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IN DEFENSE OF THE CESSATION OF THE APOSTOLIC SIGN GIFTS

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TOWARDS A DEFENSE OF THE CESSATION OF THE APOSTOLIC SIGN GIFTS

Introduction

Before Jesus Christ went to be with the Father, He spoke of the coming of the promised Holy Spirit. To His apostles He said, “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you” (Acts 1:8). When Jesus came, He “drew heaven with Him.”¹ When He went back to heaven, He did not leave His apostles to their own natural abilities. Rather, He graciously sent the Holy Spirit to give them supernatural gifts for the purpose of establishing the church.

In this paper it will be argued that certain gifts of the Spirit have ceased with the passing of the original apostolic church. This paper will give most of its attention to the connection between the apostles and the sign gifts. First, a general introduction to the gifts of the Spirit will be given. Next, a connection between the sign gifts and the apostles will be made. Possible objections to the connection between the apostles and the sign gifts will be discussed during the course of the paper. After this, a summary of an argument for Cessationism will be given. Finally, some practical implications will be drawn.

The Gifts of the Spirit

Spiritual Gifts in General

When the Bible talks about the gifts of the Spirit, what is it talking about? Clearly everything we have is a gift given to us by God. He holds everything in the created order

¹B.B. Warfield, *Counterfeit Miracles* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1972), 3.

into existence every moment of every day. We are completely dependent on Him for our continued existence. All of our natural talents and abilities are gifts from our Creator. However, the spiritual gifts spoken of in Acts, 1 Corinthians and Ephesians differ from the everyday talents and abilities with which God has blessed us. They are special gifts from God for the purpose of edifying and establishing the church.

What then is a spiritual gift? In his book *The Holy Spirit*, Charles Ryrie defines a spiritual gift as “a God-given ability for service”.² The special gifting of the Holy Spirit is an *ability* given to whomever He wills. These special *abilities* are distinct from any natural talent or ability. This definition holds even if, practically speaking, we cannot discern between a natural ability and a spiritual gifting. Some of the gifts are difficult to recognize as special abilities given by the Holy Spirit. In particular, Ryrie confesses to have difficulty discerning between “a naturally talented teacher, a teacher who has been well trained, and one who has been given the spiritual gift of teaching.”³

There is no need to be alarmed about this. The Bible does not teach that we should be able to distinguish clearly between those who have the spiritual gift of teaching and those who naturally learned how to teach. When it comes to certain gifts, it is not necessary to know whether or not someone has a spiritual gifting or a natural talent that has been developed. In many cases we may simply hold to what we know from Scripture concerning the nature and purpose of the spiritual gifts. For example, we may know with certainty that spiritual gifts are given by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:4-11) according to His

²Charles Ryrie, *The Holy Spirit* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1965), 124.

³Ibid., 125.

will (1 Cor. 12:11) for the profit of the church (1 Cor. 12:6). This will be true even if there are gifts given in the church that we do not recognize as spiritual gifts.

On the other hand, there are some spiritual gifts which are easily distinguishable from natural talents and abilities. The existence of these gifts cannot adequately be explained apart from the supernatural empowerment of God. These gifts are those which Paul called the “signs of an apostle” (2 Cor. 12:12). They acted as signs of an apostle precisely because they *were* distinguishable from natural talents and abilities. In fact, they were so wonderful that people from all walks of life recognized them as supernatural in origin.

Special Sign Gifts of an Apostle

These extra-ordinary “sign gifts” are primarily associated with the apostles. The book of Acts repeatedly refers to the mighty signs and wonders performed by those who started the church. In Acts 2:43 Luke writes, “Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles.” Acts 4:32 says, “And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.”⁴ Acts 5:12 says, “And through the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were done among the people.” Luke goes on to describe how the people viewed the apostles. He said that, “none of the rest dared to join them [the apostles], but the people esteemed them highly” (Acts 5:13).

