

SOME THOUGHTS ON THE CESSATION OF MIRACULOUS GIFTS

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I. Introduction

A. Churches of Christ generally, along with most groups that wear the name Christ, believe the Spirit is no longer bestowing on Christians the ability to perform miracles. There is no dispute that in the first century the Holy Spirit bestowed on some Christians the ability to perform miracles, including the ability to prophesy and to speak in "tongues" (e.g., 1 Cor. 12:4-11, 28). The question is whether the Spirit is still giving these particular gifts to the church.

B. Note that the question is *not* whether God still intervenes in the affairs of mankind, or whether the Spirit still works in other ways, but whether the Spirit still gives to individual Christians the ability to perform miracles.

C. Those who claim the Spirit is still providing miraculous abilities to Christians are generally classified as Pentecostals, charismatics, or the Third Wave.

1. Pentecostal denominations (e.g., Assemblies of God and the Church of God in Christ) trace their historical origin back to the "Pentecostal revival" that began in the United States in 1901. Pentecostals (and some charismatics) believe that the miraculous gifts are bestowed in a post-conversion experience, what they call being "baptized in the Spirit," and that this event is marked by speaking in tongues.

2. The term "charismatic" is a theologically looser description that refers to people or groups that, for the most part, have refrained from forming separate denominations. They trace their historical origins to the charismatic movement of the 1960's and 1970's. Charismatics differ among themselves on Pentecostal claims that baptism in the Spirit is subsequent to conversion and that speaking in tongues is a sign of baptism in the Spirit.

3. The "Third Wave" arose in the 1980's and is most notably associated with the Vineyard Churches. "Third Wavers" (and some charismatics) deny that baptism in the Spirit is a post-conversion experience and deny that it is necessarily marked by speaking in tongues. They believe that all are baptized in the Spirit at conversion, meaning all receive the Spirit, and that the Spirit gives different gifts to different people, including miraculous gifts. One significant figure in the Third Wave movement (Peter Wagner) describes it as "those who want the 'signs and wonders' of charismatic manifestations without the theology or labels of the Pentecostal/charismatic movement."

II. Variation in the Spirit's Working

A. The first thing to note is that the Spirit has not always worked in the same way throughout history. This is apparent from the fact no Scripture has been written since the first century. Whatever one may think about other miraculous works of the Spirit, clearly the Spirit has not continuously moved men to write the word of God (2 Pet. 1:20-21). And everyone agrees that this change in the Spirit's ministry does not conflict with the truth that Jesus is the same yesterday and today and forever (Heb. 13:8).

B. Other miraculous activities also occur unevenly in biblical history.

1. At certain times miracles ceased altogether (Amos 8:11-12; Ps. 74:9, 77:11), and though prolonged and complete cessation was the exception, at least from Moses to the exile (Jer. 32:20), miracles never occurred uniformly or regularly (1 Sam. 3:1). Rather, they were concentrated during certain eras in redemptive history. Richard Gaffin, a professor of systematic theology at Westminster Theological Seminary, explains:

Revelation tends to come in epochal fashion. Together with those media and other miraculous phenomena that either mark or accompany it, revelation clusters about and is copiously given in connection with the climactic and decisive events of redemptive history.

Specifically, without having (or wanting) to deny that revelation/miracles can occur, sporadically, at other times throughout salvation history, those cluster points, in the main, are God's dealings with Noah, the call of Abraham and the other patriarchs, the Exodus, developments surrounding the monarchy, the beginning and end of the Exile, and, preeminently and consummately, the coming and work of Christ (including the founding of the church). The observable negative corollary, then, is that periods of pause and inactivity in the history of redemption (such as the slavery in Egypt and the interval following the return from exile until the coming of Christ) are, correlatively, times of silence in the history of revelation.¹

2. The point is that there is ample precedent for the Spirit working differently at different times in history. So unless Scripture affirms that the Spirit will continue giving the miraculous gifts through today, which it does not, there is no basis for insisting that he has done so. The Spirit gives the gifts as he wills (1 Cor. 12:11; Heb. 2:4), and we must respect his sovereignty in the matter.

III. Indications That the Spirit Has in Fact Ceased Providing the Miraculous Gifts

A. First, there is widespread agreement that the ministry of apostleship has terminated.

¹ Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., "A Cessationist Response to Robert L. Saucy" in Wayne A. Grudem, ed., *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996) 150-151.

1. This agreement is based on the fact Acts 1:21-22, 1 Cor. 9:1, and 1 Cor. 15:7 show that only those who had seen the risen Lord could be apostles of Christ (in this special sense). Since Paul was the last one to whom the risen Christ appeared (1 Cor. 15:8), no one became an apostle after Paul.

