

Spiritual Gifts

Are they all still available today or have they ceased?

Spiritual gifts are an important subject for the church because Scripture gives them a high priority in mutual encouragement and fellowship. To mention just a few verses to prove this,

Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, *let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy* in proportion to our faith; or ministry, *let us use it in our ministering*; he who teaches, in teaching; he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness. Rm 12:6-8

Eagerly desire the best gifts. 1 Cor 12:31

Pursue love, and desire spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy. 1 Cor 14:1

‘Eagerly desire’ is a strong expression in the Greek meaning, ‘to burn with zeal’, ‘be zealous in the pursuit of’, ‘desire earnestly’, or ‘strive after’. This is an apostolic command but is it obeyed? Do Reformed believers really pursue with earnest desire and zeal the spiritual gifts? Is it on their agenda at all?

No one can deny that spiritual gifts are vital in the church, though in practice many churches only exhibit the gifts of one man. Frequently, teachers divided the gifts into the ordinary or natural and the extraordinary or supernatural; though this was often unhelpful and is not a Biblical division; indeed all gifts are from God and are thus supernatural in origin. This led to little expectation of a manifestation of several gifts and an emphasis upon others, with the corollary of a lack of expectation amongst the people and a focus upon the minister.

Then the Charismatic Movement created a problem by centring attention on their particular expression of the gifts, something hardly done before the 20th century. The gifts, especially what was considered as extraordinary gifts, gradually became defined according to Pentecostal/Charismatic teaching and practice, even though this was often without any Biblical precedent and was inspired by rogue sources (usually the occult). Rightly, this needed condemning. But the conservative reaction was to say that none of the extraordinary gifts were available today, instead of properly evaluating the Charismatic phenomena and critiquing them individually and Biblically to establish a truly Scriptural exposition of the gifts; the words ‘baby’ and ‘bathwater’ come to mind. This position was called ‘cessationism’ and is nominated in this paper as ‘full cessationism’. Essentially the structure of the cessationist argument was rational and not Biblical.

As a result of the wild excesses of the Toronto Experience, many conservative believers became more convinced that the full cessationist position was right. The essential cessationist theory is all supernatural spiritual gifts ended after the ministry of the apostles, or soon afterwards, and that the canon of Scripture has relegated all these gifts unnecessary (some extremists ignore all the gifts, ordinary and extraordinary). It also cancelled out some gifts (such as prophecy) which the Charismatic Movement practised in an old covenant, miraculous sense but throughout church history had been seen in a more ordinary sense. Reformed Christians, who had already adopted the cessationist position, pointed to Toronto as proof positive of the direction that the gifts lead to – unrestrained wild behaviour, mysticism, indecency and sin. All supernatural spiritual gifts are, thus, seen as a work of the enemy and a deception.

Now I would be the first to condemn not only Toronto, but also the vast majority of the practices of the Charismatic Movement. Having been a leader amongst it in the early years of a significant Restorationist church, I can speak from experience of the sham that much of it is. I am aware of the dangers, the false prophecies, the stirring up of the flesh, the naivety, the credulous acceptance and superficiality. Yet however many false gifts abound, I still cannot be convinced of the rightness of the full cessationist argument - because it simply is not Biblical. This is why I intend to investigate this subject in this paper, which will take the position of a 'modified, or partial, cessationism'. We need to adopt a position which both condemns the Charismatic Movement as ungodly and heretical, but yet is also fully Biblical. We cannot support a rational argument which lumps certain gifts into a pot and then disposes of them all when Scripture tells us to desire gifts in general (there is one exception, however, as we will see).

The Full Cessationist Position

B. B. Warfield

Perhaps the best, and most quoted, defender of this stance is B.B. Warfield. His book *'Counterfeit Miracles'* is probably the most familiar source for this argument. We should first note that cessationists do not usually say that there are no spiritual gifts. They cannot because it is clear that the term covers both ordinary and extraordinary gifts, many of which are in constant use today. Various ordinary matters are termed as 'a gift of the Spirit' in the New Testament; the following are examples of this: marriage, acts of mercy, faith, helps, governments, service, encouragement etc. What is denied is the availability of supernatural sign gifts (*'extraordinary capacities produced ... by direct gift of the Holy Spirit'*¹), like tongues or prophecy and offices like prophet or apostle. Unlike some, Warfield does not restrict supernatural gifts only to the first apostles, he agrees that they transmitted gifts to others.²

The logic of his argument is as follows.

- The gifts were the authentication of the apostles. They were not the possession of the whole of the early church.
- The only people that possessed them were the apostles and those disciples laid hands upon by the apostles.³
- The gifts, therefore, belonged exclusively to the apostolic and immediately sub-apostolic age.⁴
- The supernatural gifts have now passed away, ending in the second century.⁵

¹B. B. Warfield, *Counterfeit Miracles*, Banner of Truth, Edinburgh, 1976, p3.

² Ibid.

³ Warfield, p3, 23-24.

