

## **On the Cessation of the Charismata: The Protestant Polemic on Post-Biblical Miracles**

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Many Evangelicals today would affirm Bishop Butler's stern rebuke to John Wesley: "Sir the pretending to extraordinary revelations and gifts of the Holy Ghost is a horrid thing, a very horrid thing." (Cited by Ronald A. Knox, *Enthusiasm* [Oxford: The University Press, 1950], 450). What is the reason for such a revulsion to contemporary charismatic experience? Simply because, in the long evolution of Christian theology, miracles have come to signify the additional revelation of qualitatively new Christian doctrine, principally, in Scripture. To claim a revelation or a miracle represents an attempt, essentially, to add new content to the Bible.

The modern conflict over the cessation of miraculous gifts has antecedents as old as the fairly sophisticated arguments of early rabbinic Judaism. But the cessationist doctrine found its classic expression in post-Reformation era Calvinism: 1) The essential role of miraculous charismata was to accredit normative Christian doctrine and its bearers. 2) While God may providentially act in unusual, even striking ways, true miracles are limited to epochs of special divine revelation, i.e., those within the biblical period. 3) Miracles are judged by the doctrines they purport to accredit: if the doctrines are false, or alter orthodox doctrines, their accompanying miracles are necessarily counterfeit.

Since it is widely believed that Scripture alone is the basis for Protestant doctrine, it is no wonder, then, that the traditional post-Reformation arguments against contemporary miracles (cessationism) have been widely disseminated. But the case for the continuation of the whole range of God's gifts and graces has only recently been articulated in terms beyond its usual appeals to personal experience to those based more on serious historical and biblical study. Even within the latter area, the case for continuing spiritual gifts generally rests on a very few biblical texts, usually centering on 1 Cor 13:8-10. Theologically, the case is advanced on the simple assertion that because miracles are not limited to evidential functions in the Bible, and because prophecy is given mainly for "edification, exhortation and encouragement" and not construed as addition to a sufficient Scripture, the basic cessationist premise (that miraculous charismata necessarily accredit new doctrine) is bypassed. If the function of the charismata determines their duration, then their edificatory, rather than simply evidential functions determine their continuation.

The doctrine of cessationism, however, deserves a more thorough examination of its foundational premises, and a broader investigation of the relevant biblical witness, than it has heretofore received. It is to this need that this paper is presently addressed, in which are summarized the results of my Marquette University Ph.D. dissertation and adapted book, *On the Cessation of the Charismata: The Protestant Polemic on Post-Biblical Miracles* (Sheffield Univ. Acad. Press, 1993). Because of the space restrictions, this summary is necessarily bereft of many scriptural references, supporting documentation and scholarly opinion. For these I would refer you to my dissertation. The purpose of this survey is ultimately irenic, undertaken with the hope that a biblical understanding of charismatic function in its eschatological setting may defuse the conflict over cessationism.

The doctrine that revelatory and miraculous spiritual gifts passed away with the apostolic age may best be approached by examining the central premises of the most prominent and representative modern expression of cessationism, Benjamin B. Warfield's *Counterfeit Miracles* (CM). The thesis of this paper is that Warfield's polemic--the culmination of a historically evolving argument--fails because of internal inconsistencies with respect to its concept of miracle and its biblical hermeneutics.

This paper holds that contemporary cessationism stands upon certain post-Reformation and Enlightenment era conceptions of miracle-as-evidence, upon highly evolved, post-biblical emphases about the Holy Spirit, the kingdom of God and their normative expressions in the world. The central fault of Warfield's cessationism is that it is far more dogmatically than scripturally based. His cessationism

represents a failure to grasp the biblical portrayal of the eschatological outpouring of the Spirit of prophecy, expressed characteristically in the charismata, which are bestowed until the end of this age by the exalted Christ as manifestations of the advancing Kingdom of God.

The approach of this paper is to review: 1) the historical evolution of cessationism and the concept of miracle on which it depends; 2) to survey the theological setting in Scripture against which the cessationist polemic must be examined; 3) to scan a few representative passages of Scripture which summarize the recurring theme in the NT that Spiritual gifts are granted for the advance of God's kingdom and the maturity of the church until the end of this present age. This will be followed by a review of some biblical principles applicable to cessationism.

### **I. The Historical Evolution of Cessationism and Its View of Miracle**

Benjamin Warfield's "Protestant polemic" against continuing miracles is "Protestant" in that it seeks to protect the core principle of religious authority on which his tradition was based: the final, normative revelation of Christ in Scripture. From before the turn of the century until Warfield responded with his work, *Counterfeit Miracles* in 1918, Protestant religious authority had come under increasing attack, in Warfield's view, from a variety of competing religious movements. Warfield perceived that these religious bodies e.g., Roman Catholics, proto-pentecostals like the Irvingites, faith healers, as well as Christian Scientists and the theological liberals, were, to some degree heterodox, because they all shared an ominous flaw in faith or practice: openness to contemporary miraculous gifts.

Cessationism did not originate within orthodox Christianity, but within normative Judaism in the first three centuries of the common era. An early form of cessationism was directed at Jesus. One of the accusations which led to Jesus' execution was that he had violated the commands of Deuteronomy 13 and 18, which forbid performing a sign or a wonder to lead the people astray after false gods. The Mishnah and Talmud developed a sophisticated cessationist polemic, used not only against early charismatic Christians, but intramurally within Judaism by competing rabbis. (See Fredrick E. Greenspahn, "Why Prophecy Ceased." *JBL* 108 1 [Spring 1989]: 37-49).

