

That Glorious Day When Tongues Are Not Needed: Until Then . . .

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Part 2 of 2

Completed Scriptures

For those dating the cessation of the *charismata* at AD 90-98 and into the second century, the inscribed revelation of the New Testament plays a momentous role—it is indeed the cessation factor. But even among these there is no agreement upon *why* and *when*. We go from the New Testament being written, to its being “circulated,” to its being made “available,” to its being “accepted by the Church.”

For some choosing the completed New Testament as the cessation factor, it is only a matter of 1 Corinthians 13:8-13 being fulfilled: “Whether there be tongues, they shall cease . . . when that which is perfect is come . . .” (*KJV*). For these the “perfect” to come is the New Testament, which culminated when the last letter of Holy Writ was penned. But the great majority of commentaries and many cessationists (see Figure 1 on page 28) reject this interpretation of 1 Corinthians 13:8-13.

Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. Now we see but a poor reflection; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

1 Corinthians 13:8-13

No passage of Scripture has proved as rich to the debate between Pentecostals and cessationists as these six verses of Paul’s. If the cessationists are right about this passage, the Pentecostal-charismatic doctrine of spiritual gifts dissolves. On the other hand, if the Pentecostal-charismatic interpretation is correct, the continuity of the spiritual gifts between the Apostolic Age and today is clearly and forcefully affirmed. Within these six verses there are eight issues to resolve. In verse 8 there are the issues of the *variation* and *voice* of the verbs; in verse 9 there are the issues of the omission of *tongues* and the nature of the *partial*; in verse 10 the nature of the *perfect* is the issue; in verse 11 the illustration of *childhood to manhood* is the issue; in verse 12 the issue is the interpretation of the *mirror* illustration; finally, in verse 13 the issue is the meaning of the word translated *now*.

Issue #1: “Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away” (verse 8). There are three notable verbs in this verse: (1) prophecy *will cease*; (2) tongues *will be stilled*; (3) knowledge *will pass away*. In the original Greek the two verbs used with prophecy and knowledge are the same word, *katargēthēsontai*, though translated into English differently. The verb used with tongues is a different, related word, *pausontai*. Based partially upon this variation in word choices, it is argued that tongues will cease *before* the other two gifts (Baxter, p.64; C. R. Smith, pp. 82-83; Thomas, *JETS*, p. 81; Toussaint, p.314).

The few cessationists I have heard use this argument offer no proof from other biblical or non-biblical sources that justifies it: The variation of the words does not make a distinction in time. The research of Paul

Elbert confirms this. Arguing for charismatic continuity, he has shown from other New Testament passages and from classical Greek that a variation of related verbs does *not* signal distinctive changes in the meanings of the verb (see Elbert, pp. 30-32). Even cessationist Judisch agrees: “It would be speculative to see any reason for this change [of verbs] beyond literary elegance” (p. 82).

Issue #2: Not only is there variation in the verbs in verse 8, there is variation in the *voice* of the verbs. The word that controls prophecy and knowledge is in the passive voice—“They are being stopped”—whereas the word that controls tongues is in the middle voice, which may mean that the subject acts upon itself—“They shall make themselves cease or automatically cease of themselves” (Robertson, *Word*, p. 179). This distinction is claimed as proof that tongues were to cease *before* the other two gifts (Baxter, p. 64; Dillow, p. 113; C. R. Smith, p. 83-84; Thomas, p. 105; Toussaint, pp. 314-315).

Actually, it may just as well prove that tongues last *longer* than prophecy and knowledge, assuming the variation of voice means anything at all. No one who is knowledgeable of the Greek language would say that when passive and middle voice synonyms are grouped together, the action of the middle verb takes place before the action of the passive verb. Furthermore, there is evidence that Paul could not have used the verbs he did in all passives or all middles. The verbs in question *katarg 'th'sontai*, future passive; *pausontai*, future middle) did not regularly occur in both forms (Ervin, *These*, p. 218). In addition to this, the research of Elbert, which included the examination of 2,000 examples of the middle voice of “will be stilled,” confirmed the conclusions of other Greek scholars: The middle voice of this verb is used with the passive sense (pp. 26-27).