2. The significance of this is that it establishes the temporary nature of at least one of the miraculous spiritual gifts given to the church.

a. Those who believe in ongoing miraculous gifts argue in response that apostleship was an *office* filled by specific men and not a distinct *spiritual gift*. In their view, apostles simply exercised a combination of gifts, none of which was unique to them. So cessation of the apostleship (through death of the apostles) did not involve cessation of any of the gifts. Rather, the same gifts that had been given to the apostles continued being given to nonapostles.

b. Even if there was no distinct gift of apostleship, this response does not completely negate the significance of the apostles' passing. The apostles undeniably were gifted men who were themselves given as gifts to the church. They were placed in the church by God (1 Cor. 12:18, 27-28), being given through Christ as a gift for the conditioning of the saints (Eph. 4:7-8, 11). So regardless of whether they possessed a distinct spiritual gift, the fact the apostles were given only temporarily to the church still makes the lesser point that not everything that blesses the church continues until the consummation.

3. It seems clear, however, that Paul considered apostleship to involve a distinct spiritual gift.

a. The entire discussion in 1 Corinthians 12 is about how the Spirit differentially apportions spiritual gifts to different members of the body of Christ. Paul says that each of the members has been gifted by the Spirit (12:4, 7, 11) to play a certain role in the body (12:12-20) in accordance with God's design (12:18, 28). (The link between spiritual gifts and one's role in the body also is made in Rom. 12:4-8.) In that context, the inclusion of apostles in the list of other distinctively gifted saints (1 Cor. 12:28) strongly implies that Paul saw apostleship as a distinct gift.

(1) Even if the gift of apostleship was a distinctive combination of other gifts, rather than a singular ability, it still would be a distinct gift. The gift is the bouquet, not the individual flowers within it.

(2) The bouquet of apostolic empowerment was given only to those who had seen the risen Lord and been commissioned by him. This gift included the power to perform extraordinary miracles (Acts 2:43, 5:12, 14:8-11, 27, 15:12, 19:11; Rom. 15:18-19; 2 Cor. 12:12), certain revelatory gifts, and undoubtedly some others. After the apostles died, the gift of apostleship ceased to be given.

b. That Paul considered apostleship a distinct gift is corroborated by Eph. 4:7-11. Verse 11 says that Christ gave to the church apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers. This declaration is preceded immediately (vv. 9-10 are parenthetical) by the statement that each received a gift of grace from Christ following the Lord's ascension to heaven (4:7-8). Andrew Lincoln rightly observes, "Since in his reference to grace here the writer has in view its outworking in a variety of ways in individual believers, it is equivalent to the use of *charisma* in 1 Cor. 12:4 and Rom. 12:6."²

c. It thus seems clear that Paul viewed the apostles as having been specifically gifted for apostleship. Since the Spirit ceased giving this particular gift after the first century, the question is not whether spiritual gifts have ceased but which ones.

B. The second indication that the Spirit has ceased providing the miraculous gifts is that both the apostles and prophets³ are said to be the *foundation* on which the church is built, with Jesus being the crucial stone (Eph. 2:19-20).

1. The apostles and prophets were the instruments of God's new revelation (e.g., Eph. 3:4-5, 4:11), and as such, the church is built on the truth that was revealed through them. Since the apostles undisputedly passed from the scene early in church history, one would expect the same to happen to the prophets. That is implicit in the idea of a foundation. It is laid one time at the beginning of the structure; it is not continuously constructed.

2. It is noteworthy in this regard that the gift of prophecy was widely believed by Jews to have ceased not long after the last book of the O.T. was revealed. This precedent suggests that completion of the N.T. Scriptures may have had an effect on the work of the Spirit, particularly with regard to revelatory gifts. David Farnell, who wrote his doctoral dissertation on N.T. prophecy, states:

Between the time of the last canonical prophet, Malachi and the advent of the Messiah, in the period known as the "Four Hundred Silent Years," prophecy ceased in Israel. Though claims to the prophetic gift may be seen in the literature of this time, the Jewish people as a whole never accepted them as legitimate. In fact, those claims emphasize the absence of the Spirit of Yahweh from his people and Israel's longing for the promised return of the prophetic gift when God would once again speak. This desire remained intense through those silent years, until the silence was shattered by the advent of the Messiah.⁴

² Andrew T. Lincoln, Word Biblical Commentary, *Ephesians* (Waco, TX: Word Publishing, 1990) 241. Christ is the giver of this grace through the agency of the Spirit, whom he poured out after his ascension (Jn. 7:39; Lk. 24:49; Acts 1:4, 2:32-33).

³ Grudem's claim that Eph. 2:20 speaks of one group, "apostles who are also prophets," rather than two groups, "apostles and prophets," is seriously flawed. See R. Fowler White, "Gaffin and Grudem on Ephesians 2:20: In Defense of Gaffin's Cessationist Exegesis," 54 *Westminster Theological Journal* (1993) 303-320.