It is clear then that the apostles were unique in their power and authority. Matthew 10:1 records the power given by Christ to the twelve disciples. In this passage,

⁴In his book *Gifts of the Spirit*, Ronald Baxter shows that the Greek word *dunamis*, which when translated in this passage is “power”, is used of works that are supernatural in origin and character.

Jesus gives them the power over unclean spirits, the power to cast out demons, and the power to heal all kinds of sickness and diseases. Later, in the book of Acts, the Holy Spirit gifts them with the ability to speak in tongues, to pronounce judgment, to heal people, to cast out demons and to prophecy.

Agreement on the number and nature of the sign gifts is not unanimous, but generally speaking the gifts that are extra-ordinary and revelatory are taken to be sign gifts. Sometime the New Testament author distinctly says that a gift is a sign, as in the case in 1 Cor. 14:22. In this passage, Paul speaks of tongues as a “sign”. Some point out that the apostles performed great signs and wonders, and all gifts that appear to fit in that category are taken to be the sign gifts.

These gifts are taken as “sign” gifts in that they are a sign of the authenticity of the ministry and message of the apostles. The fact that these gifts are special sign gifts is presupposed by Paul in one of his arguments to the Corinthians. In defending his apostolic authority Paul refers to the “signs of an apostle” performed in their midst. (2 Cor.12:12) Paul relied on the ability of his audience to recognize “signs and wonders and mighty deeds” as the authenticating witnesses to his apostolic authority. If these gifts were not unique to the apostles, it is difficult to see how they could have been used to authenticate Paul’s special apostolic ministry.⁵

Continuing this thought, Professor B.B. Warfield notes that the sign gifts “were part of the credentials of the Apostles as the authoritative agents of God in founding the

⁵Ronald Baxter, *Gifts of the Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1983), 124.

church.”⁶ Additionally, in his book *Signs and Wonders*, Dr. Norman Geisler says, “Since being an apostle was a special God-ordained task, it necessitated special divinely bestowed gifts.”⁷ The apostles were given the monumental task of establishing the church. It makes sense to think that God would put His fingerprints all over His work. Gifting the apostles with unmistakable sign gifts ensured that people would be able to recognize the work of God through His apostles.

The Apostles and the Sign Gifts

Since the special sign gifts were uniquely tied to the ministry of the apostles, and since they were given for the establishing of the church, it follows that the absence of the apostles along with the completed work of the apostles would bring about the rescinding of the sign gifts. For once the purpose of the gifts was fulfilled, they were no longer needed. B.B. Warfield intimately ties the sign gifts to the Apostolic Church. He says that the sign gifts were confined to “the Apostolic Church, and they necessarily passed away with it.”⁸

By “Apostolic Church” Warfield does not refer to those churches who follow the teaching of the apostles. Many today still try to devote themselves to the teaching of the apostles as it is written in Scripture. Rather Warfield is speaking of the Church during the time of the apostles. The conviction that the sign gifts are limited to the times of the apostles is at the very heart of most Cessationist positions.

⁶Warfield, 6.

⁷Norman Geisler, *Signs and Wonders* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1988), 134.

⁸Warfield, 6.

It should be noted here that Warfield confines the sign gifts to the “Apostolic Church” rather than to the apostles. Why would he speak of the sign gifts passing with the passing of the “Apostolic Church” rather than the passing of the apostles? As noted earlier, the book of Acts *primarily* associates the sign gifts with the apostles. The word “primarily” here is used because there are others who are said to perform signs and wonders. For example, Acts 6:8 speaks of Stephen as one who was “full of faith and power” and he “did great wonders and signs among the people”. Stephen was not an apostle; rather, he was chosen by the multitude of disciples at the behest of the twelve apostles. From this passage and others, we see various individuals performing signs and wonders like the apostles but who were not themselves apostles.

Why Were Sign Gifts Given to Non-Apostles?