The thought of tongues making themselves cease is indeed very strange. The gifts “cannot cease of themselves, as they are things which do not control themselves . . . but originate with God and are under God’s control” (Elbert, pp. 27-28). Saying that tongues will cause themselves to cease operating, according to Elbert, is equivalent to saying a flute will cause itself to cease playing.

Issue #3: “For we know in part and we prophesy in part,” verse 9. What happened to *tongues* in this verse? Paul mentioned knowing and prophesying; why did he not mention tongues? The cessationist answer is that Paul omitted them as a sign that they would cease *before* the other gifts (Baxter, pp. 64-65, 70; Criswell, *Baptism*, p. 121; Dillow, p. 114; C. R. Smith, pp. 82, 87; Toussaint, p. 315). We might just as well conclude, however, since tongues are not mentioned here as ceasing with prophecy and knowledge, that only those two cease and tongues go on. Not that I believe tongues outlast these other gifts, but looking strictly at the grammatical form of this verse, it seems that the absence of tongues here might just as easily be construed to mean that prophecy and knowledge cease but tongues remain.

In reality, the absence of a reference to tongues here has no significance. Paul’s omission of tongues from this verse may be explained by the awkwardness of including it: “For we know in part and we prophesy in part and we speak in tongues in part.” How can one speak in tongues in part? If, as some believe, speaking in tongues is praise *from* the believer *to* God, it becomes even more clear why Paul didn’t say we speak in tongues in part: Tongues are not partial or fragmented in the sense that prophecy and knowledge are. The gifts of prophecy and knowledge transmit cognitive bits and pieces from an infinite and omniscient God; as finite creatures, we can only comprehend the partial. The gift of tongues, on the other hand, does not find its source in the infinite knowledge of God; it is, instead, man pouring out his finite soul as the Spirit gives utterance to a God capable of receiving all and loving enough to accept the totality of man’s expression.

Issue #4: “but when perfection [the whole] comes, the imperfect [partial] disappears, verse 10. According to cessationists, the noun translated *imperfect* (or *partial*) is to be understood quantitatively, as in a *piece* of pie, and not qualitatively, as in an *imperfect* pie—an interpretation necessary to make a contrast to the future and *perfect* Kingdom that Christ ushers in (Dillow, p. 120; Gromacki, p. 123; Judisch, p.47; C. R. Smith, p.77; Thomas, p.203).

Actually, the Pentecostal-charismatic understanding of the passage in question is satisfied by either a quantitative *or* qualitative interpretation of “imperfect.” The advent of Christ and His eternal Kingdom will bring with it not only full and *complete* knowledge (quantitative) but *direct* knowledge (qualitative). When we are in His presence, things will be perfect in *every* way! Then we will know “the whole truth about God” (Barrett, p.306), as opposed to the “partial and fragmentary” knowledge we now have of Him through the spiritual gifts (Elbert, pp. 1, 17).

Furthermore, the cessationist’s quantitative construction of a whole (completion) does not seem to fit their argument. For if tongues, prophecy, and knowledge are *pieces* of the revelational pie, there can be no *whole* pie that excludes them. The Scriptures, then, are not whole, complete, or quantitatively perfect without the gifts. Some cessationists have sensed this flaw and have tried to correct it by saying that “the

perfect thing” is not the Scriptures but the completion of all divine revelation (Reymond, p.32). But this does not work either. How can the remainder of the revelational pie be called the *whole*? The *perfect* must in some sense be qualitative, and only the coming of the eternal state satisfies this criterion.

In addition, the cessationist interpretation of “imperfect” or “in part” leads to a rather awkward conclusion. For if the gifts are partial and the canon or an already matured Church is complete, then we must now know as God knows us (verse 12). Most Christians would say that our knowledge is far from perfect! More on this later.

