessationism. More study is needed on my part here, but certainly there has been a constant flow of people practicing (knowingly or unknowingly) their prophetic/word of knowledge gifts through their preaching. The Holy Spirit does not require that a preacher even realize they are uttering a

prophetic word or speaking a word of knowledge to do His work in those that hear the message He is delivering.

There are certainly accounts throughout church history where major revivals were precluded by a group of people experiencing an outpouring of the holy spirit and exercising spiritual gifts. The fact that some of these outpourings of the Holy Spirit lead to a time of revival is indisputable. I will grant that there may have been some who allowed their practices to go beyond the scope of a disciplined practice, but that is exactly what 1 Corinthians 12-14 was intended to correct. It is also disobedient to this passage to *overcorrect* the undisciplined use of these gifts by forbidding the practice of them because you suspect it is all fake. Just as it is the responsibility of the elders and deacons of the local church to implement church discipline in other matters where members are practicing sin, so it is their responsibility to ensure that the members of their congregations are practicing discipline in their exercise of these spiritual gifts. That does not mean to simply forbid their practice, but to practice them in such a way as to edify the church, spread the gospel, and bring glory to God.

The appeal to tradition argument is a plausible argument, however, it is not conclusive. There are many long stretches of church history where there is little to no evidence one way or the other. Prior to the protestant reformation, there were long stretches of history where the majority of the church held to doctrines, practices, and beliefs that were not in line with scripture. There are long stretches of history where most common people were illiterate and couldn't have documented their experiences if they wanted to. Based on these facts, it is plausible that there were any number of instances where the Holy Spirit dispensed these gifts and it wasn't documented by anyone. Therefore the argument from church history is inconclusive, as reasonable doubt can be established in several ways.

Argument 4: "Lack of evidence of this gift being used in later Epistles"

Supporters of cessationism will sometimes note that the books of the New Testament that were written later in time do not discuss the gifts of the spirit. They will then use that fact to draw a conclusion that certain gifts must not be relevant, or they must have ceased.

Biblical Response to Argument 4:

Not every peripheral doctrine in the New Testament is repeated throughout the different books. For example, 1 Timothy and Titus were written within a few years of each other. These two pastoral epistles have detailed guidance on the qualifications for elders and deacons. We do not simply discard the relevance of these qualifications because they weren't listed enough times in different epistles that were written at different times. We also do not dismiss the step by step instructions on church discipline because they are only found in Matthew 18. Therefore we should not dismiss these detailed instructions on how to properly use these spiritual gifts within a church gathering because they aren't found in other scriptures.

Logical Response to Argument 4:

This again is making an "Argument from Ignorance". We cannot logically assume that just because later books of the New Testament did not address this specific topic, that these gifts were not still being practiced.

Perhaps God simply felt that He had given us clear enough instructions on how to appropriately use those gifts and did not feel the need to repeat Himself. The chaos happening in Corinth was addressed in the first letter to Corinth, then that letter was recognized as the scripture it is and circulated around all the other churches. Perhaps most people were following God's instructions for practicing their gifts correctly, and 1 Corinthians was used to correct those who weren't, so there was no further need for Apostles to write letters to other churches on how to use these gifts in church gatherings.

The fact that there are not many epistles that discuss this topic doesn't prove anything one way or the other, therefore it is inconclusive.

Questioning Cessationisms Logical Conflicts with Scripture

As I considered the arguments for cessationism, I tried to consider what the ramifications would be if it were true. If I were to accept the notion that certain gifts have ceased, I must first be able to answer these questions when it comes to what the Bible says. I must answer them without changing or manipulating the intended meaning of the scriptures to get them to align with my view.

Question 1

If God intended for the gifts of prophecy or words of knowledge to end with the completion of the canon of scripture, why did He clearly indicate in His word (1 Corinthians 13) that they would cease when we Jesus returns and we are face to face with him?

Question 2

If God was not planning to continue the gifts of prophecy, tongues, and interpretation of tongues after the New Testament was canonized, then why would there be a passage in that canon (1 Corinthians 12-14) that gives us a detailed set of instructions on how to use these gifts properly within the context of church gatherings?