⁴ Warfield, p6. There is not agreement on this. The Reformers took this view, but most Protestants felt that there was a gradual waning of the gifts which disappeared in the fourth century, say about the time of Constantine. Some even extending them much later. (See Warfield p6-8.)

⁵ Supernatural gifts are mentioned by the some of the church Fathers, but not often. Also, the heathen world abounded with similar miracles, including supposed raisings from the dead. In comparison, the Fathers are fairly quiet about the matter. The most notable references are Iranaeus (*Cont. Haer.*, II, lvi, lvii; V,vi) Origen (*Cont. Cels.*, I, ii; III, xxiv; VII, iv, lxxvii) and Justin (*Dial.*, pp.254ff., 308B, 315B, 258A; chap. 8). Cyprian, Tertullian and Augustine also contain references to the gifts. Argument from the Fathers is inconclusive. They certainly contain references beyond early 2nd century but later writers are more suspect and less cautious. Eusebius could look back upon the age of the Spirit as a bygone era. Schaff states that the ante-Nicene writers are more free of references to the gifts than the works of the Nicene and Middle Ages, (vol II, p117).

The evidence for the cessationist argument is drawn mainly from history, by analysis of the writings of the Fathers. From this is formed a rationalist argument deduced from a logical approach to history. To it is added an argument based upon revelation; i.e. miracles are connected with new revelation to accredit it. Miracles only occur in revelation periods performed by accredited messengers of God; the abundance in the apostolic age being a mark of the richness of the revelation given. When this revelation period closed, so did the miracles.⁶

One has to note that this argument is extra-biblical. There is no scriptural support for it at all. If Scripture were silent on the uses of the gifts for all time, then this would be reasonable. If, however, the Bible gives even one statement regarding the perpetual use of the gifts, then this becomes unwise and ungodly.

There are several problems with Warfield's argument.

- If the miracles ended with the revelation closure, why does he accept that miracles continued into the second century after the close of revelation in about 95 AD? He cannot deny the evidence of Justin and Iranaeus as at least referring to miracles performed by disciples of the apostles still alive after 150 AD.
- The argument is not drawn from Scripture and is contrary to several important and clear Biblical texts (see later).
- A simple reading of Scripture leads one to surmise that the gifts are available today. To avoid this conclusion, one has to refer to a convoluted sophistry regarding the philosophy of revelation and the writings of the church Fathers.
- The expression of gifts was not confined solely to the apostles and those they laid hands upon:
 - ◆ Ananias (Acts 9:12). There is no indication that he was an apostolic delegate, rather the reverse. We never hear of him again, yet he was the chosen instrument in Paul's healing, baptism and early discipling. Paul declared that he was not inferior to the 12 (2 Cor 11:5) and rigorously defended being an apostle of Jesus Christ, not just an apostle to the churches like Andronicus (Rm 16:7), having seen the Lord and performed the signs of an apostle of the Lamb (1 Cor 9:1; 2 Cor 1:1, 12:12). Thus, Paul could not have had hands laid on him by a delegate of the 12 or there would have been some implicit subservience or lack of equality with the 12. So Ananias is sent by direct command and revelation of the Lord to lay hands on Paul (Acts 9:10).
 - ◆ Philip had four daughters who prophesied (Acts 21:9). There is no doubt that these were not leaders of any sort, yet they were famous in this gift (even in patristic literature). An apostle would not have laid hands upon women for ministry.
 - ◆ Very few of the Corinthian church members were laid hands on by Paul, such as in baptism (1 Cor 1:14-16). After he left them they received ministry from other leaders, such as Apollos, some unknown men and possibly even Peter (1 Cor 3:4, 22). Thus it seems that in the period Paul was absent the Corinthian's experience of spiritual gifts was multiplied and became a problem. The problem of a wrong manifestation of the gifts could not have been a problem while Paul was there or he would have dealt with it; it emerged after he left and required a corrective letter. Thus it seems that the emergence of many gifts in Corinth was not due to Paul.

⁶ Warfield, p25-26. This is almost like the arguments supporting Dispensationalism.

- Passing on the reception of the Spirit, and the working of gifts, could not be performed by all the apostles' delegates; thus it was not automatic that their disciples could express sign gifts. If this is true then the cessationist argument breaks down.
 - ◆ Philip could not do it in Samaria (Acts 8:14ff), despite being one of the seven and the first leader of revival.

Summary

WARFIELD'S ARGUMENT	THE BIBLICAL POSITION
The gifts were the authentication of the apostles.	Agreed.
The gifts were not the possession of all the early church.	Wrong. Philip's four daughters prophesied and these were not apostolic delegates nor able to be elders.
The only people that possessed them were the apostles and those disciples laid hands upon by the apostles.	Ananias is not stated to be an apostolic delegate. It also does not appear that Paul personally laid hands on all the Corinthians that spoke in tongues and prophesied. He had to correct the exercise of gifts that appeared while he was absent.
The gifts belonged exclusively to the apostolic and immediately sub-apostolic age.	Augustine said that healings continued in the 4 th century. The godly Calvinist Alexander Peden prophesied accurately in the 17 th century.
The supernatural gifts have now passed away, ending in the second century.	Tongues ceased by 100 AD (or probably by 70 AD) but other gifts continued (see later). Many historical Biblical commentators did not believe that all the gifts had ceased, rather that the ordinary ones were common and the supernatural ones were rare; note Calvin. ⁷

The usual attempt at a scriptural defence of full cessationism.