⁴ David F. Farnell, "The Gift of Prophecy in the Old and New Testaments," 149 *Bibliotheca Sacra*

C. The third indication that the miraculous gifts have ceased is related to the second. Hebrews 2:3-4 implicitly links the other miraculous gifts to the existence of apostles and prophets by showing that miracles were used by God to confirm that the message revealed through the apostles and prophets was divine in origin. (Of course, miracles alone are inadequate to confirm divine origin [Deut. 13:1-5; Mat. 24:24; 2 Thess. 2:9-12; Rev. 13:13-14, 16:14, 19:20]. They require a corroborating theological context.)

1. This confirming function is also mentioned in Mk. 16:17-20, which, even if it is not part of the original text, shows an early understanding of the gifts. Robert Saucy, Distinguished Professor of Systematic Theology at Talbot School of Theology, states that throughout Scripture "the *primary purpose* of the miracles was as signs of authentication pointing to God, his messengers or spokesmen, and their message, which was the word of God."⁵ See, e.g., Ex. 4:1-5, 30-31, 10:1-2; Deut. 4:34-35; 1 Ki. 17:17-24, 18:36-39; Mat. 11:21-23; Lk. 7:21-22, 19:37-38; Jn. 2:11, 23, 3:2, 6:14, 7:31, 10:37-38, 11:47-48, 12:18, 37, 14:11, 15:24-25, 20:30-31; Acts 2:22, 43, 14:8-11, 27; Rom. 15:18-19; 2 Cor. 12:12.

2. Once God confirmed the truth of his foundational revelation through the miracles that accompanied it and inspired men to record that confirmation for all posterity, it would make sense if those confirming miracles ceased to be performed. Their confirming effect would continue through the authoritative record of their occurrence. It should not surprise us, therefore, if the miraculous gifts faded as the N.T. documents came to be recognized as Scripture, which is in fact what happened.

3. It is a matter of history that the miraculous gifts described in the N.T. disappeared in the church.

a. Precisely how long they continued is a matter of debate, but even Charismatic scholar Ronald Kydd concedes that the gifts vanished by the latter part of the third century. He summarizes his reading of the evidence as follows:

Generally speaking, and of course there must have been exceptions at specific places and times, the Church prior to A.D. 200 was charismatic.

However, in the first half of the third century, things change. We still find evidence that Latin-speaking Christians in the West were familiar with the gifts and open to unusual manifestations of God's presence. Nevertheless, we have to admit that even in the West there were Christians who were raising more than one eyebrow over the gifts. In the Greek East, we hear of only "traces" and we see that what people understand the gifts to

(October-December 1992) 389-390. See also, Roger Beckwith, *The Old Testament Canon of the New Testament Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985) 366-376.

⁵ Robert L. Saucy, "An Open But Cautious View" in Wayne A. Grudem, ed., *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996) 106.

be has changed. It is clear that the importance granted to the spiritual gifts was passing. This impression is heightened when we realize that a much lower proportion of Christian authors talk about the gifts in this period than before A.D. 200. The gifts just did not occupy the place in the life and thinking of the Church that they once had.

These three centuries saw dramatic changes in the Christian Church. *In the midst of all this, the gifts of the Spirit vanished.*⁶

b. Thus, church leader John Chrysostom, speaking in the late fourth century on the subject of spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians, declared:

This whole place is very obscure: but the obscurity is produced by our ignorance of the facts referred to and by their cessation, being such as then used to occur but now no longer take place. And why do they not happen now? Why look now, the cause too of the obscurity has produced us again another question; namely, why did they happen, and now do so no more?⁷

c. Eusebius, writing around A.D. 320, refers to miracles of the second century as though they no longer occur.⁸

4. The references to miraculous activity in the second and third centuries are difficult to evaluate.

a. They are, with few exceptions, confined to the gifts of prophecy and healing, which included exorcism. These gifts are harder to verify than miraculous healings of organic diseases and disabilities.

b. Further, the healings appear to have occurred primarily through prayer, which may be distinct from the N.T. spiritual gifts of healings or miracles (see, Jas. 5:14-16).⁹ Also, the healing reports of the second and third centuries "were usually somewhat vague. . . . The majority of writers did not claim to have seen the events related; [and] those through whom the healings and exorcisms were accomplished were not usually named."¹⁰

⁶ Ronald A. Kydd, *Charismatic Gifts in the Early Church* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1984) 87 (emphasis supplied).

⁷ Quoted in David F. Farnell, "The Current Debate About New Testament Prophecy," 149 *Bibliotheca Sacra* (July-September 1992) 295.

⁸ Eusebius, *The History of the Church* (London: Penguin Books, 1965) 205-206, 209.

⁹ Saucy (1996) 113-114.