Question 3

If these gifts are not available to us, then it stands to reason that we would be encouraged to stop people from practicing them, but the

scriptures say the opposite. How can you reconcile the belief that these gifts were not meant to be used by us today with the clear imperatives of scripture to not quench the spirit by despising them (1 Thessalonians 5:19-21) and to not forbid their use (1 Corinthians 14:39)?

Question 4

One of the gifts of the Spirit is agape love. Paul stresses this as the greatest of the Holy Spirit's gifts, and describes its eternal nature. Agape is a love that no human by nature has the ability to conjure on their own. How then can we be certain that all spiritual gifts that “break natural law” have ended?

Question 5

Likewise, salvation, regeneration, and sanctification are works of the Holy Spirit that break us away from our fallen human nature. How are people still getting saved if the Holy Spirit no longer does any miracles that go against the laws of nature?

Question 6

If the clear instructions in 1 Corinthians 12-14 are not applicable to us, what are the ramifications for other areas of scriptures that provide clear instructions for things like church discipline, the qualification of elders & deacons, or male headship in the home/church?

Argument for Disciplined Continuationism

Biblical Argument: It's What The Bible Says To Do

From a Biblical perspective, there is only one argument we need for Disciplined Continuationism, and that is the plain and clear teaching of scripture. I believe firmly that if we set aside any preconceived notions about the topic, and read 1 Corinthians 12-14 like the original recipients would have read it, it is obvious that this passage articulates how to properly exercise these spiritual gifts in the context of church gatherings. The text also contains a chiastic logical proof that certain gifts will pass away when we are face to face with Jesus Christ. The premises in that logical proof can be used to deduce that we will continue to need these gifts until we see Christ face to face. This letter is written to the general population of the church in Corinth, not to specific Apostles who were writing scripture. Therefore, this passage is applicable to every christian who has not yet died, received their glorified body, and seen God face to face.

The Bible would not include these instructions on how to use our gifts if we were not supposed to align our practices with them. There are clear commands in this passage that we should obey. We cannot obey the commands and procedures regarding tongues and prophecy if those gifts are not even available to us. God did not make a mistake in providing these commands and procedures, and I don't agree with the notion that we can ignore the plain meaning of this passage because we "don't think it applies to us anymore". This kind of thinking would open the door to all kinds of doctrinal manipulations and heresies (Ephesians 4:14). While there is scripture to support that the 12 Apostles had a special dispensation of the Holy Spirit, there is no scriptural support that the general population of believers who were practicing these gifts in Corinth had any special dispensation of the Holy Spirit that we could not have today.

The primary purpose of spiritual gifts is to build up the church and advance the Gospel. In Acts 2 we see how the Holy Spirit used the gift of tongues, not to validate scripture writing, but to grab the attention of the

people gathered in Jerusalem and create an opportunity for them to hear and receive the gospel. After it grabbed their attention, Peter gave an impromptu sermon and many people were saved. Acts 6:8 says: “ *And Stephen, full of grace and power, was doing great wonders and signs among the people* ”. Stephen was neither a scripture author or an Apostle, yet the Holy Spirit worked great wonders and signs through him in order to advance the gospel and grow the church. Stephen's martyrdom in Acts 7, and the subsequent persecution of the church by Saul in Acts 8 became the catalyst to scatter the church and spread the Gospel beyond Judea and Samaria out to the ends of the Earth.

The Bible does make it clear that some gifts are more useful for the edification of the body than others. An argument can certainly be made for example that the gift of tongues is not particularly useful in an established church where everyone can read and teach from the Bible in their own language. Its general lack of utility in established church bodies where everyone speaks the same language most certainly had an effect on its frequency of use. However, there are still situations where the gift of tongues has utility on the mission field and when evangelizing in areas of ethnic diversity. It also can be a blessing in special times of worship and prayer when the Holy Spirit moves in a group of people in particular areas and times. It can also be very edifying for individuals in their own private prayer lives. Certainly we can see evidence that some of these gifts are not always going to be normative in every church. God doesn't just do miraculous things everytime we want Him to, he does them when it aligns with His sovereign plan. The Holy Spirit may determine that certain gifts are not needed for certain church bodies at certain times. However, just because something is dispensed less often does not prove that it is never dispensed.