Some writers have attempted to make a more Biblical case but can find no clear reference to the supernatural gifts ceasing; so they are forced to make a very thin and convoluted exegesis of one passage, with the even weaker support of a few others. The appeal to 1 Cor 13:8-10 is facile in the extreme and shows the level to which people have to sink to defend the indefensible. What does it say?

Love never fails. But whether *there are* prophecies, they will fail; whether *there are* tongues, they will cease; whether *there is* knowledge, it will vanish away.

For we know in part and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away. (NKJV)

The argument has been made that the word 'perfect' is a reference to the completed canon of Scripture. When the Bible was complete, there was no longer any need for supernatural ministries; they then ceased.⁸

⁷ 'The Prophets here spoken of are those who make known the will of God, by applying with dexterity and skill prophecies, threatenings, promises, and the whole doctrine of Scripture, to the present use of the Church. If any one is of a different opinion, I have no objection to his being so, and will not raise any quarrel on that account. For it is difficult to form a judgment as to gifts and offices of which the Church has been so long deprived, excepting only that there are some traces, or shadows of them still to be seen.' John Calvin, *Comm. on 1 Cor*, 12:28. Confusingly, Calvin also said, 'he refers only to ordinary gifts, such as were to continue perpetually in the Church.' [*Comm. on Rm*, 12:6.] Note John Owen; 'He [the Spirit] is the advocate for Christ, the church, and the gospel, in and by his communication of spiritual gifts, both extraordinary and ordinary, unto them that do believe; for these are things, at least in their effects, visible unto the world. Where men are not utterly blinded by prejudice, love of sin and of the world, they cannot but discern somewhat of a divine power in these supernatural gifts.' *Works*, Vol 4, p458-459; AGES edition. In general Owen saw that the extraordinary gifts had ceased.

⁸ Probably the most full exponent of this approach is Victor Budgen, *The Charismatics and the Word of God*, Evangelical Press, Welwyn, 1985.

There are problems with this.

- It is obscure. If Paul meant ‘Scripture’, why did he not say so? Scripture is not denoted in this way elsewhere.
- If this is true it is a vitally important doctrine. The early church was full of powerful gifts of the Spirit; they were part of the warp and woof of Christianity, why is there no clear teaching elsewhere on such an important subject. I’m sure that the first Christians would have wanted to know this and later believers would have needed to be able to distinguish the false from the true gifts by knowing that they would all cease at a certain time.
- The context of the passage in question is the most poetic Paul gets anywhere. It is not wise to build up an important doctrine from one word of debated and obscure meaning in a passage where Paul has spoken in figurative terms (e.g. noisy gongs, clanging cymbals).
- It does not say that they will pass away after the 1st century AD.
- If prophecies will pass away at the completion of written revelation, then knowledge will also pass away (v8-9). There is no warrant in the context for reducing the word ‘knowledge’ to ecstatic knowledge. To do so is to be guilty of manipulation of the text.
- Why would Paul single out prophecy, tongues and knowledge if his concern was to show the eradication of all supernatural gifts? What about words of wisdom, miracles, or healings?
- Paul’s clear purpose in this passage is to exhort believers to share their gifts in love. A loving disposition is to be our overriding attitude in fellowship. He is not arguing for the cessation of sign gifts.
- In the time spoken of, Paul says that ‘we will see face to face’ (v12). What else can this mean but the coming of the Lord at the end?
- Paul says, ‘now I know in part; then I shall understand fully’ (v12). Paul is, again, clearly talking about meeting the Lord. Paul did not suddenly fully understand God’s revelation when the canon was complete, because he was dead.
- When the perfect comes, only faith, hope and love remain (v13). That can only be in the new world, at present there are many Christian characteristics, linked to human nature, that abide besides these three.
- All agree that the genuine charismatic gifts continued till the late second century. There is no argument here, although some may restrict them to about 160 AD. This gives us two problems. First, the perfect had already come; the last New Testament writing was about 95 AD. Why did the gifts continue? In fact, apart from John’s writings, the rest of the New Testament was complete by the 60’s.⁹ Secondly, the Canon of Scripture was not formally settled until the Councils of Hippo (393) and Carthage (397). Why were there no genuine gifts lasting until that time? Critics state that the gifts in the fourth century were spurious.¹⁰
- Throughout history virtually no commentator has adopted this interpretation. For instance the Puritans generally adopt the view in this paper. In recent history a small handful have but they were prompted by a response to the Charismatic problem.¹¹

⁹ This point is accepted by Budgen (p88).