Christian theologians at first attacked Jews with their own cessationism, but not until the fourth century did they employ the polemic against other Christians. These apologists, e.g. Justin and Origen, argued that God had withdrawn the Spirit of prophecy and miracles from the Jews and transferred it to the Church as proof of her continued divine favor. Thus they came to share with Jews an aberrant view of miracle: evidentialism. That is, the primary, if not exclusive, function of miracles is to accredit and vindicate the bearer of a doctrinal system.

Against some Christian sects who claimed unique access to the Spirit, or that the charismata would cease with them, the orthodox repeatedly cited 1 Corinthians 13:10 as proof for the continuation of spiritual gifts in all the Church until the *parousia*. By the time of Chrysostom (d. 407), however, cessationism provided the ecclesiastical hierarchy with a ready rationale against complaints of diminished charismatic activity in mainline churches. Their cessationist arguments ran in two contradictory directions. Miracles appeared unconditionally: required as scaffolding for the Church, which, once established no longer required such support; or conditionally: that if the Church became more righteous, the charismata would reappear.

John Calvin turned the cessationist polemic against Roman Catholicism and the radical reformation, undercutting their claims to religious authority they based on miracles and revelations. Calvin popularized the restriction of miracles to the accreditation of the apostles and specifically to their gospel, though he was less rigid about cessationism than most of his followers. Nevertheless from Aquinas through the Enlightenment, the concept of miracle assumed an increasingly rationalistic cast, until it became a cornerstone of the Enlightenment apologetic of Locke, Newton, Glanville and Boyle, but a millstone in Hume.

Hume's skepticism about the possibility of miracles, the ultimate cessationist polemic (which exemplified Warfield's historical critical method in his examination of post-biblical miracle claims), precipitated the response of Scottish Common Sense Philosophy (SCSP), a somewhat rationalistic apologetic made widely popular by William Paley's *Christian Evidences*. Paley argued from the divine

design of nature, predictive (Messianic) prophecy and from (biblical) miracles. SCSP epistemology was short-lived in Europe but came to dominate American thought so thoroughly that for about a century, the Romantic reaction, so widespread in Europe, scarcely gained a foothold.

Nowhere had the Enlightenment era Scottish philosophy been more warmly nurtured than at Princeton seminary, where Warfield was its last major expression. Warfield seems unconscious of the impact of SCSP on his thought. but his CM rests solidly on its epistemology, and from it, his concept of miracle, discernible as such to anyone of “common sense.”

Warfield's concept of miracle required an essentially deistic view of nature invaded by a supernatural force so utterly transcendent that, to an impartial observer acquainted with the facts, no possible natural “means” could produce such an effect. A miracle must be instantaneous, absolute and total to qualify. A startling, dramatic healing may occur today so that “the supernaturalness of the act may be apparent as to demonstrate God's activity in it to all right-thinking minds conversant with the facts.” But to call such an event a miracle is to obscure the division between miracles and the “general supernatural” (CM, 163). Similarly, Warfield divides NT spiritual gifts into those which are “distinctively gracious” (“ordinary gifts”) and those which are “distinctly miraculous” (“extraordinary”) gifts.

On the one hand, Warfield insists that making such distinctions is “simply a question of evidence,” (*The Selected Shorter Writings of Warfield* [Philppsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1973], 175) and on the other a matter of one's *a priori*. It is no surprise, then, that when Warfield spends perhaps 97% of CM “sifting” the evidence on post biblical miracles throughout Church history, he arrives at “an incomparable inventory of objections to the supernatural.” (Colin Brown, *Miracles and the Critical Mind* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984], 199). Warfield at the outset has already decided their fate when he insists that miracles may only occur as “the credentials of the Apostles” and “necessarily passed away with them” (CM, 6). Warfield's cessationism involves a double standard: in CM he applies the same rationalistic critical methods as Hume and Harnack to postbiblical miracles that he attacks in liberal critics who apply them to the biblical accounts.

Biblically, discernment of a miracle is neither “simply a question of evidence,” nor is it simply based on one's *a priori* position. A miracle is an event perceived, in varying degrees of accuracy (*e.g.*, John 12:29), by divine revelation. “The natural man cannot accept the matters [gifts] of the Spirit” for they are “discerned by the Spirit” (1 Cor 2:14).

Not only is Warfield's understanding of miracle-discernment unbiblical, but his understanding of their function as well. By demanding a strict evidentialist function for miracles, Warfield confuses the sufficiency of revelation, *i.e.*, in the unique historical manifestation of Christ and essential Christian doctrine, with the ongoing means of communicating, applying and actualizing that revelation, *i.e.*, via such charismata as prophecy and miracles. We see below that the charismata do not so much accredit the Gospel as they express and concretize the Gospel. Just as sound and inspired preaching applies, but does not change, the all-sufficient Scripture, so true gifts of prophecy, knowledge or wisdom reveal human needs, directing them to God's truth within the eternally-sealed limits of the biblical canon. Just as gifts of administration or hospitality tangibly express the gospel and advance the kingdom of God, but do not alter its doctrinal content, so likewise, gifts of healing and miracles.

For Warfield, the inerrant authority of Scripture was the bedrock of his theology. So it is ironic that in only a few scattered pages of CM does he seek scriptural support for his cessationist polemic.

## **II. The Eschatological, Charismatic Spirit Manifests the Advance of the Kingdom of God until the Parousia.**

Warfield's polemic failed to comprehend the broad sweep of biblical theology when it addressed the crucial eschatological dimension of the charismata in pneumatology and in the presentation of the kingdom of God. These doctrines, as they appear in classical Protestant systematic theologies, have been grotesquely misshapen by a long evolution of tangential dogmatic conflicts. Even after competent biblical studies have been published on these areas, not only Warfield, but most other systematicians have been reluctant to utilize the results. Warfield's evidentialist function for miracles, the foundation for

cessationism, is reductionistic and superficial in view of the dominating role for miracles in the biblically formulated, eschatologically conditioned doctrines of pneumatology and the kingdom of God.

