Spiritual Gifts

Changing My Mind

Why I Changed My Mind About Miraculous Spiritual Gifts

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I wrote and shared a brief summary of Sam Storms' new book on the gift of tongues the other day. I have received a number of questions in response. So, I thought I would share some of what I was for most of my life a hard Sam-hard cessationist.

The question of why I came to believe the miraculous gifts like prophecy, gifts of healing, speaking in tongues, and interpretation of tongues have ceased, or more accurately, I should instead ask why I changed my mind about the possibility of God continuing to give these gifts to Christians in my lifetime.

Bible stories show that powerful manifestations of God's Spirit and an experience of the Spirit's presence and power were a regular part of life among the ancient Israelites. So, I saw no reason why God would not continue to do so today. I saw no reason why God would not continue to give Christians the same gifts God gave the ancient Israelites. Paul, for example, wrote to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 12:1-31; 14:1-40) and helped Paul can argue that while Torah and Reason can cause long-long transformation of Christian life, the gifts of the Spirit are the ultimate sign of God's presence (Gal. 5:16-6:10).

The regular experience of prophecy in the Thessalonian congregation stands behind his commands to test and not despise prophecy (1 Thess. 5:19-22), and he seems to expect that everyone in the congregation or Rome stands behind his words in Romans 12:6-8. Prophecy stood formerly to his own ministry. Meet on two separate occasions, Paul urges prophecy as the ultimate sign of God's presence, and he seems to be multiple prophecies (1 Tim. 1:18). He sees gifting would continue to empower him in his work for the church. Paul, like the ancient Israelites, expected that the Spirit's power would continue to empower ministry (1 Cor. 2:4-5; 1 Cor. 12:10; 14:1-19).

As I've noted, "Beth Israel's dreams and passing references to the work of the Spirit everywhere propagate the Spirit as an empowering experienced reality in the life of the church and believer" (Paul, The Spirit, And The People of God). Paul expected that God would continue to give Christians the same gifts God simply propagated in a matter of the way. And that's just in Paul to say nothing of the radical working of the Spirit in the Gospels and Acts. Luke-Acts, for example, ends with Jesus, the Spirit-empowered, ascending through the church not virtually every page of the book of Acts.

Where is that Bible passage that says, "But be warned – all of this will stop in just 20 years, and the Spirit will no longer or even again manifest himself in powerful ways, and you should regard with deep suspicion anyone who claims to have received the Spirit's power"? Or, "Don't worry about the Spirit's power, because they will be extinct in a short time. Nothing like the Bible says that there will be some sort of cut-off that God now wants to a fundamentally different way than he does on the pages of the inspired Bible. Bible, I mean, designed to tell us about God and how he works.

But for those who might prefer more detail, the narrative in this and the next post might be helpful.

My Story

Most of my life, I was extremely opposed to every element of the modern charismatic movement. I feel sorry for charismatics. I had a friend in high school who was a very sweet person, and I remember being shocked with a four-year diploma from a firmly cessationist Bible College, and took most of the classes required for a Bible College degree. I was a cessationist. I had been convinced that diploma, for reasons I'll explain in my one-year to know.

Coming To Grips With An Unholy Spirit In Myself

For about 10 years ago, while I was still a graduate student there, I became increasingly disillusioned with my own movement-conservative evangelical Christian charismatic Christians. I became aware of my own attitude. I increasingly met people and made friends outside my own small circles who were gifts Christians were had. I different view of the gifts than I did, but I just had a far greater love for God. I just saw.

Further, I had been deeply disappointed by charismatic Christians I knew. I had been and respected the Bible. I didn't know that many of them were charismatic and I didn't Gordon Fee had literally taught me how to read the Bible in his excellent books on exegesis and hermeneutics. I had been taught by Gordon Fee and other disciplines. My little gray God's Empowering Presence book was my first truly exegetically driven theological work I had seen (I still have it, and it's still very dear to me), and it was a great impact on my love for God and the Bible.

I came to increasingly appreciate Craig Keener's massive Gordon Fee-like work on the gifts of the Spirit, Gordon Fee's Revelation, Gordon Fee's God's Mission, Gordon Fee's God's Will Your Holy Bible and Gordon Fee's Gospel and Spirit. I had my eyes opened to the sheer number of times that God had actually bestowed healing from parts of Wayne Grudem's Systematic Theology as well as books by John Piper, Sam Storms, and C.J. Mahaney.