¹⁰ See Warfield for instance.

¹¹ E.g. Jamieson Fausset & Brown’s *Comm. on the Bible*, A W Pink’s book on *Divine Healing*, also Gromacki, Unger, and Chantry; but only JFB is a heavyweight commentary of note. Charismatics first appeared with Irving in the mid-1800’s.

A question answered

Why does Paul use *to telion* ('perfection', 'a complete or mature thing') if he is referring to the Second Coming of Christ? It is neuter and is never used of heaven or the Parousia.¹² The reason is that Paul's argument is centred on ages or dispensations (administration of a period of time). The sign gifts are needed in this incomplete, immature age. When that age ends and the perfect has come, the gifts (all gifts) will not be necessary anymore. The use of 'destroyed' (*katargeo* = 'will fail' and 'vanish away' NKJV) supports this. This word also appears in 1 Cor 15:24-26 (where underlined):

Then *comes* the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power.

For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy *that* will be destroyed is death. (NKJV)

What Paul clearly has in mind in 1 Cor 13 is the same as 1 Cor 15:24-26 - the end of this age.

Other passages used to support cessationism

Other passages adduced to support the cessationist theory are of such slight connection that they are almost not worth looking at. 2 Pt 1:18-21 is hardly relevant. Peter is arguing that Old Testament prophecy must be correctly interpreted and he refers to the additional support of apostolic eye-witness testimony (v16, 18) which adds weight to the OT prophecies. This assures his readers that they were not following some myth (v16). The prophets foretold the Christ, and the apostles had personal experience of him and testify to his Lordship. Peter's point is not to defend Scripture but testify to Jesus.

The foundational work of apostles and prophets in Eph 2:20 is also not relevant.¹³ There were varieties of apostles and prophets even in the New Testament. Not all were foundational to either the Scriptures or the church. Were Philip's four daughters who prophesied part of the foundation along with Peter and Paul? What about apostles like Andronicus and Junias (Rm 16:7). Prophecy is an encouraging ministry in the church (1 Cor 14:3-4). This is different from the writers of Scripture who were prophets in that they wrote God's revelation down. Cessationist apologists fail to see this Scriptural difference.

Heb 2:3-4 supports both the full and modified cessationist arguments. It simply states that supernatural gifts confirmed the salvation procured by Jesus and testified in his Gospel. This is a plain fact. Jesus' miracles and the signs produced by the apostles proved that God witnessed to the truth of their message. The use of the aorist tense in verse three is referring to the past action of this testimony, i.e. the specific signs performed by Jesus and the apostles. It is not chiefly referring to Charismatic gifts practised in the churches at large for edification. There is a difference between the special ministry of the apostles (both in terms of office and power) and the ministry of the church. The special empowerment of apostolic ministry ceased when the apostles of the Lamb died (perhaps even before since they are not mentioned in later epistles) but the normal ministry of gifts in the church continued, but these were not of the same order.¹⁴

¹² The Second Coming of the Lord. (Lit. 'presence'.)

¹³ I take 'prophets' here to be a reference to the OT prophetic Scriptures, which the apostles frequently refer to as being foundational and coupled to their revelation (e.g. Peter, 2 Pt 1:19).

¹⁴ Note that there is a Biblical difference between 'apostles of the Lamb' (Rev 21:14), i.e. the 12 and Paul who had to conform to specific qualifications, such as having seen the Lord, and 'apostles to the churches' (2 Cor 8:23, 'messengers' is literally 'apostles') who were not of that order but merely missionaries or church planters, an office which continues today. The office of the apostles of the Lamb does not continue and only these exhibited the powerful signs of an apostle.

Summary

The 'perfect', then, is not the canon of Scripture but the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. If all the gifts pass away in this current age, then so does knowledge which is listed with them! Since there is a Biblical argument that the gifts are important, we need a much better case than this to eradicate them from use.

What is the Biblical Position?

1. The Fulness of the Spirit is available for all (Eph 5:18).

The command in Ephesians is exemplified in the apostles' ministry in Acts. We see their desire to ensure that converts are filled with the Spirit.¹⁵ Supernatural gifts result from a disciple being filled with the Spirit. Also the experience is to be continually received as it is necessary for encouragement to persevere; thus the Greek text of Eph 5:18 implies continual fillings. It cannot be denied that the apostles sought the fulness of the Spirit in their converts as a realised experience; (converted Samaritans, Acts 8:15-17; Paul, Acts 9:17; Romans, Acts 10:44-48, 11:15-17; Greeks, Acts 19:6).

We should expect subjective experiences of the Holy Spirit in our lives just as the apostles did (Acts 2:1ff, 4:31). Indeed, it appears, from these texts, that a vital experience of the Holy Spirit is necessary to speak the word of God with boldness. This has nothing to do with the second blessing idea of Charismatics. There should be many experiences of the Spirit in our lives and the fulness is open to all. The definitive work in a person's life is to be made into a new creation in Christ (2 Cor 5:17) as a result of being baptised in the Spirit and united to Christ; that is what decides what sort of person one is – possessing eternal life or not. However, God has many gifts and blessings for his children. Some press on into these fully, others are satisfied with water up to the ankles. God encourages us to press on (Phil 3:12).