¹⁰ Saucy (1996), 114, quoting Darrel Amundsen and Gary Ferngren's chapter "Medicine and Religion: Early Christianity Through the Middle Ages" in *Health/Medicine and the Faith Traditions* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982).

c. The *Muratorian Fragment*, which dates to about A.D. 170, states that the number of prophets "is complete." This shows that, at least in some quarters of the church, the gift of prophecy was believed to have already ceased. Ronald Heine, an expert on the early church, comments:

It should be noted that the Muratorian canon, which is to be dated at approximately the same time [as the Montanist Controversy]¹¹ and located at Rome, rejected the *Shepherd of Hermas* for the same reason that Hippolytus advanced against the Montanist prophecy: it is a recent writing and prophecy ceased with the apostles. There was, then, at Rome, in the late second and early third century a different attitude toward the possibility of contemporary prophecy than we have seen exhibited in the documents coming from the Montanist controversy a little earlier in Asia.¹²

5. References to miracles from the fourth century on are noticeably different.

a. According to Amundsen and Ferngren, in these later accounts, "a wide variety of people, both alive and dead, are credited with miracles that in many instances must be labeled bizarre even by the most sympathetic reader."¹³ These reports clearly show the influence of such nonbiblical elements as "the veneration of saints and martyrs, the traffic in relics, Christian magic, an excessive preoccupation with demonism, and miracle-mongering."¹⁴

b. Moreover, these later miracles are never claimed to have been done by those reporting them. As Saucy observes:

The evidence by which many miracles were substantiated also raises doubts about their validity. In marked contrast to someone like the apostle Paul, who claimed to work miracles, none of the writers reporting these later miracles ever claimed to have miraculous powers themselves. Since by this time the saintliness of a person was measured to some extent by the amount of miraculous power he had, we frequently find miracles attributed to saints by their biographers. Interestingly, the farther a biographer was

¹¹ Montanism was a heresy that arose in Phrygia in the latter part of the second century. Montanus, a former priest in the cult known as Cybele, converted to Christianity and claimed the gift of prophecy. He and two prophetesses allegedly received their prophecies while in an ecstatic state. Farnell (July-September 1992) 288-290. It is noteworthy that the only alleged "Christian" prophets from the second half of the second century were Montanists. Kydd (1984) 34.

¹² Ronald E. Heine, "The Role of the Gospel of John in the Montanist Controversy," 6 *The Second Century* (Spring 1987-1988) 12-13, quoted in Farnell (July-September 1992) 295.

¹³ Quoted in Saucy (1996) 115.

¹⁴ Saucy (1996) 116, quoting Amundsen and Ferngren.

removed in time from the saint of whom he wrote, the more the life of the saint was glorified with miracles.¹⁵

D. The fourth indication that the miraculous gifts have ceased is that the modern miraculous gifts do not square with the portrait of those gifts in the N.T. The healings and miracles in the N.T. were remarkable and objectively verifiable; their occurrence could not be denied (e.g., Acts 4:14-16).

1. Oster rightly asks,

In this day of global communication and instant replays, why are noncharismatics not given access to contemporary examples of individuals being raised from the dead or samplings of nature miracles, rather than primarily charismatic worship services where those items put forth as proof of the working of the "Holy Ghost" are exceedingly unrepresentative of the full number of gifts and miraculous powers demonstrated in the early church.¹⁶

2. The modern gift of "tongues" is a prime example of this disconnect with the N.T. Modern charismatics claim that the gift of tongues is the ability to utter unintelligible sounds (ecstatic utterances). The biblical gift of tongues, however, is the miraculous ability to speak in a human language one had not learned.

a. This is clear from Acts 2:4-11. Those that gathered in response to the sound like a violent wind were amazed because they heard the believers, a group of Galileans who had been given the gift of tongues, speaking in a variety of human languages.

b. Some try to explain away this passage by arguing that the believers were actually uttering unintelligible sounds but the nonbelievers heard those sounds as human languages because the nonbelievers had some type of "hearing gift." This argument fails for at least five reasons.

(1) First, the text says nothing about the Spirit affecting anyone's hearing. The notion of some type of "hearing gift" must be imposed on the passage. On the other hand, Acts 2:4 specifically states that the Spirit gave the believers the ability to speak in other languages. Since the believers spoke in other languages, the nonbelievers heard other languages. The statement that the nonbelievers "heard" languages (2:6) does not imply that something other than languages was spoken. When Jesus said in Jn. 14:24, "the word which you hear is not Mine, but the Father's who sent me" (emphasis added), he was not implying that he had spoken something other than what they heard.

¹⁵ Saucy (1996) 116.

¹⁶ Richard E. Oster, Jr., The College Press NIV Commentary, *1 Corinthians* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1995) 322.

(2) Second, nonbelievers are unlikely candidates for a spiritual gift, especially in the context of Acts 2. Acts 2:1-13 presents the giving of the Spirit to *believers* in fulfillment of Christ's promise (Acts 1:4-5). There is simply no basis for asserting that the nonbelievers were also given a spiritual gift.