At first glance, this appears to be a problem for the Cessationist’s position. The argument for the cessation of the sign gifts relies on at least two key points. First, the sign gifts must be so uniquely tied to the original apostles that the removal of the apostles necessitates the removal of the sign gifts. Second, the office of the apostle must not continue beyond the original apostles, for the sign gifts are the “signs of an apostle”. If the apostolic office no longer exists, then the signs that verify their ministry should no longer exist. God would not use the sign’s of an apostle to authenticate the ministry of an office that no longer exists.

Furthermore, if the sign gifts were given to establish the authenticity and authority of an apostle, why would God give these gifts to people who are not apostles? It seems that if these gifts were specially designed to function as *the* authenticating signs of the apostolic office, then giving these gifts to other people would appear to diminish their

function as the signs of an apostle. Furthermore, if there were other individuals performing signs and wonders like the apostles, then why insist that these gifts passed with the passing of the apostles or the Apostolic Church? At first glance, it appears reasonable to hold that those who received gifts could themselves continue to give those gifts to yet other individuals. The above concerns will be taken one at a time.

The Uniqueness of the Apostles Gifts

The first question deals with the uniqueness of the gifting of the original apostles. If God gave the sign gifts to authenticate the ministry of the apostles, then why would He give these gifts to others? The first step in responding to this question is to rebut the notion that individuals outside of the apostolic circle received these gifts directly from God. As Dr. Norman Geisler says, “The apostles themselves had power to grant [the miraculous gifts]”.⁹ Only the apostles were given sign gifts *directly* from God. Others were given these gifts *through* the apostles.

The fact that the Holy Spirit came first on the apostles and gifted them with sign gifts may be seen by looking at the first few chapters of Acts. If one were to follow the language in the first two chapters of Acts, rather than seeing the Holy Spirit come upon the 120 present at Pentecost, one would find that Jesus promised to give the Holy Spirit to His apostles. Geisler argues for this with the following reasoning:

- 1.** Only the apostles were promised before Pentecost that “you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 1:5). It is clear from the context that “you” refers only to “the apostles” (v.2).
- 2.** The “they” (Acts 2:1) on whom the Holy Spirit fell refers back to the previous verse, namely, the “apostles” (1:26).
- 3.** Likewise “they” and “them” (v.3) on whom tongues of fire fell refers to the same “apostles.”
- 4.** Further, the crowd heard “them” (the same “apostles”) speak in tongues (v.6).
- 5.** Also, those

⁹Norman Geisler, *Systematic Theology vol.4: Church Last Things* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2005), 674.

who spoke in tongues were “all ... Galileans” (2:7), as the apostles were. Even the angel called them “men of Galilee” (1:11). But the others present in the Upper Room were not all Galileans; some were from Jerusalem and Judea (1:12-14).¹⁰

So the progression of the first couple of chapters of the book of Acts shows that the promised Holy Spirit was given to the apostles. They were Christ’s special delegates to the world. Christ sent the Holy Spirit to them, and they in turn gave gifts to others through the laying on of hands. That the apostles bestowed the Holy Spirit on others by the laying on of hands is evidenced throughout the book of Acts. One poignant example of this is found in Acts 8:17-18. The former sorcerer, named Simon, is rebuked for trying to purchase this gift of God. For Simon saw that “through the *laying on of the apostles’ hands* the Holy Spirit was given”. (*emphasis mine*)

Therefore, in response to the original question, it must be concluded that God did not give sign gifts directly to people other than the apostles. Other servants of God, who were themselves trustworthy, were given gifts by the apostles for the advancement of the church. The New Testament does not show God giving the sign gifts to everyone. From looking at the New Testament Warfield concludes that “In the entire New Testament we meet with no instance of the gifts showing themselves – after the initial instances of Pentecost and Cornelius – where an Apostle had not conveyed them.”¹¹ He continues, “The connection of the supernatural gifts with the Apostles is so obvious that one wonders that so many students have missed it, and have sought an account of them in some other quarter.”¹²

¹⁰Geisler, *Signs and Wonders*, 173-74.