Issue #5: Verse 10 continued. The “perfect thing,” ultimately, is what the debate is all about. There are two cessationist schools of thought on this issue. One school claims that “the perfect thing” is the Scriptures, the canon, or finished revelation (Baxter, p.67; Chantry, pp. 50-51; Coppes, p.60; Pyle, p. 101; Schutz, p.12; Unger, *New*, pp. 95-96). The other school teaches that “the perfect thing” is the matured Body of Christ, the Church, and could not be the Scriptures (Dillow, pp. 127-129; Gardiner, p.35; Reymond, p.34; Thomas, pp. 106-107, 203-204). Of course, both schools deny that “the perfect thing” is the presence of Christ after this life, whether by our going (in death) or His Second Coming (known in the Greek as the *parousia*). The cessationists argue from this verse that the perfect cannot be the *parousia* because (1) “the perfect thing” never refers to the Second Coming anywhere else in the New Testament; instead, it refers to completion or maturity (Dillow, p.120; C. R. Smith, p.76; Thomas, p.203), and (2) the Greek word translated “perfect” or “perfection” is of the neuter gender, not the expected masculine if reference is to Christ (Unger, *New*, p. 95).

The cessationist has very good reason for wanting to disprove that “the perfect thing” is the *parousia*. For if it is the presence of Christ and His Kingdom, this means that tongues, prophecy, and knowledge are to continue until He comes, until we know Him directly—“face to face.”

Three well-respected Greek lexicons confirm that “the perfect thing” may indeed refer to persons or to the absolute quality of perfection: Cremer cites the use of *perfect* in classical Greek as referring “to the gods and their exaltation” (p.543). Under *perfect* Thayer writes, “The perfect state of all things, to be ushered in by the return of Christ from heaven” (p.618). Kittel’s respected word study cites *perfect* as being used to refer to the sacrificial lamb without blemish (VIII, pp. 67, 72).

Even non-Pentecostal Greek scholars, Gaebelein and Mare for example, write that the idea of “the perfect thing” being the New Testament is “alien to the context” (p. 269); Robertson and Plummer say that Paul “is full of thought of the Second Advent” here (p. 297). Figure 1 on page 28 lists more than sixty non-Pentecostals who accept “the perfect thing” as a reference to the coming of Christ with the eternal Kingdom. *No major non-Pentecostal commentary accepts the cessationists’ argument on “the perfect thing.”*

Not only does the word *perfect* work against the cessationist theory, but its verb, *come*, also does. Non-Pentecostal Conzelmann says that it “points to the *parousia*” (p. 226); Edwards and also Cook claim that it is an allusion to the *parousia* (pp. 349, 352, 341). Elbert cites references in 1 Corinthians 4:5 and 11:26, as well as in the Thessalonian epistles which Paul wrote from Corinth, that support Conzelmann’s and Edwards’ claims (pp. 9-10). When at Corinth and when writing to the Corinthians, the *parousia* was clearly a concern of Paul’s (Elbert, pp. 2-3).

Two other passages in 1 Corinthians argue against the cessationist theory of “the perfect thing” being the completion of Scripture or the matured Church. First, in chapter seven Paul advises virgins not to marry because Christ will come very shortly. In light of this, it is unlikely that Paul, as he wrote chapter thirteen, was thinking of a time when the worship practices of the Church would be radically changed by a “New Testament” or “matured” Church (Cottle, p. 47).

Second, Paul tells us that there is a current practice in the Church that will also cease when Christ comes. Not only that, but *Christians are exhorted to continue this practice until Christ comes*. In verse 26 of chapter eleven, Paul tells the Corinthians, “For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.” (The verb *comes* is identical to that used in 13:10.) Without a doubt, just as we partake of the blood and body of Christ until He comes, so we should edify the Body of Christ on earth until He comes to perfect it (Ephesians 4:13; 1 Corinthians 1:7; 13:8-13).