#### **A. A Biblical Doctrine of the Holy Spirit Is Inimical to Cessationism**

Warfield's desire to limit the Spirit's contemporary miraculous and revelatory work is not only to confuse the finality of revelation with its mode of presentation and application, but also to change the essential character of the Holy Spirit as biblically defined and to alienate his pneumatology from its clear and authoritative biblical grounding. If we apply Warfield's own biblical hermeneutic to every scriptural context on the Holy Spirit, it reveals a profile of the Spirit's activity that is characteristically, if not exclusively, miraculously charismatic--the virtual consensus of serious biblical scholarship. Specifically, in a broad sense, the Spirit of the Bible is the Spirit of prophecy. To speak of the Spirit's "subsequent [post-apostolic] work" as functioning only within the Calvinistic *ordo salutis*, demonstrates that the Holy Spirit of post Reformation cessationism is far removed from the portrayal of the Spirit in the canonical Scriptures. Most significantly, Warfield's pneumatology fails to account for the great Old Testament promises of the specifically prophetic Spirit *to be poured out upon all eschatological generations who believe*, beginning with those in the New Testament era (Isa 47:3; 59:21; Joel 2:28-32; cf. Acts 2:4, 38).

#### **B. A Biblical Doctrine of the Kingdom of God Is Inimical to Cessationism**

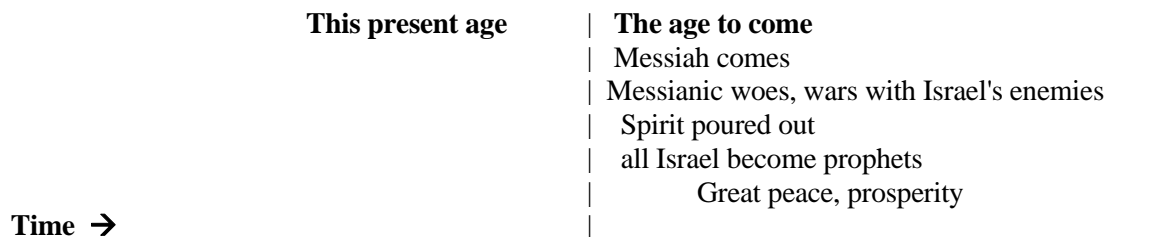
Warfield failed also to address the important implications of the doctrine of the kingdom of God. Its nature is essentially that of warfare against the kingdom of Satan and its ruinous effects (Mt 4:23; 9:35; 10:6,7; 12:28 Lk 11:20; Lk 9:2,60; 10:1-2,9,11; Acts 10:38). The NT teaches that Jesus' earthly mission was to inaugurate the kingdom of God in charismatic power, and that he is to continue that mission through Christian believers, beginning with his disciples and their converts and continuing until the end of the age. As a rabbi's good disciples, his followers are to duplicate and continue exactly his work ("teaching them to obey all that I commanded you," Mt 28:20), in this case, to demonstrate and articulate the inbreaking Kingdom. This is shown by: 1) an analysis of the commissioning accounts of Mt 10, Mk 6; Lk 9 and 10; Mt 28:19-20 [cf 24:14]; Lk 24:49 and Acts 1:4,5,8); 2) the characteristic way in which the kingdom was demonstrated articulated in Acts; and 3) by the summary statements of Paul's ministry among the Gentiles throughout his epistles (Rom 15:18-20; 1 Cor 2:4; 2 Cor 12:12; 1 Th 1:5, cf. Acts 15:i2). Thus, the "signs of a true apostle," or of any Christian, do not accredit anyone as a bearer of orthodoxy, but rather, characterize the way in which the commissions of Jesus to proclaim and demonstrate ("in word and deed") the eschatological kingdom of God are normatively expressed by any believer. Whether in the context of an unevangelized crowd of pagans, or within the Church community itself, wherever the Spirit displaces the kingdom of darkness in its various manifestations of evil, whether sin, sickness or demonic possession, the kingdom of God has provisionally arrived. Such victories of repentance, healing or other restoration from the demonic world, represent a continuing, though partial experience of the fully realized and uncontested reign of God to come.

The essential nature of the kingdom of God is divine power--directed toward reconciliation of man to God, of righteousness, peace and joy--displacing the rule and ruin of the demonic ("The kingdom of God does not consist in talk, but in *dunamis*," 1Cor 4:20). Of the 98 contexts of divine *dunamis* in the NT, 65 refer to what the Protestant tradition would designate as "extraordinary" or "miraculous" charismata, 33 of the cases refer to the power of God without clear indication in the immediate context as to the exact way in which God's power is working. See the discussion of the Holy Spirit and his relation to charismatic power in the appendix of my dissertation, "On the Cessation of the Charismata," esp. p. 323. The New Testament miracles do not appear simply to accredit preaching (or, "the word"); rather the preaching in most cases articulated the miracle, placing it in its Christological setting and demanding a believing and repentant response. Presently, the exalted Christ continues to pour out his charismata upon his Church to empower his kingdom mission until the end of the age (see sec. 11,D, below). It is simply unbiblical to say as Warfield does, that after an initial outpouring of spiritual gifts in the apostolic age to reveal and establish Church doctrine, the exalted Christ's "work has been done."