We see in 1 Corinthians 12-14 that the Holy Spirit dispensed gifts of prophecy, speaking in tongues, interpreting tongues, and speaking words of knowledge to people who were not writers of scripture. It is also clearly indicated that the disciplined exercise of those gifts will continue to be useful to us to some degree until we all see Jesus face to face. There is nothing in scripture that says any of these gifts will cease at any other time.

These commands and instructions are written with the same authority and in the same literary style as the instructions on church

discipline in Matthew 18, or the qualifications of elders and deacons in 1 Timothy 3. Ignoring church discipline will result in a weakened congregation that is saturated with false Christians. Ignoring the qualifications of elders and deacons will result in weak leaders that are not fit to shepherd a congregation. Denying the possibility of the continued existence of certain spiritual gifts and strictly forbidding their practice, will result in quenching of the Spirit, and a lowered view (or even denial) of genuine workings of the Holy Spirit. All of these things are going to result in a weakened and less effective church body.

We cannot pick and choose which commands we like and don't like because they don't fit into our own patterns of thought, our culture, our preferences, or anything else outside of scripture. Jesus said in John 14:15-16: *"If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever,"*. He went on in verse 26 to talk about how the Holy Spirit will help the Apostles remember all of his commandments. It is quite clear that all of the instructions and commands written in the Gospels and the Epistles of the New Testament are meant for the church to understand so we can model our lives and practices after them. As I mentioned previously, Paul specifically calls out in 1 Corinthians 14-37-39 that we should acknowledge the scriptures he was writing in 1 Corinthians are commands from the Lord. We should treat them as the commands of Jesus that they are.

My Thoughts to the Various Groups

As I have been writing this, I have prayed that God would help me to accurately articulate what the scriptures say in a tone that captures the agape love for the church that has been placed in my heart by the Holy Spirit. As I wrote this section, I strove to lovingly exhort each group towards greater conformity to the clear teachings of scripture. As I considered this issue from various viewpoints, I believe the scriptures have messages that are relevant to every angle. My comments below are written from a place of love and not intended to cause division or be judgmental towards anyone. If you disagree with me, I am ok with that as

this is not a salvation issue. I am certainly open to further dialogue and I am open to considering any evidence or arguments that I may have missed.

To Cessationists

Steven Charnock, in “*The Existence and Attributes of God*” (Discourse 2), says: “*We shall never tell what is the matter of a precept or the matter of a promise if we impose a sense upon it contrary to the plain meaning of it; thereby we shall make the law of God to have a distinct sense according to the variety of men’s imaginations, and so make every man’s fancy a law to himself*”

Whenever we think we see a pattern in scripture, then use that pattern to draw a conclusion which is not supported by the clear meaning and intent of the scriptures as they are written, then our conclusions are not to be given the same authority as scripture. To think otherwise is to rely on our own understanding rather than the teaching of scripture. This is the type of thing that Job's friends were doing when they were convinced that God was punishing Job for some secret sin. This is a very dangerous place to be theologically, as it opens us up to being “*carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes*” (Ephesians 4:14).

A Cessationist view requires us to ignore the plain meaning of the text and context of certain scriptures, then try to draw conclusions from “patterns” we observe in scripture, history, or our own experience. It requires us to draw conclusions based on inconclusive arguments, and to change/downplay the original meaning of scripture to get our idea to “fit”.

The doctrine of the clarity (perspicuity) of Scripture affirms that scriptures are written to be understandable. There are indeed some passages in the Bible that require more effort to understand, however 1 Corinthians chapters 12-14 is not one of those passages. Paul’s original meaning and intent in this letter are quite clearly written and easy to understand. As with any epistle, we must also keep in mind that it can’t mean something completely different for us than it would have for the intended audience that the epistle was written to. Whenever the scriptures

are plain and unambiguous about a topic, we should exercise extreme caution in applying any human observations to that topic. We should also be cautious about searching for “hidden meaning” in the nuances of the grammar. If one of those potential nuances doesn’t align with the greater context of the passage, then we should disregard it.