Very little needs to be said about Unger’s argument that the gender of the noun for “the perfect thing” is neuter not masculine and, therefore, does not refer to the Person of Christ. First, it need not refer to Christ alone but to His eternal Kingdom. Second, Christ is referred to with the neuter gender on other occasions. He calls Himself “the Beginning and the End,” using the neuter gender (Revelation 21:6). Also, John refers to Him with a neuter gender pronoun in 1 John 1:1 (Elbert, pp. 32-33).

Issue #6: “When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me,” verse 11. The purpose of this verse, it is argued, is to illustrate “the perfect thing.” Cessationists argue that the image in the illustration is that of a child maturing to a man, and that the *perfect* must reflect this process of maturation. Since the *parousia* is an event, not a process, cessationists reason that the perfect must be either the Scriptures or the Church (Gromacki, p. 127; C. R. Smith, pp. 84-85; Thomas, pp. 109, 111, 204; Unger, New, pp. 96-97).

Actually, the illustration does not demonstrate the process of maturing at all: The beginning (childhood) and the end (adulthood) are the points of the illustration, not the growth in between (Morris, p. 187). As the *Broadman Bible Commentary* says, “Paul is not interested . . . in emphasizing continuity between a child and a man. His concern is not to establish continuity but dissimilarity” (p. 374). Furthermore, we cannot squeeze the idea of maturation out of the second illustration Paul gives using the reflection (verse 12). Only the Pentecostal/charismatic interpretation is consistent in both illustrations: Our knowledge of God in this world is incomplete, partial, fragmentary, and indirect whereas in the world to come, it is complete and direct.

Issue #7: “Now we see but a poor reflection; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known” (verse 12). This is the second of two illustrations that Paul gives to clarify “the perfect thing.” Since nothing in this verse specifically suggests that the “perfect” is the Church or the Scriptures, cessationists usually offer explanations such as “Receiving the Scripture was coming ‘face to face’ with God” (Chantry, p. 53) or “We can now meet the Lord face to face in His Word” (John Williams, p. 230) or “All who view matters through the apostolic teaching and who are regenerated by the Holy Spirit behold the face of Jesus Christ—face to face” (Coppes, p. 60).

Hoping to render this verse useless to “the perfect equals the *parousia*” understanding, cessationists usually support this argument: The Pentecostal-charismatic interpretation is inconsistent in interpreting “face to face” literally and “reflection” figuratively. To be consistent, seeing Christ face-to-face should also be taken figuratively. Also, it is argued that Pentecostals and charismatics gratuitously supply “Christ” here, as the object in the mirror; instead we should supply what we normally see in a mirror—our own selves (it is not explained how one then sees oneself face-to-face, even figuratively; Judisch, p. 51; Gromacki, p.127; Reymond, p.35). The last part of the verse—“know fully, even as I am fully known”—is of necessity ignored by cessationists. I have been unable to find a cessationist theory that deals with the “full knowledge” phrase that accompanies “the perfect thing.”

Actually Pentecostals have no trouble viewing both “face-to-face” and “reflection” as figurative representations. “Face to face” need not require a literal nose-to-nose encounter between the Christian and the glorified Christ. Rather “face to face” may convey the idea of a direct perception of God as opposed to the valuable but fragmentary and indirect knowledge we have of Him through the gifts of the Spirit. It is true that Christ is literally in the perfect kingdom that He brings, but there is no reason to press for a literal, individual, face-to-face encounter, though this may become gloriously literal. I suspect that the face-to-face encounter to which Paul refers in this illustration will occur in that moment our backs shall “face” this partial, imperfect, and painful world never again to experience it and our eyes shall “face” that complete, perfect, and painless eternal world of His presence never again to experience anything but it.

Cessationist Judisch complains that Pentecostals arbitrarily supply “Christ” as that object seen dimly in the mirror, when in fact the normal image we see in a mirror is that of our own face. But as Judisch says, the Pentecostal-charismatic interpretation does not take the mirror illustration literally. Furthermore, Paul does not mention an image in the mirror. Judisch supplies *image* to thwart the Pentecostal-charismatic interpretation. In reality, the reflection in the imaginary mirror is not a point of Paul’s illustration. The point is the unclear image produced by today’s mirror (spiritual gifts) compared to the clear and direct perception that will occur when the *perfect* appears. When the *perfect* does appear, all imperfect and partial knowledge will disappear.