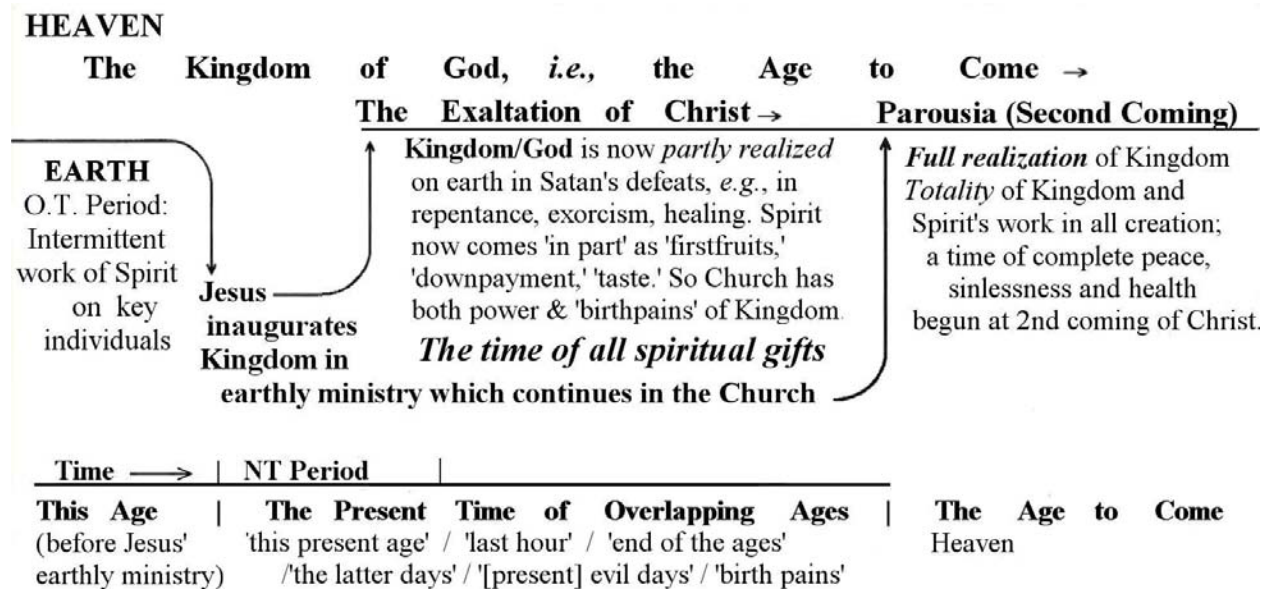
**C. The Specifically Eschatological Dimension of the Doctrines of Pneumatology and the Kingdom of God Is Inimical to Cessationism**

Warfield's failure to grasp the eschatological implications for cessationism is perhaps the most crucial. He nowhere notices that the Old Testament promises of the Spirit of prophecy and miracles apply to the entire time between the two comings of the Messiah; that Jesus' "authority power" granted in his commissions to his Church is extended to all nations and is to continue until the end of the age--a frequently repeated theme in the New Testament epistles. The Spirit of revelation and power is bestowed all during this age as his own "downpayment," "first-fruits" or "taste" of "the powers of the age to come," until the time of the fullness of the Spirit in the consummated kingdom of God. The first coming of Jesus represented, in Oscar Cullmann's metaphor, "D-Day" the decisive battle (properly at the resurrection) which raged on, with its sufferings, victories and defeats, toward its ultimate victory at "V-Day" (the *parousia*). Below are diagrams of the Old and New Testament views of history which originated from a Princeton Seminary colleague of Warfield's, Gerhardus Vos, in his *Pauline Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1930; repr., 1961), 38.

The original schema of the Old Testament and the rabbis was strictly linear:



The New Testament introduces the overlapping period of the Messianic reign, during which time the Church carries out the final commission by the power of the Spirit sent from the exalted Lord Jesus. The first descending and ascending lines represent the incarnation, inauguration of the Kingdom and ascension of the Messiah Jesus, and the third, his *parousia* at the end of this present age:



The New Testament expressly ties the presence of the charismata to the exalted Lordship of Jesus. During his earthly ministry, Jesus promises the Spirit to “those who believe in him” only after he was exalted: “Up to that time the Spirit had not yet been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified” (Jn 7:39). Similarly, the Paraclete cannot come until Jesus has gone to the Father (16:7,17). The “greater -works” of those who believe in him can be performed only because Jesus goes to his Father (14:12). Peter continues the same theme in Acts: “Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit, and has poured out what you now see and hear” (2:33). The same Jesus whom God has made “both Lord and Christ” now, on the basis of repentance and baptism, will bestow the gift of the Holy Spirit to all (2:36b,38-39). Against this brief sketch of the place of charismata in biblical theology, which was largely available in the scholarship of his day, Warfield never made a reply.

Finally, Warfield the exegete, beyond his failure to engage the theological issues above, failed even to acquaint himself with the brief, but significant passages of Scripture which in and of themselves taught the continuation of the charismata. It is because Warfield is first and foremost the biblicist, and because he claims to have structured his whole polemic on “two legs,” an investigation into history and scripture, that his omission is so glaring and so disappointing.

#### **D. New Testament Passages Reiterating the Pattern of Continuing Charismata during the Time of Christ's Present Exaltation until the End of the Age**

The following are a series of paraphrases of Scriptures which restate the role of the charismata in the eschatological framework outlined above: the charismata continue during this age to minister toward the (as yet unrealized) goal of complete maturity of the church. Again, expressed biblically, the divine “Spirit” is presented in Scripture as associated primarily and essentially performing charismatic operations. The exegetical support for these interpretive paraphrases have been worked out in the dissertation.

