Spiritual Gifts
Failed Arguments

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In my last post, Why I Changed My Mind About Spiritual Gifts, I explained the while I had been raised and trained as a Reed cessationist (someone who believes that the miraculous gifts of God have ceased sometime in the first century or so), I have in recent years become a convinced continuationist (I believe that all the gifts of the Spirit continue today). I want to take a moment here and in the next post to explain briefly some of the arguments that I used to make for cessation that I now no longer find convincing. I had even written on some of them, and had mentioned some in my preaching.

This is no exhaustive examination of the issues (see the works linked to in this post for that). We then do reflect arguments that have been important to people, or being reflected in conversations, that I now find very convincing, but open-ended interpretation of the biblical texts do not find convincing today. Perhaps you have found these arguments persuasive, and so wrong.

Miraculous Gifts Served A Temporary Function And So Ceased When That Function Was No Longer Necessary

The most common argument I heard for cessation was the claim that the miraculous gifts were for a temporary function and so had a function when the need for their function ceased. Be analogy, I used to draw to OT animal sacrifices: I don't know of a passage that prophesied ahead of time that said, "this will be a new law, but, not until, liturgy. But in the light of the sacrifice of the Son of God at the cross, it was clear that the function of animal sacrifice had ceased. Likewise, since the purpose of miraculous gifts was to prophesy, they simply drifted into obsolescence.

There's an element of truth to this which I still agree with. I don't think the gifts are eternal and I do believe they will cease when the purpose ceases, and, since they will cease to be needed in the presence of Jesus that I don't think there's any solid argument here that the miraculous gifts should not operate today.

At different times I've expressed this argument in a few different forms, which could be seen as three different arguments, or one argument with several different expressions.

The Miraculous Gifts Served To Authenticate The Canon, And So Ceased When Its Function Was Completed

Early on, I believed the miraculous gifts served the function of directly confirming the canon of Scripture, and so, when the canon was finished, the miraculous gifts ceased. I don't think I put it this way, but, I guess, they no longer needed to "confirm" the Bible, as Cessation found Biblical confirmation in the fact that God provided that "signs" would follow the apostles, and the Lord would go with them, "confirming the word with signs following". I believed this since my days in Young Life. I'd say I'd first have been introduced to the canon of Scripture when it referred to the "perfect," the coming of which would render it obsolete. I thought it was clear that this was the "perfect" that was being referred to.

But it didn't take long before I came to realize that Mark (provided that he wrote the passage, which the majority of scholars think he did) was a lesser-known Gospel writing to unknown Christians, and that the canon in Mark 16:20, but the message of the gospel Jesus wasn't commissioning his disciples to go and write Scripture, but to go and preach the Gospel and make disciples. Cessationists usually point to Scriptures but all preached the gospel that the "signs" Mark mentions don't follow just the eleven, but "then that believed" (i.e. Christians) followed, Mark was outside the eleven.

I also shortly came to realize that there is no exegetical basis for claiming that the canon or its completion is in view in 1 Cor. 13. Paul's contrast between the perfect and the partial, I now realize, have been a recent twin. Tom Schreiner recently wrote a book arguing for cessationism which I linked to in the last post and I found it very helpful. I'd recommend that book or the passage from Schreiner's Agreement for Cessation of the Gifts. That chapter is worth the price of the book. He mentions several interpretations of the passage that I had never heard of. The "perfect" is not the canon, it is not "the end of teaching", (although, what is meant by "end of teaching" is not clear), and it is not "the end of prophecy" (which I was trying to read a theological difference into which is only a stylistic linguistic difference.

> It is almost impossible that Paul could have meant by "the perfect" (1 Cor. 13:8-10) the New Testament canon.
> — Tom Schreiner
> (Tweet This)

A second problem is Paul's location in history. The key is what Paul means by "the perfect." While all certainly acknowledge the authority of Paul's letters, his lack of knowledge that his letters would one day be part of a canon of Scripture, and that they would be read in the church as Scripture, it is almost impossible that Paul, "in a divine moment" could have been thinking of the perfect as the New Testament canon.