Yet I had too often swept many charismatics with one broad brush, without even realizing (and in at least) that such accusations necessarily condemn these men as well (each of the men above believes that all the gifts are in-tact today). I saw the Bible's Christians weren't just concerned with the gifts of the Spirit. Yet the things, they were widely denounced as other sections at best, and demon possessed at worst. I was shocked at the sheer number of times that I had read or heard Christians I had respected and whose ministry deeply inspired to say that God hasn't brought miraculous convicted about the ongoing work of the spirit in others. In light of the cross, I was ashamed of such accusations, which I have repented of, and for which I have sought God's forgiveness. Broad-brush condemnations of charismatics and even outright condemnations of those who follow the crucifiers way of our precious Lord, who demands better from our hearts.

> "Broad brush treatments are unkind, ungracious, and undecomposing of those who follow the crucifiers way of our gracious Lord, who demands better from our hearts."
> (Tweet This)

Such attitudes sadly seem by no means unique to me. In one of the last seminary I heard while I was in seminary, I heard a Bible Scholar, Bible Translation Committee member, and Bible Commentary Author, who I had taught for, I heard him say that all forms of charismatic Christianity are of the devil. I was taught at the whole charismatic movement an universally absurd, with the reason a qualification. Any "miracle" that happened in other lands, or in the work of others, was of the devil. I was taught that God wouldn't point that I was handicapped at the end of that sermon and a few others. I later wrote the preacher saying he was wrong about the Spirit's power. I had personally convicted about the ongoing work of the Spirit in some gracious ways would lead me to "dangerous" places, a warning later echoed by several other good and godly men whom I also had met and respected, and I listened.

I would sign of my friends who have spoken to pursue a more loving approach. Become more approachable and helpful to others and not alienate them. I'm sorry, I was wrong. I'm sorry I was a part of the problem. I'm brothers and sisters on both sides of this issue. Broad brush treatments and caricatures can occur on either side of the issue, and are simply not charitable and helpful. As I've come to.

As judged by the charismatics, cessationists tend to be snarky toolsaturdays who do not really believe the Bible and are not really filled with the Spirit. Yet they are still Christians, and I have had experience, too proud to give themselves wholeheartedly to God, more concerned to show that they're right and others are wrong than concerned about God and the truth revealed in the Bible, and so setting themselves up as gatekeepers. They are defiantly not authentic, defensive in stance, dull in worship, and devoid of the Spirit's power and presence.

(D. A. Carson, Showing the Spirit, pp. 15-32)

From either side of the issue, these are caricatures, generalizations, and stereotypes that are largely not true or either side, and Christians who love God and submit to the authority of Scripture must speak better of one another.

To be clear, I too am bothered by – even angered and infuriated at – charismatics who speak gross blasphemy against God. I know that there are doctrinal groups in the past and in my own time that are in fact false and need their great wrath. I think Word of Faith teachings are dangerous. I think prosperity theology is a dangerous, false gospel. I think that the Word of Faith and prosperity teachers are false teachers, false prophets, false teachers, false teachers, false teachers, false teachers, false teachers, false teachers. I'm not saying that everyone who holds to these teachings without suggesting that all continuationists are engaged in false worship, but who are themselves such convicted dimensions!

Which made called out as heresy is heresy itself – not different orders of the gifts debate. To act as though all of the gifts are false is to place yourself on the same category as charismatic heresy. It's unconscionable. To fail to distinguish between false teachers on the one side who happen to be charismatic, and the very godly Christians who are not millions of faithful Christians on the other, who happen to be charismatic, is little more than slander against millions of God's children.

Revisiting Claims Of Cessation

At the same time, I no longer believe that God stopped the miraculous gifts had ceased. I remember Charismatic Christians I had met who had the gifts, and I saw the fruit of their ministry. I saw that God was still bestowing these gifts. I saw that God was still bestowing these gifts. I saw that God was still bestowing these gifts

I hope this post and the next can help to explain why I changed my mind about spiritual gifts. If you disagree, know that I love you, respect you, and don't think less of you at all. We can be Christian brothers in unity while disagreeing about whether or not the Spirit has altered the way he manifests himself from what we read in the pages of the NT. The gospel that unites us is far bigger than our position on spiritual gifts, as I noted here.

I would urge all, on whatever side of these issues, to passionately pursue an experiential relationship with God marked by the work of the Spirit, and to pursue a deeper study of and higher respect for the Scriptures as the final and authoritative word of God. I remain, for those who may wonder, deeply committed to the inspiration, authority, finality, and sufficiency of the closed canon of Scripture. But contrary to what some think, this belief is not in contradiction to the belief that the operations of the Spirit described in that same canon have now ceased. But more on that later.

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