**1. I Corinthians 1:4-8** “I always thank God for you because of God's grace (including the whole range of charismata) because in every way you have been enriched in him--in every kind of speech (including prophecy) and in every kind of knowledge (including the gift of revealed knowledge). You are doing this now *exactly as (kathos)* the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you (that is, charismatically, by the apostles and or evangelists who first demonstrated articulated the gospel to you)--with the result that you do not now lack an,; spiritual gift during the time you are awaiting the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ. (The Lord) will also (not merely when the gospel first came to you, or even only now, but will) *continue to confirm/ strengthen* you (in the same way as you are now experiencing the charismata **until** the time you are 'awaiting' the end) *until the end*, so that (via the strengthening and purifying charismata which generates growth and progressive maturity) you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

**2. 1 Corinthians 13:8-13** “Love never ends: it continues on into the age to come. But wherever the charismatic operations of prophecies, tongues speaking or revealed knowledge occur, they will be ended. Like childhood, they all represent an incomplete, yet necessary stage of God's eternal plan.

But when will these three (representative) gifts, i.e., the charismata generally, cease? The eschatological principle is this: when the complete (end) arrives, at that precise point, the incomplete will be ended. Specifically, when Christ returns at the end of this present age, then, and not a moment before, the charismata--gifts of prophecy, tongues and revealed knowledge here offered as examples--which are incomplete compared to the ultimate heavenly realities they only now indicate, will all come to an end, having served their temporary purpose.

Let us note three or four illustrations of this point. First, when I was a baby (representing our present existence) I babbled, thought and reasoned (i.e., the present charismata of speech and knowledge) like a baby--a necessary and positive development to be sure--all of which would be related to what was to come. But at adulthood (our existence in heaven), this stage is superseded by vastly greater powers of communication, thinking and reasoning.

Second, in the present age, the charismata only serve as indirect or indistinct perceptions of God or his will, like looking into a mirror or a photograph. But in heaven, the mirror or photograph (the charismata) are unnecessary if we can see God 'face to face.' At that point these items, which had helped preserve the somewhat distant relationship, will have served their purpose and will be discarded, since we will have the real person before us.

Third, in this present age, I know God, but the charismata reveal Him to me only in glimpses and hints. But then, in heaven, I will know God (*kathos*) exactly as, and to the same degree God knows me now. Of what use will be those tentative and imprecise gifts of revealed knowledge under those conditions?

(Fourth), in this present age, faith, hope and love, all three function, but like the other charismata, faith (which is a charism of revelation, which, if acted upon, can produce miracles or any other aspect of God's salvation), and hope (another gift of God which is superseded if it results in the presence and reality of its object), will both be unnecessary because of their 'waiting characteristic; in heaven, the waiting will be over. By contrast, love is greater, because, unlike faith, hope and the other charismata, love never ends."

**3. Ephesians 4:11-13** "[The ascended Christ] gave some apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor/teachers (not to accredit the gospel or its bearers, but) for the perfecting of the saints toward the work of ministry, toward the building up of the body of Christ. [But for how long?] These gifts are distributed, in principle (vs. 7) 'to each' *until (mechri)--an ongoing process of distribution--the following state is attained, i.e., that we all arrive: at the unity of the faith, at the full knowledge of the Son of God, into full, mature adulthood, that is, to the level of stature (maturity) of the fullness of Christ.*" (Note: even Paul has not "attained" to this state [Phil 3:12]).

**4. Ephesians 1:13-23** In the context of believers' receiving "all wisdom and understanding" (1:8) and Paul's continued prayer for the same (1:17) and to experience ("know") [Christ's] incomparably great power--like that of the resurrection], Paul describes the time frame: "In him, when you believed, you were marked with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit [or first installment--the first payment of the same to follow] guaranteeing our inheritance (described, *inter alia* as "incomparably great," etc., like resurrection power in 1:19), *until (eis)* the redemption of those who are God's possession--to the praise of his glory." This state of affairs is active in believers and is paralleled to the exaltation of Christ which occurs "not only in the present age, but also in the one to come" (1:21-23, cf 2:6).

**6. Ephesians 3:14-21** Paul's prayer is that the readers may "have power through the Spirit" that in love they "*may have power together with all the saints* [an explicit universal application]... to the goal that you may be filled to the measure of aR the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, *according to the power that is at work within us*, to Him be glory, *in the church and in Christ Jesus, throughout all generations* for ever and ever. Amen." Cf. Isa 59:21.

**7. Ephesians 4:30** With Eph 1:13-23 above, the time period of the Spirit's prophetic presence in the believer is restated: "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God [an allusion to ignoring prophetic warning, e.g., Isa 63:10? cf. Eph 4:29] with whom you were sealed [an ongoing mark of ownership and protection] *until (eis)* the day of redemption."

**8. Ephesians 5:15-19** In the present evil days (characteristic of the time of the Messianic woes [Mt 24:9-12; 1 Tim 3:1 preceding the *parousia*, don't be drunk on wine, but continue to "be filled with the Spirit (cf Jer 23:9; Amos 2:12; Acts 2:13,15; Lk 1:15). Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs" (i.e., glossolalic singing? 1 Cor 14:13-17)--perhaps representative of the whole range of charismatic prophetic operations to continue during these "present evil days."

**9. Ephesians 6:10-20** "Be empowered (closely assoc. with "miracle/mighty work" in the NT) in the Lord and in his mighty power... struggling against demonic forces... with sword of Spirit--the word of God (prophecy)--and constant prayer. [Since we are in the time of the Messianic woes that Jesus predicted about standing before magistrates, etc. I pray that *words will be given me*][divine passive] (Mt10:19b-20 Mk13:11--"it is not you speaking but the Holy Spirit").

**10. Philippians 1:5-10** “Christ who has begun a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. What work? sharing in God's grace (and imitating Paul, 3:17; 4:9--necessarily including the charismata (cf. Mt 28:20 “teaching them all that I have commanded you”) in defending and confirming--a word in this context speaking of charismata, signs and wonders). And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and perception (charismata of revelation), so that y u may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless *until (eis)* the day of Christ.”