¹¹Warfield, 23.

¹²*Ibid.*, 23.

Showing that God gave the sign gifts to the apostles and that the apostles then gave them to others explains all the relevant biblical data. It accounts for the fact that Jesus promised the Holy Spirit to His apostles only. It also accounts for the fact that others, who were associated with the apostles, exercised supernatural gifts. The sign gifts were given to the apostles as authenticating sign gifts, but they were dealt out to others so that the early church would grow and become established. As Warfield notes, “[The miraculous powers] were therefore needed throughout the period of the church’s weak infancy.”¹³ So the fact that other individuals exercised miraculous gifts does not negate the strong tie between the sign gifts and the apostles. Rather it shows the expansion of the work of the apostles.

What about the second question? If the sign gifts were specially designed to function as *the* authenticating signs of the apostolic office, then would giving these gifts to other people diminish their function as sign gifts? On the contrary, rather than diminishing their function as sign gifts, the giving of these gifts to non-apostles served to show which individuals had been gifted by the ministry of the apostles. Knowing who the apostles approved of would have been very helpful for the establishment of the church.

It is important to note that during the infancy of the church, the canon of Scripture had not been put together. Several decades transpired between the events of Pentecost and the writing of the New Testament. During these early years of the church, the gifts of the Spirit were the mark of a true church. That the apostles gifted others for ministry was their way of putting their seal of approval on a particular ministry. It was their way of

¹³Ibid., 21.

helping people distinguish between those who remained in the teachings of the apostles and those who did not.

It is reasonable to hold that those performing signs and wonders would have backed the teachings and authority of the apostles. Those who received the gifts from the apostles could redirect the thinking of those who saw them perform great signs. They could remind their audience that they received these miraculous gifts from the apostles. So whether it was the apostles or those who received gifts from the apostles, the sign gifts remained the “signs of an apostle”.

The Uniqueness of the Original Apostles

The next question bears directly on the overall point of this paper. If there were other individuals performing signs and wonders like the apostles, then why insist that these gifts passed with the passing of the apostles or of the Apostolic Church? If the apostles gave these gifts to others, then perhaps the recipients of these gifts gave them to other people too. If that is the case, then perhaps these gifts spread and continued rather than diminished and faded away.

This view fails, however, because it was the prerogative of the apostles alone to pass gifts on to the church. Since the number of apostles was limited to the original twelve plus Paul, the gifts could not continue beyond the lives of those who were solely responsible for the giving of those gifts. As was mentioned earlier, the apostles gave these gifts to others through the laying on of hands. The New Testament does not give any examples of non-apostles giving gifts to other people.

Further, it simply does not follow that because the apostles gave miraculous gifts to others that those who received the gifts from the apostles could then pass those gifts on

to others. It is clear that the apostles were unique in many ways. As Abraham Kuyper says in his book *The Work of the Holy Spirit*, “In the history of the Church and the world [the apostles] occupy a unique position and have a peculiar significance.”¹⁴

As mentioned above, one of the ways in which the apostles were unique is found in the fact that there was a limited number of them. The Bible limits the number of apostles to those within the apostolic circle of the first century. Abraham Kuyper explains why the circle of apostles is closed:

That the apostolate was a closed circle ... is evident from Acts i. 25: “Lord, show of these two, the one whom Thou hast chosen to take the place of this ministry and apostleship”; and again from St. Paul’s word (Rom. i. 5): “By whom we have received grace and apostleship”; and again (1 Cor. ix. 2): “For the seal of my apostleship are ye in the Lord”; ... And again it is evident from the fact that the apostles always appear as the twelve; and from their being specially appointed and installed by Jesus breathing upon them the official gift of the Holy Spirit; and from the exceptional power and gifts that were connected with the apostolate. And it is especially from its conspicuous place in the coming Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ that the apostolate obtains its definite character. For the Holy Scripture teaches that the apostles shall sit upon twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel; and also that the New Jerusalem has “twelve foundations upon which are written the twelve names of the apostles of the Lamb.”¹⁵