The *baptism with the Spirit* occurred once for all time at Pentecost to unite the elect with Christ, change their nature and pour out the Spirit upon them to indwell them forever and seal them to Christ. The Spirit's presence in our lives is the guarantee of our hope and the basis of our assurance (1 Jn 3:24). The *filling of the Spirit* is a repeated experience of the Spirit coming upon a person to stimulate and encourage him in Christ, or to enable him to minister (e.g. to preach a message with power or give powerful relevant counsel).

2. There is no clear distinction drawn between ordinary and extraordinary gifts.

The lists of gifts contain mundane and supernatural elements. 1 Cor 12:29-30 contains helps and administration with healing and miracles; Rm 12:6-8 contains encouraging and giving with prophecy, Eph 4:11 contains teachers as well as prophets. If anything, it seems that there is a deliberate aim of including all sorts of gifts together so that no distinctions may be drawn between what remains and what is supposed, by cessationists, to pass away. Nowhere are we categorically informed that there will come a time when supernatural gifts will cease during the present Gospel age.

A more full list of gifts is: words of wisdom, word of knowledge, gifts of healings, miracle working, prophecy, discernment (distinguishing) of spirits, tongues, interpretation of tongues, helps, administration (leadership), encouraging, giving, leadership, showing

¹⁵ We are never told to be 'baptised in the Spirit'. All believers have been baptised in the Spirit as a result of Christ's ascension, but not all believers are filled with the Spirit or Paul would not command us to be so. See my separate paper on this subject for further details.

mercy; gifts of office are: apostles, pastor-teachers (shepherds), evangelists and prophets. If the ordinary gifts remain, then so do the extraordinary ones.

3. Paul desires that all should prophesy (1 Cor 14:1).

There is no indication that this term is restricted to didactic teaching, in fact the Scriptures compare teaching and prophecy in the same verse (Eph 4:11), but it is related to teaching and is based upon Scripture. It has nothing to do with new revelation, only the apostles and their delegates had inspirational grace to write Scripture. When Paul says prophecy, he means delivering a message from God to his people for encouragement or correction. The best teaching is always prophetic and Peter tells us, 'If anyone speaks, *let him speak as the oracles of God*' (1 Pt 4:11) and an 'oracle' is an utterance of God through men. Notice that Peter says, 'anyone' – not just apostles.

But whatever our view of exactly what prophecy is (see later), what is certain is that Paul wants the church to excel in it; he even goes so far as to warn us not to despise prophesying (1 Thess 5:20).

There have always been false prophecies. The current spate of them is nothing new. What is vital is discernment amongst Christians to sort out the wheat from the chaff. The presence of false prophecies should not cause us to despise prophecies altogether or we disobey God.

Paul desires that all believers should prophesy. That is what the verse says and we cannot controvert it. Again this is not restricted to the early church; in fact, Paul demands that we should not despise this gift, anticipating the future controversy.

4. Paul tells us to earnestly desire spiritual gifts (1 Cor 14:1,5).

With the exception of tongues (see later), there is no indication here or elsewhere that this desire should cease after a certain period of time. We should be just as desirous of spiritual gifts today as the early church was. If the gifts always include supernatural as well as mundane functions in the New Testament, and if we are told to earnestly desire and not despise them, we disobey God in adopting a full cessationist position by separating that which God has put together and spurning grace from his hand.

5. Paul expects a normal Christian gathering to contain spiritual gifts (1 Cor 14:26, 29).

There is no better or more complete description of a Christian gathering than 1 Cor 14. Again, this sets a pattern for all time; it contains statements such as: 'as in all the churches' (v33), and 'what I am writing to you is a command of the Lord' (v37). Paul also says that prophecy is for upbuilding and encouragement (v3), that it edifies the church (v4), and then commands us to 'strive to excel in building up the church' (v12).

If this chapter is full of references to extraordinary gifts, and this is normative practice for the church, then we have no right to condemn the use of gifts. In the light of these very clear passages we can only adopt a full cessationist position by being disobedient to Scripture, or by twisting them with sophistry to mean something else. The consistent Biblical position is that supernatural gifts are for all time.

6. The expression of the 'supernatural' gifts is not as the Charismatic practice.

Pentecostalism grew up as a syncretism of Biblical ideas mixed with pagan and occult mystical practices while modern Charismaticism is an extreme form of this; thus many of the practices claimed to be gifts of the Spirit are, in fact, more like the pagan aberrations

they mimic. For instance, the word of knowledge is practised as prescience whereby a leader calls out a symptom of illness and a name, or description, of the sufferer in the audience that he does not naturally know. This sort of prescience is commonly found in occult literature (*kardiagnosis* – knowing the secrets of the heart). Healing or blessing is associated with being stricken to the floor and being put into an altered state of consciousness; this is common in eastern faiths, such as radical Hindu sects that practice kundalini yoga. The apostles did not act in these ways; they healed with an authoritative word instantaneously, even from a distance.