Has this happened? As a result of the completed Scriptures, do we know as God knows us (not omnisciently, of course, but “face to face”)? As a result of a “matured” Church, do we know as God knows us? No, we do not have this full revelation. In that day, when the *perfect* appears, all will know as they are known and an end will come to denominations and factions. Until then every gift of the Spirit should be used to receive even the bits and pieces of knowledge that God would grant us.

First Corinthians 13:1 2b (“Then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known”) so forcefully rebuts the cessationist theories that revisions are appearing. One claims that Paul’s first illustration (childhood-manhood) refers to the Church matured by completed revelation and his second (the “reflection”) refers to the *parousia*. Since Paul wasn’t sure which would appear first, he allowed for both. The appearance of

either would signal the end of tongues, prophecy, and knowledge (Thomas, *JETS*, pp. 81-89). The most straightforward interpretation is that of the Pentecostal-charismatic's. Why use complicated devices to get around it?

Issue #8: "And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love," verse 13. No one denies that *love* is eternal. At issue in this verse is the understanding of the word *now* and the disposal or retention of the two virtues *faith* and *hope* in eternity. Is the Greek word translated *now* to be understood as referring to time ("Today, these three remain") or to logic ("Now in fact, these three remain")? If *now* is interpreted temporally, it implies a contrast in time—the *now* of the three virtues (faith, hope, and love) with the *then* of the three gifts (tongues, prophecy, and knowledge). This interpretation is made to oppose the continuity of the gifts to our day by claiming that faith and hope, unlike love, will be done away with at the *parousia*. Therefore, if faith and hope are to outlast tongues, prophecy, and knowledge and if faith and hope cease at the *parousia*, then the gifts must cease *before* the *parousia*. The questions are: Is now to be taken temporally or logically? and Do faith and hope cease when Christ comes? (Dillow, pp. 123-124; Edgar, p. 344; Judisch, pp. 46-48; Thomas, pp. 113-115).

As Figure 1 indicates, the vast majority of commentators take *now* in its logical sense and believe that faith and hope are eternal. The only reasons for arguing otherwise are Paul's references to the dissolution of hope when it is fulfilled and faith when it becomes reality (see Romans 8:24; Hebrews 11:1; 2 Corinthians 5:7). But the contexts of these verses clearly do not point to the *parousia*. To the contrary, the contexts are, painfully, speaking of this world. It may be true that in His presence certain hopes we have may be fulfilled and particular beliefs we now hold by faith may become certainties, but this in no way eliminates every facet of hope and faith.

Is not faith also trust in God? Will we no longer trust Him? Will all of eternity be experienced in a moment so that it is improper to speak of expectations in heaven? In the words of Gaebelien and Mare, "Trust. . . in the Lord begun in this life will continue forever and . . . hope in the Lord begun now . . . will expand and issue into an eternal expectation of his perfect plan for our eternal existence with him" (p. 270).

The cessationists' application of the three verses in question (Roman 8:24; Hebrews 11:1, 2 Corinthians 5:7) in an absolute sense to 1 Corinthians 13:13 is done at the expense of the contexts of every verse involved. This is one reason why almost every commentator rejects the temporal use of *now* in verse 13. If contexts do not matter, then I might point out 1 Thessalonians 5:8, where faith and love are inseparably joined as the Christian soldier's breastplate!

Beyond the theological and philosophical arguments against the temporal use of *now* are the grammatical arguments. Greek scholars enumerate several reasons why the virtues of faith and hope cannot be separated from love.

1. According to Lenski, the *position* of the verb "remain" stresses application to all three virtues in the triad (p. 571).
2. Robertson and Plummer state that Paul's use of the *singular* verb with the *three* subjects argues for the durability of all three virtues (p. 300; Edwards, p.354).
3. The construction of the sentence demands that, if faith and hope be construed as temporary, love be construed as temporary also (Lenski, p. 572).
4. Faith, hope, and love are inseparably bound by Paul's "these three" construction (Lenski, p.573; Edwards, p.354).
5. Goudge notes that the *now* of verse 13 is a different Greek word than the definitely temporal *now's* of verse 12 (p.121).