(3) Third, there is no hint of this hypothesized "hearing gift" in the various lists of spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12:8-10, 28-30; Rom. 12:6-8). If such a gift not only existed but played a role at Pentecost, one would certainly expect it to be mentioned somewhere in Scripture.

(4) Fourth, it is hard to imagine why God would bother to first convert the speech of Galileans into gibberish before granting the nonbelievers the ability to hear them in their own languages. Why not skip the gibberish step and grant the nonbelievers the ability to hear the Galileans' Aramaic as their own languages?

(5) Finally, the fact some people in the crowd mocked the believers by claiming they were drunk makes clear that there was no "hearing gift." If the nonbelievers were spiritually empowered to hear the nonsensical utterances of the believers as their own languages, they would never conclude that there was anything strange about the believers' speech. Each would simply hear his own language being spoken. On the other hand, if the gift involved the believers in speaking a variety of foreign languages, the nonbelievers would hear many languages in addition to their own and could easily conclude that those languages they did not recognize were nonsense.

c. Others try to explain away Acts 2:4-11 by arguing on the basis of 1 Cor. 13:1 that the gift of tongues in Acts 2 is different than the gift of tongues in 1 Corinthians 12-14. That verse does not prove that claim.

(1) In 1 Cor. 13:1 Paul speaks hypothetically of "tongues of angels" to make the point that *even if* he spoke the language of angels, the gift would be worthless if not administered in love. In the sentence, "If I fight with the strength of men and of angels but cannot recognize my enemy, it profits me nothing," the reference to angels is clearly hyperbole to stress the importance of knowing the enemy. It need not mean that I actually fight with the strength of angels.

(2) Another possibility is that some of the Corinthians assumed that the foreign languages they did not recognize were angelic languages, and Paul simply works within that assumption to make his point about the surpassing importance of love.

(3) Another possibility is that human language is also the language of angels (e.g., Lk. 2:13-14; Rev. 5:11-12), and Paul characterizes the gift of tongues in this grand fashion to emphasize the importance of love.

d. Still others try to explain away Acts 2:4-11 by arguing on the basis of 1 Cor. 14:2 that the gift of tongues in Acts 2 is different than the gift of tongues in 1 Corinthians 12-14. That verse does not prove that claim.

(1) The reason tongues were not understood in the Corinthian worship assembly is that the worshipers spoke Greek (and perhaps Latin) and the tongue-speaker was miraculously uttering one of the multitude of other languages.¹⁷ That is why, in the absence of an interpreter, the assembly was not edified when someone spoke in tongues (1 Cor. 14:5, 16-17, 27-28).

(2) The fact the tongue-speaker addresses God rather than men (1 Cor. 14:2) does not require that he be speaking a nonhuman language. Just because one can use human language to speak to men does not mean one cannot also use that language to speak to God. We address God regularly in human language when we pray.

(3) Indeed, just a few verses down (1 Cor. 14:10-11), Paul says, "There are however many kinds of languages in the world, and none is without meaning. Therefore, if I do not know the meaning of the language, I will be a foreigner to the one speaking and the one speaking [will be] a foreigner in my [view]" (ALC). It seems hard to miss the link here between "tongues" and human languages.

e. In addition, if the gift of tongues in Acts 2 was different than the gift of tongues in 1 Corinthians (or elsewhere in the early church), one would expect Luke to have indicated a distinction. After all, Acts was composed after 1 Corinthians, and Luke would have been well aware of the Corinthian church from his travels with Paul. And certainly Luke would have indicated a distinction if the tongues mentioned in Acts 10:46 or Acts 19:6 differed from the tongues of Acts 2. (Peter himself apparently saw no difference between the tongues of Acts 10 and Acts 2, as he linked the two events in Acts 11:15-16 with no mention of a difference.) Luke obviously knew of only one gift of tongues and that gift involved human languages.

f. Further evidence that tongues were human languages is provided by the quote in 1 Cor. 14:21 of Isa. 28:11-12. In the Isaiah passage, God, in essence, said to Israel that since they refused to heed his understandable prophecy, he would deliver a message to them in the form of the unrecognizable speech of their Assyrian captors, and even then they would ignore it. In the same way, the unrecognized human language of tongues is a sign to unbelievers of their refusal to hear. And just as the unbelieving Jews rejected the message inherent in the Assyrian language that surrounded them in captivity, so the unbelievers in Corinth would reject as insane God's message inherent in tongues (14:23).¹⁸

¹⁷ It is possible, of course, that on occasion the Corinthian assembly would include a visiting bilingual or multilingual Christian who could understand the language a tongue-speaker happened to be speaking, but Paul is addressing the normal situation. Normally, the foreign language being spoken was not understood in the assembly. See Jim McGuigan, *The Book of 1 Corinthians* (Lubbock, TX: Montex Publishing, 1984) 179, 241-242, 248.