If we observe a pattern in the practices of the church that contradicts or otherwise does not conform to the clear instructions we can read in the scriptures, then we should correct the practice of the church. We should not attempt to explain away the scripture as being “not relevant to us today” or alter how we interpret the Bible so that the scriptures match our practices. In this case, our churches should prevent the undisciplined, disruptive use of the gifts, without going to the other extreme of denying their existence or forbidding their use altogether.

1 Corinthians 14:39 contains clear imperatives: “*earnestly desire to prophecy, and do not forbid the speaking in tongues*”. 1 Thessalonians 5:19-21 contains the plain imperatives that we should be careful not to “*quench the spirit*” or “*despise the gift of prophecy*”. If the gifts of tongues and prophecy were not going to be relevant to the church after the canon of scripture was complete, then these commands would not be there for those who came after the New Testament was completed to read, understand, and apply to our lives. Since we cannot conclusively prove that these two spiritual gifts have ceased, we should be very careful not to completely dismiss these commands as irrelevant to us today.

If these gifts were *only* for the purpose of validating the ministries of the Apostles who wrote scripture, then only those individuals would have had these gifts. It is obvious from the biblical text that many individuals who were not one of the 12 Apostles were practicing these gifts regularly, but Paul did not rebuke them for the practice. Indeed, he encouraged them to desire these gifts, and instructed them on how to continue to practice them properly. It is explicitly stated in the Bible that the purpose of all spiritual gifts is to build up the body of Christ. Therefore we can know these gifts were not exclusively meant to validate scripture writers. (1 Corinthians 12:7, Ephesians 4:11-12).

I believe that there is a significant danger in quenching the work of the Holy Spirit if we deny the existence of these gifts. By ignoring the clear teaching of scripture in this matter, we run the risk of belittling, dismissing,

or outright denying the authentic work of the Holy Spirit, which I believe may be a form of blasphemy towards the Holy Spirit. Certainly, we risk insulting the Holy Spirit if we are wrongly accusing His work of being “fake”.

If, having reached this point of the article, you are still convinced that there are certain gifts that are not available to us today, it is my hope that you will be able to at least find yourself in the “Moderate Cessationists” group. That you would have the grace and humility to acknowledge that, though you may believe your opinion on this matter is plausible, and you may even believe your position is highly probable, your position is not something that can conclusively be proven logically nor is this position conclusively revealed to us in scripture. Therefore, you should exercise caution that your opinion does not become dogmatic, divisive, or dismissive towards continuationists. You should be very careful that your opinion does not cause you to disobey the parts of the Bible that are clear.

To Practical Cessationists

“But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.” (James 1:22–25)

If you believe these gifts are available to you today, but do not have any desire to experience them or participate in them, then I would encourage you to do some honest evaluation of what is holding you back. I would echo Paul by saying you should earnestly desire spiritual gifts. It may even be that you are using some of these gifts without even knowing that you are doing it. Perhaps someone else in your local church or small group has exercised these gifts and you have been a recipient without realizing it. A word of knowledge, or prophetic message, or discerning of spirits could be dismissed as intuition or coincidence.

Keep in mind that God may not have any of the revelatory gifts in mind for you, and that is ok too. Paul addresses this in 1 Corinthians 12:27-31: “²⁷ Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. ²⁸ And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues. ²⁹ Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? ³⁰ Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? ³¹ But earnestly desire the higher gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.” Chapter 13 goes on to demonstrate that the “more excellent way” is to exercise the agape love that is gifted to every true disciple (John 13:34-35).

Just because you desire any particular gift, that doesn’t mean you will ever receive it. It certainly doesn’t hurt to ask God for any gift that you desire as long as you are desiring it to edify the church and bring Glory to God. Just be sure that you are ok with both outcomes. If you never receive a particular gift you ask for, be content and use the gifts God *has* given you. If you are ever prompted to use *any* gift to build up your fellow believers, be sure that you are not quenching the work that the Holy Spirit is trying to do through you just because it may seem a little weird. If you are holding back and not allowing the Holy Spirit to work through you because you don’t want to be associated with those that are undisciplined in their practice of these gifts, then that is something I would recommend that you bring before God in prayer.