It should also be observed that Paul's point in verse 13 is to contrast the three permanent virtues and the three temporary gifts. To make two of the virtues also temporary seems to defeat the very purpose of Paul's comparison.

To eliminate faith and hope in heaven is to eliminate reasons for joy. It is more likely that our joys in heaven will multiply as further faith and hopes are continuously fulfilled from glory to glory throughout eternity:

"For *faith* will still find scope in the ever-deepening mysteries of the unfathomable wisdom of God, and hope will still look onward with assurance to some fresh fulfillment of God's redemptive purpose" (*Abingdon Bible Commentary*, p.1188).

Ultimately, 1 Corinthians 13 :8-13 provides scriptural support for charismatic continuity and knocks down all theories that would lock any of God's gifts out of the twentieth century. Ironically, when everyone agrees with this . . . when "we all reach unity in the faith," tongues will have ceased (Ephesians 4:11-13)!

Other cessationists who consider the completed New Testament the cessation factor take up an issue different from the fulfilling of I Corinthians 13:8-13. It is a theological issue of immense proportion. For these, the continued use of revelatory gifts, producing “fresh revelations,” infringes upon the sufficiency and finality of Scripture.

Pentecostal-charismatic scholars have yet to answer this charge thoroughly. Perhaps it is because the objection seems so outrageously misplaced, given the high view of Scripture the great majority of Pentecostals hold.

Since Scripture says nothing explicit about the cessation of the *charismata* (except 1 Corinthians 13:8-13, which decrees them until Kingdom come), an extrabiblical argument must be posited. Thus, for some of the cessationists listed in the AD 90-98 column of Figure 2, the cessation of the *charismata* often becomes an argument based upon the following syllogism: Extrabiblical revelations undermine the sufficiency of Scripture; prophecy and tongues produce extrabiblical revelations; therefore, prophecy and tongues undermine the sufficiency of Scripture.

As much as the cessationists have tried to make the major premise self-evident, it is not. The key term, unfortunately, is the most nebulous—*sufficiency*. Sufficient for what? The obvious, most general answer is that *it is sufficient for what it was given*. The basic error of the cessationist is lumping the two—inscripturated revelation and revelatory *charismata*—into the same category on the assumption that they were given for the same purpose. There is no scriptural or logical reason for doing this.

A major error of the cessationists is that they focus on the source and authority of the *charismata* and ignore their function. Since the Scriptures and the *charismata* have the same source, so the argument goes, they have the same authority; therefore, the *charismata* undermine the sufficiency and finality of the Scriptures. But prophecies, when made subject to Scripture, do not derogate the authority of Scripture. Rather, they exalt it.

If a prophecy is from God, it is indeed authoritative; but though all such prophecies have the same origin, it doesn't follow that they have the same function. One function of Scripture is its service as The Standard. Since it alone serves as The Standard, prophetic utterances can neither attain its glory nor undermine its supremacy. All prophetic utterances are subject to its blazing light. If they survive, they are gold; if not, they are dross and are rejected by the Word-governed Body of Christ. Pentecostals and charismatics indeed shout *sola scriptura*—and louder than most.

Scripture is sufficient for what it was given; Scripture is final, not to be contradicted or overridden by local prophetic utterances, which are, along with all *charismata*, given “to each one . . . for the common good. . . All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines” (1 Corinthians 12:7, 11).