¹⁸ Paul's remarks are not inconsistent with the positive effect tongues had on some unbelievers in Acts 2.

g. The O.T. and early rabbinic background of the expression "to speak in a tongue" confirms that the phrase refers to human languages. Engelbrecht concluded from his review of the relevant O.T. and rabbinic material:

In light of this evidence it is not difficult to conclude that "to speak in a tongue" is a semitic idiom and that earlier studies which concentrated on finding its origin and meaning in Greek literature were misguided. It should be noted that "to speak in a tongue" is never used in the sense of "ecstatic utterance" and (apart from two polemical passages in the *Thanksgiving Hymns*) consistently refers to the speaking of a foreign language or the holy language, Hebrew.¹⁹

h. Finally, the ease with which ecstatic utterances are counterfeited weighs against the claim that they are the biblical gift of tongues. Ecstatic utterances are known among various pagan groups, both ancient and modern, Muslim mystics, and Mormons.²⁰ Charismatic scholar Michael Green admits that ecstatic utterances, as a psychological phenomenon, are "widely experienced" and that such speech "can be psychologically induced in men who have no faith at all."²¹ Something that can be so easily fabricated is ill suited as a sign of divine confirmation (Heb. 2:3-4; Mk. 16:17-20).

IV. 1 Corinthians 13:10 Does Not Affirm That All First-Century Gifts Will Continue Until the Consummation.

A. Contrary to assertions by charismatics, 1 Cor. 13:10 does not affirm that all the gifts given by the Spirit in the first century will continue to be given until the consummation. Here's the text of 1 Cor. 13:8-10:

⁸Love never falls. But if there are prophecies, they will be brought to an end; if there are tongues, they will stop; if there is knowledge, it will be brought to an end. ⁹For we know in part and we prophesy in part, ¹⁰but whenever the complete [state] comes, the partial will be brought to an end.

Remember that Paul is speaking about the effect of languages that are not understood. Unbelievers who visited the Corinthian assembly would be locals who shared the same language as the believers (Greek and possibly Latin). Therefore, they would fare no better than the believers in understanding the various languages spoken when the gift of tongues was exercised. At Pentecost, however, the crowd that had gathered was very cosmopolitan, and thus many different languages were understood. As previously mentioned, the unbelievers at Pentecost who did not hear a language they understood accused the believers of being drunk.

¹⁹ Edward A. Englebrecht, "To Speak in a Tongue": The Old Testament and Early Rabbinic Background of a Pauline Expression," *22 Concordia Journal* (July 1996) 302.

²⁰ Thomas R. Edgar, *Satisfied by the Promise of the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1996) 219-223.

²¹ Michael Green, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975) 199, quoted in Oster (1995) 322.

B. Even if 1 Cor. 13:10 refers to the consummation, as I believe it does,²² Paul does not say that the gifts mentioned in 13:8 necessarily will continue until that time. The point of 1 Cor. 13:8-13 is that love is superior to the spiritual gifts because the gifts are only for now, whereas love is both for now and forever. Love never ends, but *even if* prophecies, tongues, miraculous knowledge, and presumably other gifts should exist at the consummation, they will at that time come to an end. In other words, that is their *terminus ad quem*, the latest possible point for their existence, not necessarily how long they actually will exist.²³ He is not asserting that the miraculous gifts will last **until** the consummation only that they can last **no longer** than the consummation. Love, on the other hand, will continue into the eternal state.

1. Paul says that **IF** there are miraculous gifts (meaning at the consummation, as it would make little sense to say **IF** there are miraculous gifts in his day after spending all of chapter 12 discussing them) they will cease at that time because their partial nature makes them useless or unsuitable for the eternal, heavenly state. He does not say there in fact will be miraculous gifts at the time of the consummation only that **IF** there are miraculous gifts at that time they can continue no further. That is all he needs to make his point that love is superior to the gifts because love is for both now and eternity, whereas the gifts are only for this side of the consummation (regardless of whether they cease at the consummation or before).

2. Certainly **IF** the partial gifts are in existence at the consummation they will be brought to an end at that time, being inconsistent with the eternal state, but that doesn't mean they cannot be brought to an end before then. If one said, "If there are trees in Jerusalem they will be consumed at the Second Coming because they are ill suited for existence in the eternal state," one would not necessarily be asserting that trees would not vanish from Jerusalem before then (e.g., through war or disease).