To Undisciplined Continuationists

In Acts 8:9-24 we are told about a man named Simon who had a reputation as a magician. Simon offers to pay Philip some silver to lay hands on him and give him the power of the Holy Spirit. Philip rebukes Simon the magician for his selfish motives, and we see that Simon repents after he is called out for incorrectly pursuing those gifts. This story should give us pause to check our motives when we are seeking spiritual gifts. Is

your motive for seeking a particular gift to spread the gospel and build up the church?

It can be very tempting to pursue some of the more spectacular or prominent gifts because we think it will make us appear more spiritual to others, and draw attention to ourselves. Some church leaders will put on “Holy Spirit Services” that over emphasize gifts like healing, tongues, or prophecy in such a way that the people on stage performing these acts are the main focus rather than the gospel or the edification of the body. There are certainly people who have faked speaking in tongues, or staged “faith healings” to trick undiscerning people out of their money and lead many astray when their healings are not genuine. There are also many people who have improperly sought after more mundane gifts like teaching, or shepherding because they desire the notoriety and authority that sometimes accompanies those gifts. Seeking any gift without the proper motivation can have disastrous consequences.

The disciples who first spoke in tongues on the day of pentecost were not “trying” to speak in tongues. They didn’t practice by saying “banana” backwards 100 times, nor did they force themselves to utter nonsense syllables until they “learned” to speak in tongues. The Holy Spirit came upon them and gave them utterance when the time was right, and He used that as a sign to draw people to Christ. We see time and time again throughout Acts that signs and wonders were accompanied by preaching the Gospel, and resulting in people being added to the church.

When people inevitably tried to attribute the signs and wonders that were being performed to the men who were performing them, the disciples pointed to God as the source of the miracles and turned the conversation towards the Gospel so that people would be saved. Acts 3:12 says “ *And when Peter saw it he addressed the people: ‘Men of Israel, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we have made him walk?’* ”. Peter then goes on to present the gospel and 5,000 people were saved. Peter wasn’t motivated to have people follow him or draw attention to himself. He was motivated to draw attention to Jesus. Peter, Stephen, Philip, and the other disciples used those signs and wonders the Holy Spirit performed through them to build up the church. They used them to call sinners to believe the gospel, be saved, and to live lives of repentance and obedience to Christ.

1 Corinthians 12-14 is there to teach us that, first and foremost, we should desire to be filled with agape love for the church. We must first be filled with the Holy Spirit, and be motivated by that agape love to the point where our primary mission in life is to bring glory to God by building up the church, sharing the gospel, and expanding the kingdom of God. When that is our motivation, we can trust that the Holy Spirit will provide whatever gifts that we need to accomplish that task. Therefore, we should all pay special attention to our motivations.

Even when properly motivated, God may not have a particular gift for you, but He will provide you with the giftings that will most edify the church. Take the time to learn what gifts (supernatural or mundane) God has given you and use them to spread the gospel and edify the body. If the Holy Spirit doesn't deem it appropriate to give you a gift you desire, perhaps He has a good reason to withhold that from you. You can still ask, but don't try or force it or fake it. Instead, be content with the gifts and talents He provided you and use them for His glory.

If you are practicing spiritual gifts like the speaking of tongues, or healing, or prophecy in a manner that is self glorifying, disruptive, chaotic, or otherwise inconsistent with scripture, then I earnestly plead with you to repent and implement the discipline described in 1 Corinthians. If you are faking it so that you can make a show of how spiritual you are, or draw crowds to your church, then know that you are making a mockery of the Holy Spirit and repent. I believe that an argument could be made that faking the work of the Holy Spirit is a form of blasphemy of the Holy Spirit and certainly it qualifies as taking the name of the Lord in vain. You are making a false representation of God, and that is a dangerous place to be in. "Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap" (Galatians 6:7). Check your motivations, and seek first the gift of agape love that will last for eternity.