**11. Colossians 1:9-12** “We have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all Spiritual wisdom and understanding (revelatory gifts)... being strengthened with *all po-er...* to build spiritual maturity, looking toward (though already provisionally experiencing) the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. Indeed we have already been brought into that kingdom.”

**12. 1 Thessalonians 1:5-8** In view of the rabbi-disciple model in # 10, above, the normative transmission of the gospel in “word and deed” in this passage. “our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power (*en dunamei*), with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction.... You became imitators of us and of the Lord . . . . And so (it follows) *you yourselves became models* to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia.” The pattern of the gospel's normative pattern of transmission in the miraculous power of the Spirit was carried over into a third generation--two away from Paul, i.e., those upon whom apostolic hands would not be laid! All with the goal of building Christian maturity until the end of this age.

**13. 1 Thessalonians 5:11-23** In a strong eschatological context of the *parousia* Paul encourages believers to continue edifying each other in love: “Do not put out the Spirit's fire [paralleled with]; do not treat prophecies with contempt. Test them and heed the good ones, in view of the goal of being blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The One who calls you will be faithful to preserve you (using these charismata, cf. 1 Cor 1:4-81 etc.)”

**14. 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12** “For which--in an ongoing process toward the goal [that You win be counted worthy at the coming of Christ] we constantly pray for you that our God will count you worthy and may fulfill your every good purpose *and every work of faith in power (en dunamei)*, so that the name of our Lord Jesus might be glorified in you and you in him.”

**15. 1 Peter 1:5** “Through faith you are being shielded by God's power (*en dunamei*), *until (eis)* a salvation ready to be revealed at the last time.”

**16. 1 Peter 4:7-12** “The end of all things [the goal and context of this warning] is near.... Each one should use whatever spiritual gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks--as the oracles of God.” Most commentators see this as a reference to NT prophecy. The parenthesis is given against the approaching end, with the understanding that prophecy is to be operative up until that point.

**17. 1 John 2:26-28** As an antidote to false prophets, John encourages the gift of prophecy: “Dear children, *this is the last hour* ... But *all of you have an anointing* from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth . As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need any one to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit--just as it has taught you, remain in him . . . . continue in him, so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming.” This passage is strikingly parallel to the promise of the Paraclete to the apostles (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:13f). Here the promise is to the general readers!

**18. Jude 18-21** [As Jesus prophesied] “*In the last times...* there will be those who follow their own human desires, and who do not have the Spirit. By contrast, you, beloved, during these same “last times,” edify yourselves in your most holy faith by *praying in the Spirit*.” “Praying in the Spirit” = praying in response to the direct leading of the Spirit--a revelatory process, or, as in 1, Cor 14:4,14,15, in glossolalic prayer (“one who “*prays in the Spirit*” *edifies* himself).

Each of these passages, then, continues the pattern of Jesus' commissions to his disciples to demonstrate articulate the Kingdom in the power of the Spirit--to the 12, the 70 (72), the 120--as



archetypes of “all of the Lord's people” (including the readers of these verses) whom Moses wished would all be filled with the Spirit of prophecy (Num 11:29; cf., Isa 59:21; Joel 2:28-30; 1 Cor 14:1,5,39).

### **E. The Clear Statements of Scripture Regarding the Charismata Are Inimical to Cessationism**

Warfield also fails to perceive that the explicitly stated commands to fulfill the biblical conditions for the manifestation of the charismata (e.g., repentance, faith and prayer) contradict his unconditional, temporary connection of the charismata with the apostles and the introduction of their doctrine. He also fails to account for the many explicit biblical commands directly to seek, desire and employ the very charismata he claims have ceased. How can Warfield ignore these biblically explicit conditions and commands for the continuation of the charismata, if, as he insists, the Bible continues as the normative guide to the Church for her faith and praxis?

#### **1. Commands to Faith and Prayer for the Appearance of the Charismata**

The New Testament repeatedly exhorts its readers that the appearance of God's charismatic power correlates with human response, specifically, in faith and prayer. This need not imply that these work magically, in some sense “forcing” God to act. But it is clear that anyone, quickened by the Spirit, is commanded, either by precept or example, to respond, for example, in faith and prayer to God's graces. Peter, in his Pentecost sermon urges, “Repent and be baptized every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off--for all whom the Lord our God will call.” Repentance, aggressive turning from this present world to enter the kingdom of God and its charismatic blessings, is a strong theme in the teaching of Jesus (e.g., Mt 13:44-45; 10:7,8 Lk 9:1,2; cf. 10:9).

In the synoptic gospels, almost all of the references to faith relate it to the power of God for physical needs, primarily healing. Jesus stresses the need for faith for miracles (“your faith has saved you”: Mk 5:34 Mt 9:22 Lk 8:48, cf. 7:50; “made you whole”: 17:19; Mk 10:52 Lk 18:42). The context shows similar connections in Mt 8:10 Lk 7:9, cf. Jn 4:46-54; Mk 2:5 Mt 9:2; Lk 5:20; Mt 15:28, cf. Jn. 11:40. Even for control over the elements Jesus commands faith (Mk 4:40 Mt 8:26 Lk 8:25); even to walk on the water (Mt 14:31), to uproot mountains and trees by faith (Mk 11:20-25; Mt 17:20-21; 21:20-22; Lk 17:6, cf. I Cor 13:2). In fact, he says, “Everything is possible to those who have faith” (Mk 9:23)! Conversely, where there is unbelief Jesus does no miracles (Mk 6:5-6 Mt 13:58).