The Silence of Tongues in the New Testament

Another cessationist proof that tongues have ceased is seen in the absence of reference to the gift in later New Testament books. If the gift had any permanent validity, certainly Paul would have mentioned it, so it is argued (John Williams, p.210). “After Acts, only one book mentions tongues—and as a problem” (Flynn, p. 188). MacArthur states the cessationists' argument well:

Tongues are mentioned only in the earliest books of the New Testament. First Corinthians is the only epistle where tongues are even mentioned. Paul wrote at least twelve other epistles and never mentioned tongues again. Peter never mentioned tongues; James never mentioned tongues; John never mentioned tongues. Neither did Jude. Tongues appeared briefly in the early days of the church as the new word of God was being spread and the church was being established. But once this occurred, tongues were gone. They stopped.

(p.169)

Unger points out that tongues appear only in the early lists of the spiritual gifts, proving that they had ceased by the time the later lists were written (*New*, pp. 81-82). Additionally, it is argued that the inability of Paul to heal Timothy and Trophimus (1 Timothy 5:23; 2 Timothy 4:20) is proof that the miraculous “sign” gifts had ceased (Schutz, p.29; Sir Anderson, pp. 19-20).

Obviously, the first response to this argument is that it is a textbook case of arguing from silence. If he is to be logically consistent, the cessationist who accepts this argument must also accept the idea that the Lord's Supper is no longer for the Church, for it is regulated by Paul in 1 Corinthians and is mentioned nowhere in later epistles. The cessationist must also conclude that the silence of miraculous “sign” gifts in the early epistle of 2 Thessalonians proves that they had ceased by the time that Paul penned the epistle,

around AD 51. But that is contradicted by later epistles, especially 1 Corinthians (Brumback, p. 76). Or if we were to judge the charismatic experience of the Ephesians by Paul's letter to them, we would discover little or no evidence of tongues-speaking. If we turn to Luke, however, we see that speaking in tongues formed the genesis of their Christian experience (Acts 19:1-7). Such are the dangers of arguing from silence.

There is, of course, good reason why Paul and other New Testament writers did not mention tongues in the other epistles. They did not mention tongues for the same reason that they did not mention any other topic that was not mentioned! The absence of reference to something in no way proves it no longer existed. Simply put, anything that was not germane to the writer's intention did not find its way into the letter. *That there were no problems with tongues is just as logical a conclusion as the argument that there were no tongues.*

Also, Paul wrote more to the Corinthian church than he did to the Galatian, Ephesian, Philippian, Colossian, and Thessalonian churches combined (Cantelon, p. 60). Usually, the more you write, the more you write about. His chances, therefore, of saying something about tongues to the Corinthians were much greater. Furthermore, since Paul's letter to the Corinthians was circulated among the churches, it is possible that he would not have to address the issue of tongues repetitiously.

Concerning the absence of tongues from the later lists of spiritual gifts, it should be noted that no two lists (1 Corinthians 12:8-10, 28; Romans 12:6-8; Ephesians 4:11) are identical or exhaustive, and "ordinary" gifts, as well as some "sign" gifts, do not occur in the later lists. The charismatic gift of prophecy, it is noted, does occur in every list.

As for Paul's inability to heal a person whenever he desired, it cannot be established that Paul's gift of healing operated unconditionally. Even Jesus did not heal those who did not believe (Matthew 13:58). Furthermore, lack of healing has more than one cause (Brumback, pp. 77-78). In addition to this, the miraculous "sign" gifts did not assure healing, as the deaths of Stephen, James, and other martyrs sadly prove.

The Absence of Tongues in Church History

The absence of tongues in the writings of those following the apostles is another argument that purports to prove that tongues ceased with the Apostolic Age. Cessationist George Dollar chides Pentecostals and charismatics for not referring "to the grand stream of church history from apostolic times until our present day for proof of God's plan to perpetuate" a continuously charismatic Church (p. 316). He concludes that "the voice of church history . . . is against the modern tongues movement . . ." (p. 321). More recently, MacArthur asserts dogmatically, "History records that tongues did cease. . . . Clement of Rome [c. AD 96], Justin Martyr [165], Origen [254], Chrysostom [430]—some of the greatest theologians of the ancient church—considered tongues a remote practice, something that happened in the very early days of Christianity" (p.169).