The so-called supernatural gifts in 1 Cor 12 are far more mundane than people suppose. Thus, the word of knowledge is exactly that; it is the didactic teaching that is found in the church as expressed by elders to instruct the flock (some more moderate Pentecostals admit this). The word of wisdom is the practical counselling given by elders, based upon sound teaching, to encourage and exhort the flock. Discerning of spirits is the wisdom given to elders to see the root of false teaching in heretics. These are all gifts required by pastors until the Last Day.

Prophecy is usually the application of powerful preaching with spiritual power to encourage and exhort the flock; it comes with special perception and application to present needs or to correct a problem.¹⁶ It is not didactic teaching but preaching with power; speaking for God. Less frequently, prophecy can be foretelling as well as forth-telling; but this is very rare and is only given when necessary in extreme circumstances (such as those Alexander Peden faced under persecution in Scotland). The cheap and superficial prophecies of Charismatics, and especially personal predictive prophecies, are nothing like genuine Biblical prophecy. We must have a New Covenant, rather than an Old Covenant, theology of prophecy, just as we must have a New Covenant view of priesthood.

Healings are also rare (no Christian in the NT was ever healed, though several workers were left sick); but we cannot say that they have ceased. Christians are expected to pray for healing when necessary (Num 12:13) and elders can be called for to pray for healing (Jm 5:14-15); this text alone shows that healings continue beyond the apostolic age. Though miracles are more controversial, we cannot say that they have ceased; though they may be extremely rare. The necessity for miracles and healings in the west today is far less than for more primitive underprivileged societies, which is why they are not usually seen. Miracles were more necessary in times past when there were no hospitals or welfare state, such as Paul surviving a snakebite (though that also served to authenticate his divine ministry).

All the gifts are mediated by and inspired by the Holy Spirit as he sees fit. This does not necessitate some dramatic expression of a gift, as in occultism, rather the ministry of the Spirit is continual and the gifts develop as the Spirit matures the man. Many of the gifts take time to mature, such as teaching or evangelism.

An analysis of the NT texts and words used for *gifts*

There are two words relative to this discussion. They are: *charismata* (*charisma* sing.) and *pneumatika*.

¹⁶ Calvin, 'I prefer to follow those who extend this word [prophecy] wider, even to the peculiar gift of revelation, by which any one skilfully and wisely performed the office of an interpreter in explaining the will of God. Hence prophecy at this day in the Christian Church is hardly anything else than the right understanding of the Scripture, and the peculiar faculty of explaining it.' [Comm. on Rm 12:6.]

Charismata (pl.) [Strong's 5486]

χάρισμα, ατος, τό a verbal noun from **χαρίζομαι**, denoting *what has been given, a gift* (as an expression of divine grace); **χάρισμα** = *charisma* [pron. khar'-is-mah]. This word is translated as gifts, (from 5483 *charin*, favour, from 5485 *charis*, graciousness). Translated by the AV (KJV) as: gift 15, free gift 2.

Meanings:

- 1) A favour which one receives without any merit of his own.
- 2) The gift of divine grace; the result of a gracious act of God *a gift of grace, a favour bestowed, benefit.*
- 3) The gift of faith, knowledge, holiness, virtue.
- 4) The economy of divine grace, by which the pardon of sin and eternal salvation is appointed to sinners in consideration of the merits of Christ laid hold of by faith; *the gift of redemption* (Rm 5.15f).
- 5) Grace or gifts denoting extraordinary powers, a concrete manifestation of grace in the form of extraordinary powers given to individuals, often in the plural - *gifts, special abilities* (Rm 12.6); and enabling them to serve the church of Christ, the reception of which is due to the power of divine grace operating on their souls by the Holy Spirit.
- 6) The *ability* to be self-restrained in matters of sex (1 Cor 7.7); the bestowal of a *special ability* given through ordination, *what God has given, endowment* (1Tim 4.14; 1 Pt 4.10).¹⁷

The word appears 17 times in the following forms in the Greek text:

charisma (noun accusative neuter sing.) 8; this is the basic word in the singular.

The others follow from it.

charismata 6; **χαρίσματα** noun, nominative neuter plural,

charismati 1; **χαρίσματι** noun, dative neuter plural,

charismatos 1; **χαρίσματος** noun, genitive neuter singular,

charismaton 1; **χαρισμάτων** noun, genitive neuter plural.

KJV 1 Corinthians 12:4 Now there are diversities of gifts (*charismaton*), but the same Spirit.

KJV Romans 11:29 For the gifts (*charismata*) and calling of God *are* without repentance.

KJV Romans 12:6 Having then gifts (*charismata*) differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, *let us prophesy* according to the proportion of faith.