This commitment is carried on in the apostolic church. The story of the healing of the lame man teaches explicitly that miracles do not derive from apostolic accreditation, but from the power of faith (in this case, that of the lame man) in the exalted Christ (Acts 3:12, 16; cf. 4:9-12; see the similar teaching in 14:9). Paul commands his readers to “prophesy according to your faith” (Rom. 12:6; cf. 12:3; Eph. 4:7,16), and connects the faith of a local congregation, not accreditation of doctrine, with the working of miracles (Gal. 3:5). Cyril H. Powell, in *The Biblical Concept of Power* (London: Epworth Press, 1963), 185-85, cites a number of similar examples in Paul and concludes, “Paul has learned that *pistis* [faith] is the way to God's gifts [of power].” Scripture offers many other examples relating prayer and the appearance of miracles in the ministry of Jesus and the apostles, e.g., in the miracle of exorcism in Mk 9:28; similarly in Acts 4:30 prayer “to stretch out your [God's] hand to heal and perform miracles in the name of your holy servant Jesus”; 4:33, 8:15, 9:40; 28:8. See G.W.H. Lampe, “The Holy Spirit in the Writings of St. Luke,” *Studies in the Gospels*, ed. D.E. Nineham (Oxford: Blackwell, 1952), 169. Paul continually prays for his converts that they might abound in “knowledge and all perception” or “all Spiritual wisdom and understanding” (including charismatic revelation), as well as “in all power” (*dunamis*--not excluding its most frequent NT meaning, “miracle”--Phil 1:9-10; Col 1:9-12). James makes the crucial point that the appearance of miracles is not a function of accrediting prophets, but of righteous, believing and fervent prayer (5:16-17). James points to Elijah as an example for his readers to follow, not a saint to be accredited with miracles. Why cannot this principle be applied to the New Testament worthies as well?

## 2. Direct Commands to Desire, Seek and Employ the Charismata

Closely related to the argument above that the function of the charismata determines their duration, is the argument from Scripture that the appearance of the charismata depends, not on accrediting functions, but on human responses to explicit biblical commands, e.g., simply to seek, request and employ the charismata, on the basis of prior repentance and obedience toward God, via faith and prayer. To deny that these commands of Scripture, woven so thoroughly throughout the fabric of the New Testament, have relevance today, is to call into question the very relevance of the scriptural canon for the Church of any age. These are not commands simply to the apostles, but often by apostles to the “laity.” In any case, all these biblical commands can be construed as parenetic to the Church at large.

The New Testament specifically commands its readers to “seek,” “desire earnestly,” “rekindle” and “employ” certain “miraculous” charismata (1 Cor 12:3 1; 14:1, 4, 5, and 39; 2 Tm 1:6; 1 Pt 4: 10, cf. Jn 14:12-14; 15:7; 16:23-24--ask for “anything” in the context of the Spirit's descent to the disciples; Jn 3:21-22) and implies that their appearance can be suppressed by simple neglect (Rom 12:6; 1 Cor 14:39; 1 Th 5:19-20; 1 Tm 4:14; 2 Tm 1:6). On the latter verse, J.N.D. Kelly affirms that “the idea that this grace operates automatically is excluded.” (*The Pastoral Epistles*, Harper's New Testament Commentaries [New York: Harper and Row, 1963], 159). He compares this passage with the “quenching” of the Spirit of prophecy in 1 Th. 5:19. Biblical commands, “let us use,” “strive to excel [in spiritual gifts],” “desire earnestly,” “do not quench,” etc., make little sense canonically if the occurrence of the charismata bears no relation to the obedience of these commands.

## 3. Cessationism and Five Biblical Principles Regarding the Charismata

Cessationism is inimical to at least five more important NT principles regarding the charismata.

1. Paul implicitly challenges the belief that the miraculous gifts of the Spirit were granted only for the establishment of doctrine for the Church, which then would carry on more or less under its own interpretive intellect with a greatly restricted activity of the Spirit. Paul exclaims to the Galatians who were tempted by a resurgent Judaism to exchange their calling as prophets for that of the scribes and a religion of Torah-study and works-righteousness: “Having begun in the Spirit [the context indicates a miracle-producing Spirit], will you now be completed, or reach maturity (*epiteleisthe*) in the flesh?” Paul does not force a choice between the charismata of prophecy and miracle versus biblical precepts; he insisted upon both. Scripture itself affirms the ongoing process of spiritual perfecting (maturing) in this age as being normatively developed by the whole range of the charismata, which, within the framework of Scripture, reveal Christ even as they illuminate, apply, express and actualize his Gospel. Against cessationism, the NT insists that the Church is both initiated *and* *matured* by the whole range of the Spirit's gifts.

2. Romans 11:29 states a principle that could hardly be more clearly anti-cessationist: that from God's side, his radical and unconditional grace offers to sustain the above process all during the present age: “God's *gifts (charismata)* and his call are irrevocable--not repented of, or withdrawn.” The context shows that the human failure to receive God's call, or charismata, does not at all require that they are sovereignly withdrawn in Church history, but rather that they cannot become manifested in those to who reject them. Accordingly, it may be this very unhappy state of the Church that Paul foresaw: an intellectualized quasi-deism among those having “a form of religion, while denying its power (*dunamis*)” (2 Tm 3:5).

One might argue here that this verse applies only to “salvation,” specifically to the Jews, and not to the gifts of the Spirit. But here one must follow Paul's logic. Paul bases the promise of salvation of the Jews as being true *because it is a sub-set of the generalization* that the *charismata* will not be withdrawn, and not vice versa.