Cessationist Hoekema, who also believes that tongues ceased with the Apostolic Age, addresses the Pentecostal-charismatic response that God has restored the gifts in these the latter days. He asks why these gifts, if they were essential, disappeared and why God would withhold the gifts for 1500 years (*Baptism* 65). "Did God deliberately impoverish his people?" (*What*, p.113).

The cessationist argument here, as in the previous argument, is based on silence: Tongues must have ceased since the post-apostolic writers do not mention them as currently in operation. The Pentecostal pioneers of the turn of the century seemed to have accepted the cessationist assumption that post-apostolic writers indeed do not mention tongues, for they claimed that the prophet Joel's latter rain (Joel 2:23, 28; Acts 2: 16-21, *KJV*) had fallen in the twentieth century. Current research, however, supports the view that the prophetic and so-called "sign" gifts did indeed operate in the post-apostolic period.

The cessationist argument here reminds me of the tactic deployed by American tobacco companies: no matter what the evidence indicates, deny, deny, deny that there is any link between cigarette smoking and health problems. Warfield denied it, Rogers denies it, Dollar denies it, MacArthur, Gromacki, Hoekema, and others deny that certain gifts of the Holy Spirit were to be in the Church until Christ comes. The saddest effect of this teaching is its incubation of doubt and disbelief. Not that we should be credulous, mind you, certain fantastic stories of the post-apostolic writers are indeed beyond belief.

Figure 3 on page 30 is a chart of some post-apostolic writers or writings along with the gifts of the Spirit that were functioning at the time of the writings.

There is now no justification for denying that the gifts of healings, miracles, tongues, interpretation, and prophecy survived the twelve Apostles or their disciples. The post-apostolic church prior to AD 200 was indeed charismatic (Kydd, p.87). And the only two post-apostolic writers who are quoted by the cessationists for their explicit statements that tongues had ceased are John Chrysostom (AD 407) and Augustine (AD 430). Even here the statements of these two may suggest that they were trying to quench current practices that they disagreed with (Carroll, p.84; Burgess, p.126), somewhat like cessationists are doing today. (It should be noted, however, that Augustine does testify to healings and miracles in his time (Burgess, pp. 190-192)).

Although early church writings are chock-full of references and allusions to the supernatural, including the controversial *charismata*, by the middle of the third century these gifts (or the recording of them) did begin to wane. Hunter writes that the medieval period, beginning in the fifth century and lasting into the fifteenth, yields the least evidence of tongues-speaking. On the basis of his research, however, he concludes that “there may not be a century without tongues-speech appearing somewhere among Christians” (*JETS*, p. 135).

Cessationist Hoekema implies that the Pentecostal doctrine of charismatic continuity through the centuries maligns God since God is to be blamed for allowing the gifts to practically die out. I believe the fallacy of this argument is apparent when we extend its logic to salvation by grace—that is, God is to blame for allowing the doctrine of salvation by grace to diminish because of teachings of the medieval church. If God is to blame, it is only in the sense that His instrument in this world—the Body of Christ—did not appropriate the power of the Holy Spirit continuously through the ages. God did not impoverish His people; they impoverished themselves!

Finally, it should be acknowledged that this cessationist argument is not based on Scripture, nor is it based on doctrinal teachings. It seems to be based upon supposed experience, or even worse, the assumed absence of records of the experience in post-apostolic literature. The anti-charismatic writings of Chrysostom and Augustine, which are widely quoted, are based on those men’s beliefs or opinions; they offer no scriptural support of the cessation of the gifts of the Spirit. It should be remembered that the writings of the early Church fathers have no more or less authority than any book written today.

A day is coming when prophecies, words of knowledge, and tongues shall cease. When that day arrives, no one will be rejoicing more ecstatically than the charismatics. But until then. . .

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Portions of this article were previously published in *Paraclete* and *Pentecostal Evangel*.

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This chapter from *Praying in the Spirit* appeared in the **Summer 2000** (Vol 3, No 3) edition of the *Pneuma Review*. Copyright © Robert Graves. All rights reserved.