3. The word translated **IF** in v. 8 is *eite*. As it says in *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* 1:402, "Paul uses *eite* . . . *eite* frequently as a conjunction introducing hypothetical conditions (cf. BDF sec. 454.3), primarily in a series . . ." This hypothetical condition in a series commonly is expressed by the translation "IF . . . (OR) IF" or the translation "WHETHER . . . OR." See BDAG, 279. For example, *eite* is used in a series in Rom. 12:6-8 with a clear conditional sense -- IF/WHETHER (which may not be the case) a person's gift is prophecy, let him use it in proportion to the faith; IF/WHETHER/OR it is serving, IF/WHETHER/OR it is teaching, IF/WHETHER/OR it is encouraging. Closer to the text under discussion, *eite* is used in 1 Cor. 12:26 for a hypothetical condition -- IF/WHETHER one part suffers, IF/WHETHER one part is honored. There are other similar examples. So understanding *eite* in 1 Cor. 13:8 as expressing a condition that may or may not exist is not the least bit strange.

²² Others take 13:10 to refer to the full revelation of doctrine that is to be found in the N.T. Scriptures or to the acquisition of love or maturity by the church.

²³ As Daniel Wallace states in *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan 1996) 423, "This verse does not specifically address *when* tongues would cease, although it is giving a *terminus ad quem*: when the perfect comes."

C. I suspect Paul argued this way, rather than asserting that the gifts would pass some time before the consummation, because he believed even those in Corinth who challenged his apostolic authority (e.g., 1 Cor. 9:1-14) would accept that the gifts could have no utility in the eternal state. That concession is all he needed to make his point about the superiority of love. Why risk the point by basing it on an assertion his opponents may wish to challenge (i.e., the gifts would pass relatively soon) when he could base it on something they would acknowledge?

V. Did the Spirit Give Miraculous Gifts Only Through the Laying on of the Apostles' Hands?

A. One often hears that the ability to perform miracles necessarily passed away because that ability was bestowed only through the laying on of the apostles' hands. The argument goes like this: (a) the ability to perform miracles was given by the Spirit only to those on whom the apostles laid their hands, (b) all the apostles died in the first century or soon thereafter, (c) the last person on whom one of the apostles laid hands died no later than the second century, (d) therefore, the ability to perform miracles necessarily ended no later than the second century.

B. This is accepted as correct by many, including many (if not most) in the church of Christ, but I am not convinced the ability to perform miracles was restricted to those on whom the apostles laid their hands. If you think my reasons for doubting that view are unpersuasive, that's fine – we come out at pretty much the same place in terms of the cessation of miraculous gifts. But here's why I am not convinced by that view:

1. There is a difference between the Spirit and the gifts the Spirit gives. The texts typically cited in support of the view that the ability to perform miracles was bestowed only through the laying on of the apostles' hands (Acts 8, 19) do not attribute to the laying on of the apostles' hands the bestowal of *miraculous abilities*; rather, they attribute to that act the reception of the *Spirit himself*. The only text I know of that speaks of a "spiritual gift" being bestowed through the laying on of apostolic hands, rather than the Spirit himself being given, is the gift Timothy was given through the laying on of Paul's hands (2 Tim. 1:6), but that probably was some kind of teaching gift rather than an ability to perform miracles.

a. The *locus classicus* of the apostolic-hands view is Acts 8:9-24. The argument goes like this: (a) Acts 2:38 establishes that everyone who is baptized receives the indwelling Holy Spirit, (b) the Samaritans had been baptized and therefore had received the indwelling Holy Spirit, (c) since the Samaritans already had received the indwelling Holy Spirit, what was conveyed to them through the laying on of the apostles' hands necessarily was something other than the indwelling Holy Spirit, (d) Simon saw that whatever was conveyed to the Samaritans was conveyed by the laying on of the apostles' hands, (e) the Spirit himself cannot be seen whereas miraculous or supernatural workings can be seen, (f) therefore, what was conveyed on the Samaritans through the laying on of the

apostles' hands was an ability to do miraculous or supernatural things, not the Holy Spirit himself.

b. My understanding of Acts 8 is quite different.

(1) Philip had, for the first time, taken the gospel beyond the bounds of Judaism. The Samaritans accepted his message and were baptized, but God temporarily withheld the gift of the Spirit (the indwelling Spirit) to teach the Samaritans an important lesson. I believe the Spirit was withheld (meaning the normal link between baptism and receipt of the Spirit was altered) until Jewish apostles from the Jerusalem church came to Samaria in order to teach the Samaritans that the Jews were the true Messianic community, the ones through whom the Messiah came and to whom he was first preached. (Philip, being a Hellenistic Jew, would not send a clear message in that regard.) Despite the longstanding claim by the Samaritans that they and not the Jews were the true people of God (see, e.g., Jn. 4:22), they were shown to be no different than the Gentiles in terms of salvation history. The believing Jews were God's olive tree and the Samaritans were wild shoots that were grafted into that tree (see Rom. 11:11-24 regarding Gentiles).

(2) The purpose of this lesson was to prevent the Samaritans from starting a competing Samaritan church, as they had done with Judaism. Once the point about Jewish priority in salvation history had been made, Samaritan conversions followed the normal pattern (i.e., the Spirit was received upon baptism).