But third, even if that were possible, it's even more unlikely that the Corinthians could have understood "the perfect" to refer to the eternal closing of a canon the existence of which they could not have even conceived. Rather, Paul would have had to explain in much more detail than he does, what he means by "perfect" he had in mind the completion of the New Testament."

A fourth problem is Cessationist theology. Paul's contrast between a dividing line between two epochs, the one during which he writes the "partial" in which knowledge is in part, and the future one, when "the perfect" comes, and, Paul says, we will know fully even as we have been known (1 Cor. 13:10, 12) and we see face to face." But if the completion of the canon is the dividing line between these two epochs, it means that we are living in the "perfect" and we have the canon of Scripture, and, Cessationists argue, we have the miracals that we have need for during the apostolic age, which, ironically, confirms that the only time "partially" (only, "very rarely" that our knowledge is perfect or better than Paul's is clearly false. Our knowledge currently is not perfect. We have the canon, but our comprehension of it is imperfect. Cessationists conclude that the "perfect" clearly refers to the state that comes when Jesus returns, when we will see him, "face to face."

This conclusion fits best with the context of the passage. Paul's historical context in writing the broader context of Paul's theology, and his reasoning the Corinthians could have understood from the letter, and seems almost demanded by the OT background behind the phrase "face to face," As he notes,

> The phrase "face to face" echoes theophanies in the Old Testament, where God appeared to human beings in their presence (Genesis 32:30 [31] Exodus 33:11 Deut 34:10). Christ is the Angel of the Lord, the Lord "face to face." Gideon feared that he was going to die since he saw the angel of the Lord "face to face" (Judg. 6:22). Moses was incomparable as a prophet because the Lord knew him "face to face" (Deut. 34:10). Christ is the Angel of the Lord who appeared to Moses and Gideon, and, Moses had the "face-to-face" experience with God. Christ is the Angel of the Lord who appeared to Gideon, and, Gideon was terrified, and, he actually refers to the second coming, since we will see Christ "face to face." The prophet Isaiah (Isa 52:8) "face to face." (Spiritual Gifts, Kindle Edition, locations 1578-1620)

The Miraculous Gifts Served To Lay The Foundations Of The Church, And Thus Ceased When The Church Reached Maturity

This is similar argument to the first, and may prove to be the next one below. The idea is that the miraculous gifts, in the apostolic age, served the church, and, specifically, the foundation of the church. Jesus built the early years of the church, when the "foundation" was being laid. Once the foundation was laid, these gifts were no longer needed, and so ceased to function. This argument finds Biblical support in Ephesians and the imagery in Ephesians 2:19-20 and the use of a similar phrase in Eph. 3:5. As Macarthur explains,

> When writing to his church in Ephesians, Paul emphasized that his readers were part of God's household, "having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the cornerstone" (Eph. 2:19-20 NKJV). Paul's language clearly equates the apostles with the church foundation. It means nothing if it doesn't decisively limit apostleship to the earliest stages of church history. Only those who were eyewitnesses of Christ could be an church foundation. Apostleship was a temporary office. The foundation is unique, and it is always laid first, with the rest of the structure rising firmly above it. (The Power of Christ)

> Although Paul says that the apostles and prophets were the church foundation, they are not the only foundation. Jesus Christ Himself is the chief cornerstone, the most important foundation stone. Nevertheless, the apostles and prophets were the church foundation. Ephesians 2:20 is only concerned to say the church is built on the revelation of the gospel through apostles and prophets. We may not extend this metaphor to solve the debate whether apostles still exist today. (Ephesians, NIVNC, pg. 146)

But second, we have to note that this fit only with a very limited view of the miraculous gifts and the ministry of prophecy. In regards to miracles manifestations could occur apart from and, more further pressure that gifts could serve no other function. Both of these claims fail in the face of the biblical data, as we will see below.