KJV 1 Corinthians 12:9 To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts (*charismata*) of healing by the same Spirit.

KJV 1 Corinthians 12:30 Have all the gifts (*charismata*) of healing? do all speak with tongues? do all interpret?

KJV 1 Corinthians 12:31 But covet earnestly the best gifts (*charismata*): and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way.

KJV 1 Corinthians 12:28 And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts (*charismata*) of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues.

¹⁷ Sources for Greek words are Friberg, Thayer and Louw-Nida Lexicons, plus Strong's Concordance.

KJV Romans 1:11 For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual (*pneumatikon*) gift (*charisma*), to the end ye may be established;

KJV 1 Timothy 4:14 Neglect not the gift (*charismatos*) that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery.

KJV Romans 5:15 But not as the offence, so also *is* the free gift (*charisma*). For if through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, *which is* by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many.

KJV Romans 5:16 And not as *it was* by one that sinned, *so is* the gift: for the judgment *was* by one to condemnation, but the free gift (*charisma*) is of many offences unto justification.

KJV Romans 6:23 For the wages of sin *is* death; but the gift (*charisma*) of God *is* eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

KJV 1 Corinthians 7:7 For I would that all men were even as I myself. But every man hath his proper gift (*charisma*) of God, one after this manner, and another after that.

KJV 2 Corinthians 1:11 Ye also helping together by prayer for us, that for the gift (*charisma*) bestowed upon us by the means of many persons thanks may be given by many on our behalf.

KJV 2 Timothy 1:6 Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God (*charisma*), which is in thee by the putting on of my hands.

KJV 1 Peter 4:10 As every man hath received the gift (*charisma*), even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.

KJV 1 Corinthians 1:7 So that ye come behind in no gift (*charismati*); waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Pneumatikos [Strong's 4152, from 4151 - *pneuma*, 'spirit'].

πνευματικῶς *pneumatikos* [Pron. pnyoo-mat-ik-os] adj. πνευματικός, ἢ, ὄν spiritual, pertaining to the spirit; spiritual (gifts) lit. 'spirituals in 1 Cor 14:1. Translated by the AV (KJV) - spiritual 26; appears in the Greek text, in different forms, 26 times.

Meanings:

- 1) Relating to the human spirit, as part of man which is akin to God and serves as his instrument or organ.
- 2) Belonging to a spirit, or a being higher than man but inferior to God. Predominately as distinguishing what belongs to the supernatural world from what belongs to the natural world (1 Cor 15.44, 46). As adj., denoting relationship to satanic forces; spiritual forces of evil, supernatural evil powers (Eph 6.12).
- 3) Spiritual things or matters (1 Cor 9:11); spiritual gifts or enablements.
- 4) Belonging to the Divine Spirit; of God the Holy Spirit; the spiritual person, one who is filled with and governed by the Spirit of God.
- 5) Pertaining to the wind or breath; windy, exposed to the wind, blowing.

As an example of its uses, I will supply a few texts.

KJV 1 Corinthians 2:13 Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things (*pneumatikois*) with spiritual (*pneumatika*).

KJV 1 Corinthians 9:11 If we have sown unto you spiritual things (*pneumatika*), is it a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things?

KJV 1 Corinthians 14:1 Follow after charity, and desire spiritual *gifts* (*pneumatika*), but rather that ye may prophesy.

KJV Ephesians 6:12 For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual (*pneumatika*) wickedness in high *places*.

KJV Romans 1:11 For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some **spiritual** gift, to the end ye may be established.

KJV 1 Corinthians 12:1 Now concerning **spiritual** *gifts*, brethren, I would not have you ignorant.

KJV 1 Corinthians 14:1 Follow after charity, and desire **spiritual** *gifts*, but rather that ye may prophesy.

KJV 1 Corinthians 14:12 Even so ye, forasmuch as ye are zealous of **spiritual** *gifts*, seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church.

KJV 1 Corinthians 14:37 If any man think himself to be a prophet, or **spiritual**, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord.

KJV Ephesians 1:3 Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all **spiritual** blessings in heavenly *places* in Christ.

KJV Ephesians 5:19 Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and **spiritual** songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.

Concise exposition of the gifts

The main passages which give a more lengthy description or list of the gifts are: 1 Cor 12:8-10, 1 Cor 12:29-30; Rm 12:6-8; Eph 4:11. Having looked at all the relevant words and verses, we can now draw our conclusions.

The Holy Spirit gives a diversity of gifts to the church for its edification (1 Cor 12:4). These gifts include ministries (e.g. teacher, prophet) which are church offices (1 Cor 12:28; Eph 4:11), as well as graces and ministry for the body generally. These gifts are *without repentance* (Rm 11:29; i.e. not taken back); they are not whims of God which may suddenly disappear but are given to the church as part of the ascension gifts of Christ to his body. The church needs all the gifts.