3. Still another Pauline principle is that no one member, *i.e.*, charismatic function, of the body of Christ can say to another, “I have no need of you” (1 Cor 12:21). Cessationism says precisely that. Similarly, no one who is gifted in a specific way may demand that all the body become as he, say, a tongue! The point of 1 Cor 12 is that for a body to be a body at all it must have all its functions working

reciprocally for the good of the whole, each recognizing not only its own value, but also the crucial importance of the others as well. By its very nature, cessationism violates this key biblical principle.

4. The cessationist schema that miracles cluster around great revelatory events to establish the truth of that revelation does not bear scrutiny. Jeremiah lays down an explicit principle about the distribution of divine signs and wonders in 32:20, “You performed signs and wonders in Egypt *and have continued them to this day, both in Israel and among all mankind!*” Moreover, while new, enscripturated revelation abounded during and just after the Exodus, there was relatively little new doctrinal content added during the miracle working time of Elijah and Elisha, and certainly no more new revelation in Daniel than, say, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel or the other prophets.

Moreover, the greatest new revelation of all was announced by John the Baptist, who “did no Miracle” (Jn 10:41). The contention that miracles faded as one moves toward the end of Acts thus indicating the onset of the cessation of miracles is misleading. Much of the last part of Acts relates to an imprisoned Paul, who, when released for normal ministry at the end of the book practically empties the island of Malta of its sick (Acts 28:9)! Further, to argue that because “Jews seek signs and Greeks seek wisdom” (1Cor 1:22), that Christian evangelism moved from an evangelism characterized by miracles to one characterized by reasoned discourse (and remained there for the rest of Church history) flies in the face of Paul’s own characterization of his highly charismatic gospel among the Gentiles (Acts 15:12; Rom 15:19; 2 Cor 12: 12; 1 Thess 1:5). More importantly, following the tradition of Jesus who refused signs to those who demanded them for evidential proof (Mk 8:11-11; Mt 12:38-39; Lk 11:16, 29) Paul insists his reaction to the unbelieving demand for a sign (or wisdom) is not to willingly provide them, as this argument would have it, but to preach the “wisdom and power of God” Christ crucified only to those who could receive it.

5. Finally, the essence of cessationism--the limitation of miracles to new revelation and its bearers--contradicts another biblical principle, namely, the biblical desire to see the Spirit of prophecy and miracle to be as broadly spread as possible. The classic case is Num 11:26-29 where Joshua is threatened by the loss of Moses’ “accreditation” by the prophetic Spirit. Moses replies, “Are you jealous for my sake? I wish all the Lord’s people were prophets and that the Lord would put His Spirit on them!” The subsequent OT prophets foresaw an ideal time when the Spirit would be bestowed broadly upon all categories- of humanity (Joel 2:28-29, cf. Acts 2:17-18, 21, 39). Similarly, Jesus refused to stop those who cast out demons in his name, though not directly associated with him (Mk 9:38-40//Lk 9:49-50). No doubt this logion was recorded for the Church in response to exorcists, or perhaps those exercising spiritual gifts generally, who were not only not apostles, but not even church members! At that point the “accrediting” function of miracles becomes a little thin. Paul prays for “*all the saints* [Jew and Gentile]” that they might experience gifts of revelation, knowledge and power [*dunamis*] at the level of resurrection power that Jesus experienced (so also, 1 Cor 12:6; 14:1, 5, 24, 39; Gal 3:5, 14; Eph 5:18; Col 1:9-14, etc.). Against cessationism, then, this brief sketch shows the biblical (and divine) impulse to offer the power of the Spirit to all who would respond to it, rather than limit it to a few founders of the Christian community whose status must be enhanced.

## **F. Implications and Conclusions**

The frequent failure. to respond to God’s commands to manifest the Kingdom of God in power is fully shared by most believers, “charismatics” and non-charismatics alike. Both groups tend to shape their theology and consequent practice on the basis of their own experience--or lack of it--rather than on a fresh and radical in its original sense) view of Scripture. The presence or absence of certain charismata in one’s experience proves nothing at all about one’s spiritual status or destiny (Mt 7:21-22). Neither “charismatics” or “non-” are more or less “saved” than the other; both are at once sinful, but justified by grace alone. Nevertheless, the NT offers patterns as to how the Gospel is to be presented, received and lived out. We must not attempt to reframe our failures into virtues that is, by allowing what the New Testament describes as “unbelief” in and for the gifts of God, to be construed as having chosen “the better way” of a “stronger faith” without them. The rabbis’ intellectualized biblical knowledge which led to their

cessationism, prompted Jesus to affirm that they knew (in the biblical sense) “neither the Scriptures nor the power of God” (Mt 22:29 Mk 12:24).

Much divisiveness over the gifts of the Spirit today derives from a common premise held by both sides of the debate: evidentialism. If spiritual gifts are adduced as proofs of spiritual status or attainment, rather than used as tools for humble service for others, then conflict naturally follows. The core temptation to the first and Second Adam, and by extension to all of us, was to use spiritual knowledge and power to accredit one's independent and exalted religious status, instead of through them, rendering glory, obedience and service to God. Spiritual gifts are powerful weapons against the kingdom of darkness; but misapplied in evidentialist polemics they can wound and destroy the people of God.

The charismata, then, reflect the very nature of God, who does not share his glory with another. Similarly, God is a Spirit of power, “who changeth not.” If the Church has “begun in the Spirit,” let us not attempt to change God's methods to complete our course in the weakness of human flesh. Since it is the Father's pleasure to “give good gifts to them who ask Him,” it must be our pleasure to receive them humbly.

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This article is an adaptation of Chapter 4 from the book based on the author's PhD dissertation, *On the Cessation of the Charismata: The Protestant Polemic on Post-biblical Miracles* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield University Academic Press, 1993).