Again, their significance is seen by the fact that there were only twelve original apostles, plus Paul, who added as “one born out of due time” (1 Cor. 15:8). The number of apostles was important, otherwise why would they find it necessary to replace Judas? It is clear that Jesus chose twelve men to be His disciples. With the exception of Paul, the apostles found it to be within the will of God to neither add to nor detract from this number. Additionally, an eschatological claim of Christ is dependant on there being twelve apostles. For Christ claims that “in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on

¹⁴Abraham Kuyper, *The Work of the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1941), 139.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 161-62.

the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on *twelve* thrones, judging the *twelve* tribes of Israel” (Matt. 19:28). (*emphasis mine*) So the number of apostles is important because Christ declares that, in the end, there will be exactly twelve disciples who will serve as judges over the twelve tribes of Israel.

If the number of apostles was so important, and Christ appointed twelve to be his apostles, then how are we to deal with Paul? Various people have sought different ways to resolve this tension. Some suggest that Matthias was not really one of the twelve. Baxter quotes W.A. Criswell’s position as stating, “In the first chapter of Acts the disciples chose Matthias to be the apostle to take the place of the fallen Judas, but in the ninth chapter of Acts, God chose Saul of Tarsus.”¹⁶ According to this position, Matthias was chosen by the apostles, but they were wrong in trying to appoint an apostle in place of Judas. Accordingly, while the apostles wrongly appointed Matthias to replace Judas, God chose Paul to be the twelfth apostle.

Abraham Kuyper answers this question by claiming that it is “not the name of Matthias, but that of St. Paul [which] is written upon the foundations of the New Jerusalem with the others; and that not Matthias, but St. Paul shall sit down to judge the twelve tribes of Israel.”¹⁷ Kuyper does not deny that Matthias was an apostle; rather, he thinks that both Matthias and Paul replaced Judas. Kuyper claims, “As one of the tribes of Israel was replaced by two others, so in regard to the apostolate; for Simeon, who fell

¹⁶Baxter, 90-91.

¹⁷Kuyper, 162.

out, Manasseh and Ephraim were substituted, and Judas was replaced by Matthias and Paul.”¹⁸

This view appears to be more tenable than the former view. Kuyper deals with the fact that there were thirteen apostles, yet only twelve will sit in thrones to judge the twelve tribes of Israel. According to Kuyper, Paul is included in Christ’s eschatological promise. Matthias, on the other hand, is a true apostle, but his apostleship is a temporary, earthly apostleship. He was an apostle, but he will not serve as one of the twelve foundations of the church.

Even if neither of these explanations worked, the matter of there being thirteen apostles does not detract from the overall argument.¹⁹ The fact remains that there were a *limited* number of apostles. While it is true that Paul was the thirteenth apostle, he was a special addition to the apostles. He was added to the twelve as a special messenger to the Gentiles. In fact, Paul refers to himself as an oddity in this regard. When speaking of the risen Christ, he explains how Christ was seen by the Twelve, by the crowds and by James (1 Cor. 15). After this Paul says, “Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time” (1 Cor. 15:8). This verse should not be taken to mean that Paul considered himself a mere associate of the apostles. In 2 Cor. 11:5 he says, “For I consider that I am not at all inferior to the most eminent apostles.” Rather, he is to be understood as a special addition to the original twelve.

The limited number of apostles does bring up another apparent problem for the Cessationist position. If there were only twelve original apostles and Paul, then how are

¹⁸Ibid., 162.

¹⁹Baxter, 91.

we to take the fact that the Bible speaks of “apostles” outside of the original group? The existence of other apostles would appear to negate the claim that the apostolic circle was limited to thirteen apostles. Furthermore, if there were more than the original thirteen, it would become very difficult to maintain that the apostolic office extinguished with the passing of the original thirteen.