"¹ If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. ² 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. ³ If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing." - 1 Corinthians 13:1-3

To Disciplined Continuationists

It is my hope that reading this has strengthened your confidence that the Holy Spirit is empowering your gifts. I would encourage you to remain steadfast in your faith and to continue to allow the Holy Spirit to work through you. Remain disciplined and self-controlled in your practicing of whatever gifts the Spirit has dispensed to you within the guidelines of scripture. Seek first and foremost the gift of agape love and use that for God's glory and to edify your fellow believers in the Church. Be careful not to become puffed up, or theatrical in your practices, and never let anyone shake your confidence in your gifts by telling you what you are doing is "unbiblical".

The Bible explicitly supports the disciplined practice of spiritual gifts for the edification of the body, when we are motivated by agape love for God and His Church. There is no source of truth that has more authority or reliability than the Bible. If you read the scriptures and align your practices carefully with them, you will do well and experience blessings the other groups will not.

To Pastors and Teachers on all sides

Our greatest concern should not be to prove if we are right or wrong about this issue. Great theological minds have debated this topic for a long time, and I sincerely doubt that my writing here is going to settle the debate. My hope is that anyone who holds a cessationists view would recognize that while there may be evidence they personally find *persuasive*, there is no *conclusive* evidence that it is definitely true. Therefore, they should take a moderate stance; particularly when teaching it to others. My concern is that, in this and certain other peripheral doctrinal debates (like eschatology for example), there are usually some well thought out arguments on every side. I believe that in those cases where the Bible is

not explicitly clear about a topic, we should be extremely careful about how we teach them.

Ultimately, those of us who teach are responsible for what we teach and how it affects the lives of those we are teaching (James 3:1). Even though I have a firm opinion on this topic, I would lean toward taking a more neutral/moderate approach when teaching it to others. When we come to these types of issues, I think it is better to say “The Bible is not 100% clear on this topic”, acknowledging there may be some mystery about it we aren’t meant to fully understand. We can also acknowledge when the opposing views have some valid points, and we can present our opinions on why we land where we land.

If we teach something that is not clearly taught in the Bible in a way that leaves no room for the other scripturally valid arguments, we run the risk of being on the wrong side of the issue and being held responsible for what we taught when we see Jesus face to face. That is a *huge* risk in my opinion. The risk of incorrectly teaching on this particular doctrine is elevated by the fact that if we 100% forbid the use of certain gifts in our church gatherings, and when we get to heaven we find out we were wrong, we are going to be held responsible for quenching genuine workings of the Holy Spirit. That is just as risky of a place to be in as those who abuse these gifts and teach others to exercise them in an undisciplined manner.

The most important point I would like to make is this: Even though the Bible is not 100% clear on when these particular gifts will cease, it is 100% clear on how these gifts are meant to be exercised within the context of a church gathering. It is 100% clear that every gift the Holy Spirit dispenses is intended to edify the body and glorify God. It is also explicitly commanded that we should not forbid speaking in tongues. Therefore, it is disobedient to scripture for a continuationist to practice these gifts in a disorderly, unloving, self glorifying manner. Likewise, it is just as disobedient to scripture for a cessationist to forbid the speaking of tongues all together.

There are many varieties of Gifts, and the Bible does not list them all. The Holy Spirit dispenses all kinds of gifts today that were not even imagined when the New Testament was being written. In the first century, there was no-one that had a gift for running a soundboard. There was nobody that had a special knack for software engineering that they could

use for the glory of God and the edification of the body by developing a bible app, or a church communication app. If anyone has any gift, talent, or ability that they want to exercise to glorify God and edify the body, we should not forbid it unless it is clearly unbiblical. Certainly we can and should implement discipline and restraint. Certainly we should not allow anyone to disrupt the normal flow of a church service. Certainly we should ensure that our church services and traditions do not become so rigid as to leave no room for the Holy Spirit to work. There is a middle ground between chaotically misrepresenting the Holy Spirit and quenching the Holy Spirit. That balanced, loving, disciplined, and orderly approach to exercising our gifts is what is being taught in 1 Corinthians 12-14.