(3) What was withheld from the Samaritans was the same gift of the Spirit normally received at baptism. This understanding is based on the fact the text repeatedly speaks of them receiving or being given "the Holy Spirit" (not a Spirit-given ability) and the fact Luke signals that it is the gift normally associated with baptism when he writes that the Spirit had "not yet" come upon the Samaritans (contrary to what one would normally expect regarding baptized believers) and that they had "only" been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus (contrary to what normally happens in baptism).

(4) Granting that the Spirit who had been given to the Samaritans through the laying on of the apostles' hands confirmed their receipt of him by manifesting himself miraculously in their lives (i.e., by bestowing on them the ability to do miraculous or supernatural acts), it would not mean that the bestowal of those abilities was conditioned on the laying on of hands. The Spirit and the gifts he gives are separate things. The fact the Spirit chose to be given to the Samaritans through the laying on of hands does not mean he also chose to connect his giving of any particular gifts to that act. He may have chosen to give the gifts he deemed appropriate to give *independently of the fact he had been given through the laying on of hands*. In short, one cannot leap from the fact certain gifts were given after the Spirit had been given through the laying on of hands to the conclusion that those gifts also were given through the laying on of hands.

(5) This understanding of Acts 8 does not contradict Act 2:38. God promised in Acts 2:38 that those who were baptized would receive the gift of the Spirit; he did not promise that he would never vary the timing of that gift. The Samaritans who were baptized received the Spirit as promised; the fulfillment simply was delayed in furtherance of God's purposes. Luke indicates that the Spirit normally is given at or near the moment of baptism by saying, among other things, that the Spirit had "not yet" come upon the Samaritans (contrary to what one normally would expect) and that they had "only" been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus (contrary to what normally happens), but the fact the timing of that gift was varied in the case of the Samaritans means it is a mistake to read that normal timing into the promise of Acts 2:38. God promised the Spirit to those who submit to baptism and has revealed that he normally gives that gift promptly, but he also has revealed that he has not promised that he would never alter the timing of that gift.

2. But even if the giving of specific miraculous gifts, as opposed to the giving of the Spirit himself, was conditioned in Act 8 and 19 on the laying on of the apostles' hands, nowhere is it stated that the Spirit would bestow those gifts *only* on those on whom the apostles laid their hands. That's the real issue, and I don't see the basis for assuming that the Spirit tied his bestowal of those gifts *exclusively* to apostolic hands, especially in light of texts that emphasize his sovereignty in bestowing the gifts (e.g., 1 Cor. 12:11). In fact, there are clear (to me) indications that he did not do so.

a. The Spirit gave to the apostles the ability to perform miracles without any record of anyone laying hands on them. So it would not be unprecedented for him to do so in the case of others. It's not like he has demonstrated an aversion to bestowing gifts apart from the laying on of hands.

b. Luke gives no hint that Stephen's or Philip's ability to perform miracles noted in Acts 6:8 and 8:6, 13, respectively, was related to the apostles having laid hands on them in Acts 6:6 to commission them for the task of distributing food to the widows. Acts 6:7 makes clear that the result of the apostolic commissioning of the Seven that Luke intended to communicate was that freeing the apostles to focus their effort on preaching the word of God (Acts 6:2-3) led to great growth in the church. There is no indication that Luke was connecting that commissioning with the later report of miracles.

c. Barnabas performed miracles (Acts 14:3, 15:12) without any indication that an apostle had laid hands on him. (To commission him for a missionary journey, hands were placed on him *and Paul* in Acts 13:3 – not *by Paul* – and no other apostle is mentioned.)

d. The ability to speak in tongues was bestowed by the Spirit on the disciples in Acts 2:4 and on Cornelius' household in Acts 10:45 without any indication that apostles had laid hands on them. (With most scholars, I do not believe the empowerment in Acts 2:4 was limited to the Twelve. If it was, then the point regarding that specific text is similar to the point made in paragraph 2a above.)

e. It is clear from 1 Cor. 12:29-30, where the rhetorical questions expect a negative answer, that only some, not all, were given the ability to perform miracles. If these gifts were given only to those on whom Paul or another apostle laid hands, it seems strange for Paul not to acknowledge that he played some role in the limited distribution of these gifts.

f. Similarly, when Paul says in 1 Cor. 14:5 that he would like every one of them to speak in tongues but would rather have them prophesy, he gives no hint that the bestowal of these gifts is conditioned on his laying hands on them. On the contrary, if he wants them to have the gifts and can give it to them by laying hands on them, why didn't he do that? If one says that the Spirit gives these gifts *only* to those on whom apostles lay hands but not to *everyone* on whom the apostles lay hands, I still would expect Paul to say something like, "I wish all of you had these gifts, as you know from the fact I sought to bestow them on you by laying my hands on you."