Other Apostles

Cessationists recognize that there are individuals outside of the thirteen who are called apostles. Geisler points to eleven such figures that could be considered apostles in some sense. These include, but are not limited to: Timothy, Titus, Luke, Silas, John Mark, Tychicus, Clement, Epaphras, Trophimus, Demas and Apollos.²⁰ They are taken to be apostles because, in some cases, the Greek word *apostolos* is used of them.²¹ However, there is good reason for thinking that these people were apostles in a lesser sense.

First, they derived their “apostleship” from the original apostles. Many of Paul’s letters begin by emphasizing the divine origin of his calling. This is in contrast to the calling of the lesser apostles who were sent by the original apostles. Geisler calls these people the “associates” of the apostles.²² They were those individuals who were sent out by the apostles to further the work of the church. They were fellow laborers in Christ, but they were not on par with the original apostles.

²⁰Geisler. *Systematic Theology*, 725.

²¹*Ibid.*, 724.

²²*Ibid.*, 724-25.

Second, it is clear from the book of Acts is that the original twelve and Paul are unique ministers of Christ. The associates of the apostles did not meet the requirements of that high office. Charles Hodge lays out the requirements of that office in his

Systematic Theology:

To qualify [the apostles] for this office of authoritative witnesses, it was necessary, (1.) That they should have independent plenary knowledge of the gospel. (2.) That they should have seen Christ after his resurrection. (3.) That they should be inspired, *i.e.*, that they should be individually and severally so guided by the Spirit as to be infallible in all their instructions. (4.) That they should be authenticated as the messengers of Christ, by adherence to the true gospel, by success in preaching (Paul said to the Corinthians that they were the seal of his apostleship, 1 Cor. ix. 2); and by signs and wonders and divers miracles and gifts of the Holy Ghost. Such were the gifts and qualifications and credentials of the original Apostles.²³

Since the associates of the apostles did not meet these requirements, it is necessary to make a distinction between the two different senses or referents of the term “apostle”. In the narrow sense the term “apostle” applies only to the twelve plus Paul. In the general sense the term applies to those sent by the apostles. By distinguishing between these two senses of the term apostle, the uniqueness of the original apostles is maintained.

The Basic Argument

At this point a sketch of the argument for the cessation of the sign gifts will be given. The argument may be summarized as follows:

1. Only the apostles received the sign gifts directly from God,
and,
2. Others (non-apostles) who had the sign gifts received them from the apostles,

²³Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology vol.1: Theology*. (U.S.A.: Hendrickson Publishers, 2001), 139.

and,

3. Those individuals could not give those gifts to anyone else,

so it follows that,

4. When the apostles and those to whom the apostles gave the sign gifts died, the sign gifts ceased to be.

This then, is the general flow of the argument for the cessation of the sign gifts.

While there are various arguments given for this position, all Cessationists maintain that there is a unique tie between the sign gifts and the original apostles. Further, most Cessationists hold that the sign gifts are so bound up with the apostles that the removal of the apostles entails the removal of the sign gifts.

As was shown in this paper, the sign gifts were signs of an apostle. They were given to authenticate their ministry and message. The original thirteen apostles delegated various gifts, which included some sign gifts, to others as a means of advancing and establishing the church during its infancy. Since those who received the gifts from the apostles could not give those gifts to others, the gifts could not continue beyond the life of those who had them during the apostolic era. Additionally, the purposes of those gifts were fulfilled during the time of the apostle; making the further use of the sign gifts unnecessary.

Practical Implications

In a culture of sensationalism, the issue of whether or not the sign gifts are for today is a very big issue to be sure. Examples of failed “prophecies” throughout the evangelical church are numerous. Sometimes it is falsely claimed that people have been healed of cancer. Television evangelists regularly claim to have received new revelations

from God. Hank Hanegraaff and John MacArthur give a great deal of examples of this sort of lunacy. Unfortunately, this sort of nonsense is not confined to small groups of religious crazies.