To Cessationist Pastors, Teachers, Elders, and Deacons

It is certainly understandable that, if you are a cessationist, you will have an aversion to allowing the practice of these gifts within the context of your church gatherings. I believe it is reasonable in this case to not specifically allocate any special time for the practice of these gifts in your church gatherings. Certainly if someone is interrupting the normal flow of your gatherings by exercising one of these gifts by standing up in the middle of your sermon and speaking out of turn, you should treat that person the same way you would treat a person with a musical gift who suddenly stood up and started playing their instrument in the middle of a sermon. Make them stop, and offer to speak to them after the meeting. When you do speak to them, point them to 1 Corinthians 14, which says all gifts are to be exercised in an orderly, edifying manner. You can then discuss that there is a legitimate debate about whether these gifts are for today, but there should be no debate about how they are exercised within the context of a formal church service since that is clearly defined by scripture. Without telling them you think they are faking it, you can lovingly let them know where you stand on this inconclusive issue, and that you don't consider it loving or edifying to interrupt the normal flow of the church service.

I would encourage you though, to prayerfully consider how you might respond a little differently in less formal church gatherings. Perhaps

at a prayer meeting, or during an extended time of worship/prayer at a retreat when you sense the Holy Spirit's presence heavy in the room. In those less formal/smaller gatherings you could perhaps open the floor for people who have some word of encouragement on their hearts that they would like to share. Caution them that if they say or do anything clearly unbiblical, you will point it out. You don't need to call it prophecy, or a word of knowledge if you don't want to use those words, but it would open up a time to allow for whatever working the Holy Spirit might have for the edification of those gathered. If anyone speaks, let those gathered discuss what was said and test if it is Biblical.

If someone speaks out in tongues during that time, and it doesn't sound like they are just saying "banana" backwards, you can announce something like "We will wait on the Holy Spirit for a few minutes to see if there is someone with an interpretation". If no interpretation occurs, you can simply announce that since there is no interpreter, we will not be speaking in tongues anymore at this time. If there is an interpretation, consider it and ensure it was an edifying message that is not contrary to scripture. If it was edifying then react graciously even if you are still skeptical. At the very least, the message was edifying and that is what is important. If the message is unbiblical, speak up and say why. If you are right and there is no longer any true gift of tongues, or interpretation of tongues, you will then have used the Biblical method of shutting down the undisciplined or fake use of that gift. After that happens one or two times, anyone faking it will get the message and stop. Perhaps you may never experience a true working of tongues, prophecy, or word of knowledge, but you also won't have potentially disobeyed the Bible by completely forbidding it. It would also be in a controlled environment where you could mitigate any potential abuses by implementing the guidelines described in 1 Corinthians 14.

Conclusion

I would like to conclude by first reiterating that I do not believe this to be a salvation issue. While it is not an *essential* doctrine of Christian

faith , I do believe that the loving, disciplined use of spiritual gifts is an *important* doctrine of Christian *practice* . There are great benefits and blessings to be had with the proper practice of these gifts of the Spirit. The more that we align our thoughts and actions with the truths and commandments found in the scriptures, the more Christlike we will become, and the more effective we will be at building and advancing the kingdom of God.

I personally believe that both the Doctrinal Cessationists, and the Undisciplined Continuationists groups are in error. I also believe there is a much stronger biblical case for Disciplined Continuationism than for Moderate Cessationism. I believe that those who teach cessationism in such a way that it is presented as the “one true way” are not accurately representing what the Bible teaches. I still believe that we can and should ALL work together side by side in unity without allowing the more extreme viewpoints to distract us from our main goal of spreading the Gospel.

I believe we should all heed the clear instructions of scripture and earnestly seek the Holy Spirit to gift us, first and foremost, with the eternal agape love that is the mark of true disciples (John 13:35). This is the gift that will allow us to have the greatest impact on earth and that we can take with us into eternity.

Beyond agape love, we should also be open to *any* gift that the Holy Spirit might have for us. We should strive to use whatever gifts, abilities, talents, and resources God gives us to build up the body of Christ when we gather. We should test all our gifts, thoughts, actions, and attitudes against the clear teaching of scripture to validate that they are from God. We should set aside any thoughts, practices, or preferences we may be holding on to that are contrary to the word of God.