The gifts differ according to the grace given to each member (Rm 12:6). Some people have many gifts, some few. Some have powerful gifts, other are more modest. Everyone has a gift of some sort (1 Cor 7:7, 1 Pt 4:10) and all the gifts are necessary for the proper building up of the local church (1 Cor 12: 1ff). Paul encourages believers to covet the best gifts (1 Cor 12:31) and the overriding factor is that the gifts are used in a loving way (1 Cor 13).

Regarding the supernatural gifts, not everyone spoke in tongues (1 Cor 12:30) but Paul desired that people in his day should (1 Cor 14:1 – because tongues were an unlearned human language testifying to God's wonderful works; nothing like the Charismatic

counterfeit of a babbling noise, common in occultism). Paul was anxious for people to manifest spiritual gifts (Rm 1:11; 1 Cor 1:7, 14:1) because that is the way people are established. To ignore the gifts is to encourage weakness and confusion. The gifts can be neglected (1 Tim 4:14) and despised (1 Thess 5:20). The gifts are to be stirred up (2 Tim 1:6) and used for one another (1 Pt 4:10). Such ministry is a stewardship under God. The Lord works towards his people through each working towards each other, i.e. in fellowship (Eph 4:16).

If gifts are not being shared in fellowship, there is no spiritual progress being made and people become stultified. God's principle for the development of the church is the use of the gifts in *koinonia*, mutual, encouraging ministries (1 Cor 14:12). This is a clear New Testament teaching, and yet it is widely ignored in the church at large. The poor spiritual condition of the church should, therefore, not surprise us since the normal situation is the manifestation of the gifts of only one man.

In his ministry Paul imparted spiritual gifts to churches (Rm 1:11) and to individuals (2 Tim 1:6) as did others (1 Tim 4:14). He also taught extensively on the subject (1 Cor 12-14, Rm 12 etc,) and was anxious that people were not ignorant about spiritual gifts (1 Cor 12:21). Far from this being a subject that can be ignored or explained away with sophistry, the New Testament is clear that spiritual gifts (ordinary and extraordinary) are vital to church and individual growth and to avoid them is sin and disobedience. Paul uses the strongest language in commending spiritual gifts, he says his teaching is a *command of the lord* (1 Cor 14:27).

The one exception

A very strong case can be made that tongues ceased even before the close of the apostolic age. Paul categorically states that tongues were a sign to unbelievers (1 Cor 14:22). Initially this was to demonstrate the divine reversal of the judgment at Babel, as the apostles declared God's glory to many nations in their own tongues (Acts 2). Witnessing uneducated fishermen addressing 15 nationalities in their own tongues and dialects was amazing. It was a divine authenticating sign to unbelievers. But it was also a judicial sign to Israel as Paul explains in 1 Cor 14:21 where he refers to the prophecy of Isaiah (Isa 28:11). The appearance of tongues was a declaration that the old covenant system was over and judgment would follow those who had rejected the new covenant Messiah (which it did in 70 AD).

In 1 Cor 13:8 the word explaining that tongues will cease is not the same as that used for prophecies or knowledge. They will pass away at the return of the Lord and the restoration of all things, but tongues will have already 'ceased by themselves' long before that point. Furthermore, there is no mention of them in the apostolic letters apart from 1 Corinthians; none of the later letters refer to them at all. Indeed, the post-apostolic fathers state that they had long vanished by their time (2nd century). Even Pentecostals accept that tongues initially ceased in the early church, but allege that they were restored in Pentecostalism nearly 2,000 years later. But 1 Cor 13:8 says that when they ceased, they ceased forever of their own accord. If everyone accepts that tongues ceased in early history, then the modern version cannot be Biblical tongues but are a counterfeit.

For these, and other, reasons it is certain that tongues were a special gift of speaking human, foreign languages by divine inspiration and they were a special but temporary sign in the early formation of the church in the apostolic age. Thus tongues (and their

counterpart, interpretation) are not available today. Indeed, the contemporary manifestation of them (as unintelligible sounds) is not the same as the genuine languages that were spoken in the early church. [For more information see my papers, *The Baptism in the Spirit, What about tongue speaking, Why tongues are not available today, or A Concise Examination of tongue speaking*]

Conclusion

Can it really be possible that such a vast array of Scripture verses on the gifts, that such strong language, that such urgent appeals for their use, and such serious warnings about their abuse, can be wiped out and declared to be of no use to the modern church? The full cessationist argument is full of holes, is not scripturally based and works contrary to the clear verses of Scripture. There is no Biblical statement that all the supernatural gifts have ceased or will in this age.

Much as I esteem B. B. Warfield (I have all his works), much as it would make life easier for the gifts to have ceased, much as I abhor the travesty of the false gifts being paraded in the Charismatic Movement generally, we cannot avoid the conclusion that the gifts are here to stay, ordinary and extraordinary. If mercy, helps and leadership are with us, then so are healings and prophecy, no matter how much difficulty this brings us in practice.

Our touchstone is the Bible. We must stick to its clear teaching or all is lost and it clearly supports the use of the gifts throughout the Gospel age. We ignore them at our peril.

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