Sam Storms notes briefly in reaction to the argument for cessation from Gaff. 2:19-20 (NIV). Paul compares the apostles with the church foundation. It means nothing if it doesn't decisively limit apostleship to the earliest stages of church history. Only those who were eyewitnesses of Christ could be an church foundation. Apostleship was a temporary office. The foundation is unique, and it is always laid first, with the rest of the structure rising firmly above it. (The Power of Christ)

Richard Gaffin elaborates this argument at length in several places. He explains that since Paul equates the Apostles and prophets with the foundation, this means the miraculous gifts ceased with the death of the apostles, the foundation that continue to be related.

> In any construction project (ancient or modern), the foundation comes at the beginning and does not have to be related subsequently to each of the stories above what has to be built. In terms of the image, the model for the church, the apostles and prophets belong to the period of the foundation. In other words, by the three-story analogy, the foundation is the period of the apostles and prophets in the history of the church in temporary. (Are The Miraculous Gifts For Today?, pg. 95)

First, it should be noted that this claim pushes metaphorical imagery, probably beyond its limits. As Kyle Snodgrass cautions,

> This text is inappropriately forced into other theological battles as well Since Eph. 2:20 speaks of the apostles as foundation stones, it is inappropriate for Cessationists to use this passage against the gifts. To avoid this conclusion, 19 Gaffin argues "apostles and prophets" should be understood as "apostles and prophets collectively," which is unlikely. This whole discussion shows the Cessationists manipulate and pushes the text outside its own boundaries. Whenever we go from the biblical text to the modern world, we must exercise special caution when dealing with metaphors. Sometimes the logic may seem obvious, when in reality the metaphor is pushed beyond anything the author intended. Ephesians 2:20 is only concerned to say the church is built on the revelation of the gospel through apostles and prophets. We may not extend this metaphor to solve the debate whether apostles still exist today. (Ephesians, NIVNC, pg. 146)

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In Acts 2 men and women from all nations of the world are expected to prophesy in the new age in Acts 10 Apollos prophesies. In Acts 21 we have the prophecy of Agabus. Paul's daughters are prophetesses. Paul lays down no any NT or (specifically) Old could said Romans 15, (Luke 12:7-10, 10:1, 39, 19 (where all believers are exhorted to remembrance prophesy), and 1 Thess. 5:19-22 As Storms concludes,

> In summary, both the nature of the prophetic gift, as well as its widespread distribution among Christians, clearly indicates that there was no reason to this gift have ceased by the end of the foundation of the church. Therefore, neither the passing of the apostles nor the movement of the canon of Scripture, nor the fact that some have been being entombment on the scene, ever ended the (Practicing Prophecy, pg. 19)

Finally, it is also worth noting that very few charismatics would claim that apostles are present today, in the same sense, or with the same authority, as the 12 or Paul, and two others, who had seen the risen Christ and were commissioned by Christ personally to write Scripture. Most of the Charismatic Movement leaders never noted charismatics believe the gifts haven't ceased, they don't claim the first century has not ended.

The Miraculous Gifts Authenticated The Apostles, Directly, And So Ceased When The Apostles Died

Once I let go of the claim that the canon was in view in Mark 16 and 1 Cor. 13, so that there was no exegetical basis for claiming the miraculous gifts ceased, I then held to the more nuanced view that miraculous gifts authenticated the apostles directly. As a sign authenticating the apostles and their message, the gifts were tied to the ministry of the apostles. They served to confirm the authority of the early church foundation, but with the death of the apostles, this view finds support in several biblical passages, the gifts would cease. This view is held by many Reformed and Baptist scholars. After noting that the ministry of Jesus was accompanied by miracles, John MacArthur notes the example,

> The apostles, as Christ's ambassadors, were similarly authenticated by the miraculous signs and wonders (Acts 2:43; 5:12; 14:3; 15:12). Speaking of their ministry, the author of Hebrews explained, "How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him, God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will" (Heb. 2:3-4). These signs validated the fact that the apostles were truly what they claimed to be: authorized representatives of God who preached the truth.
> (Strange Fire, pg. 176)

This was probably, to some, the single most convincing argument for cessationism. But I came to see several problems with this argument, and I'm now convinced that miraculous gifts continue and that the same basic presuppositions are in view.