Dr. Norman Geisler gives an example of a well-known author who gave a false prophecy: “In April 1973 David Wilkerson prophesied on the basis of a vision he had, warning that ‘more than one-third of the United States will be designated a disaster area within the next few years’”.²⁴ Geisler goes on to point out that Wilkerson had “no doubt in [his] mind about this forthcoming massive earthquake” that would result in one third of the United States becoming a disaster area.²⁵ Geisler remarks that after fifteen years, the event has never come to pass.

Example upon example may be given of people claiming to perform miracles and give prophecies. Further, example upon example may be given of fraudulent and failed signs and wonders. However, despite the numerous examples of shams and pranks, much of the evangelical world still appears to embrace the notion that the sign gifts are for today. A large number of Christians respond to these criticisms with an overly dismissive posture.

Apologetics

There is an apologetic issue at hand here as well. If the sign gifts are normative for the church, apologists would have to investigate each event to determine whether or not it was a miracle. They would then have to see if that miracle was confirming a message from God. If it was a true miracle and that miracle was accompanied by some

²⁴Geisler. *Signs and Wonders*, 138.

²⁵*Ibid.*, 138.

message, then the canon of Scripture would not be closed. Apologists and theologians would be running around trying to figure out what revelations should be added to the Bible.

The fact that the miracles have ceased makes the task of the apologist much easier. Contemporary criticisms of the cults stand on firm ground. If a cult claims that its “prophet” said such and such, that claim may be dismissed on the grounds that prophecy is no longer given. If a church claims to have an “apostle,” then that claim may be dismissed on the grounds that the apostles were entirely unique to the first century. The notion of an apostle today does not even need to be entertained because the Bible rules it out as a possibility.

Psychological Comfort

One of the largest problems with the Charismatic and Pentecostal movements is that it manipulates its members by appealing to whether or not they have certain spiritual gifts. For example, Pentecostal churches sometimes deny that a person has truly been baptized in the Holy Spirit if she does not speak in tongues. This leave people feeling like they are spiritually immature if they don't speak in tongues. In turn, these individuals may seek a further experience to increase their level of spirituality rather than seeking the Word of God.

This sort of thinking about Christian spirituality has lead to a weakened church. The church often measures spiritual maturity in terms of “spiritual experiences”. The Bible, however, measures Christians by their conformity to Christ, and He is already made known through His word. So not only is the seeking of “spiritual experiences” misguided, it is also counterproductive. Conformity to Christ comes about through an

accurate understanding of Bible and a submission to its teachings. Those who don't understand this should read what Paul said to Timothy concerning the Scriptures: "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

Conclusion

This paper has given a brief argument for the cessation of the sign gifts. While several arguments are given for this position, this paper focused on an argument from the nature of the sign gifts and their relation to the apostles. It was argued that the sign gifts were given directly to the apostles and that others who displayed these gifts had them because they received them from the apostles. Since those who received these gifts could not give them to anyone else, it follows that the sign gifts ceased shortly after the death of the apostles.

The church today, by and large, has fallen into a sort of quasi-Christianity that seeks experience rather than substance. It could be argued that the contemporary phenomenon of seeking experience over substance is largely due to the rise of charismatic and Pentecostal churches. Cessationism brings a much needed perspective on matters that are important to those churches. It reminds them of the apostolic roots of the church. Perhaps more importantly, it stresses the importance of basing one's faith on the objective word of God rather than on the subjective experiences of individuals.

Finally, Cessationism does not make a mockery of the church. The name of Christ has been tarnished in America because of the teachings and practices of charismatic's and Pentecostals. They have not understood the historic doctrines of the church. Nor are they

able to defend their faith because their faith is built on personal experience. This has resulted in the marginalization of the church. Cessationism, on the other hand, does not lead to these sorts of problems. You don't see Cessationists "barking in the Spirit" or knocking people over in church services. Cessationism must be taken more seriously, if for no other reason, because it must serve as a corrective to the excessive subjectivism in the church today.

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