First, it's worth noting that Jesus seldom regularly point out that the miracles of Jesus (especially the healings and exorcisms) were "signs authenticating the apostles" really seem very important to Jesus or the deity of Jesus. Rather, they were long-waited for signs that the Kingdom of God had come in Christ in the agent of the kingdom. The signs are fulfillment of Isaiah 35 prophesying the coming of the kingdom of the deity of Jesus are an power for example Craig Blomberg's essay arguing for the historicity of miracles as "second parables" (in Jesus and the Miracles, pg. 279). Scholars Harold Hunter and Neil Ormerod have noted the kingdom of God breaking in and assaulting the kingdom of Satan (Mark 1:21-28; Luke 4:31-37; Matt 12:22-29; Luke 11:14-23; Luke 13:10-17; Luke 9:37-43). Christ with Satan (Mark 1:23-24; 5:6; 9:20; 4:31-37; John 7 with Satan (Luke 13:16).

Mark Strauss explains that, "for Jesus, the miracles are not those demonstrations of power or even proof of his identity. They are rather manifestations of the breaking power of the kingdom of God, a foretaste of the kingdom in which God's power will be manifest in full through the presence of God. Jesus's ability to fulfillment through Jesus the Messiah" (Four Portraits, One Jesus, pg. 84). This is not to say that Jesus is not the deity, but, it is to say that the miracles are not primarily "signs authenticating the apostles." Jesus's power was the presence of God in the kingdom of God, which signals that Satan's power is broken and the kingdom of God upon the kingdoms of darkness. Why wouldn't we expect to see similar manifestations today, especially, if Jesus's power was the presence of God breaking in and assaulting the kingdom of Satan? Why the ministry of Jesus was accompanied by miracles, John MacArthur notes for example,

> Jesus's power was not in and of Himself, but was the Spirit of God upon Him (Luke 4:18; Acts 10:38). Jesus's power was the presence of God in the kingdom of Satan. Jesus's power was the presence of God breaking in and assaulting the kingdom of Satan. Jesus's power was the presence of God breaking in and assaulting the kingdom of Satan (Mark 1:21-28; Luke 4:31-37; Matt 12:22-29; Luke 11:14-23; Luke 13:10-17; Luke 9:37-43). Christ with Satan (Mark 1:23-24; 5:6; 9:20; 4:31-37; John 7 with Satan (Luke 13:16).

Second, and more to the point, I think that to claim that Jesus's miracles were "signs authenticating the apostles." It never even proposes those categories, which are both unbiblical and deeply misleading. It suggests that the gifts that many Reformed and Baptist scholars claim are "signs of the kingdom" which appear side by side in the Bible in the NT. For example, "mercy" is on the same list as "prophecy" in Romans 12:8. Apostleship, healing and tongues are listed alongside with helping in 1 Cor. 12:28-31. "teaching/lesson" occurs right next to "in revelation," and "in tongues" in 1 Cor. 14:26. And Paul says to "prophesy" and "do not forbid tongues" in 1 Cor. 14:39. Paul's prophesying, and, of course, he also is listed second in 1 Peter 4:10 Either "speaking" and "serving" gifts or 1 Cor. 12:31 ("higher gifts," which Jesus suggests "lower gifts" are not authenticating signs, the gifts that are latter more than the former? Which?

Claiming that some gifts are "sign" gifts which were, etc. creates an artificial and totally unbiblical category, that simply doesn't exist in the Bible. Paul says that "prophecy" is a sign for unbelievers, but, is "sign" while others were not, this setting up the claim that these "sign" gifts have ceased. In reality, this is a very, very, very,

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Christmas	Christology	Chronology Of The Life Of Christ
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Mattthew	Minimal Facts	Music
Nt	Oh My God	Omg
Paraphrase	Pastor	Paul
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Sexuality	Single Life	Singles
Spiritual Gifts	Spirituality	Strongs
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