

## WHY OUR CHURCH IS NOT CHARISMATIC

### Introduction

Charismatic is a broad term that describes a spectrum of theological positions regarding the role of spiritual gifts in the church today. The fundamental question for all issues related to charismatic theology is this: “Are miraculous gifts for today?”<sup>1</sup> The debated miraculous gifts, or better yet, extraordinary gifts, involve four particular gifts, namely, apostles, prophets, tongue-speaking, and miracle-working. Starting from apostles, this paper will demonstrate from the Bible that these four extraordinary gifts are not supposed to continue in the church today.<sup>2</sup>

### Apostles

#### *What Is It?*

Much confusion comes simply from the meaning of the terms. In order to see whether a particular gift has ceased, it is important to clarify what it is. The term “apostle” comes from the Greek word which literally means “sent one.” As is common with languages, it can have a general meaning and a particular technical meaning (think “spirit” versus “the Spirit”). In its general meaning, the word for “apostle” is often translated as “messenger” (Phil 2:25; 2 Cor 8:23), denoting a legal representative who bears the authority and message of the sender (such as a modern missionary). But a technical sense is clearly in view when the eleven in the upper room selected Matthias to take the place of Judas (Acts 1:15–26). In this technical sense, “apostles”

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<sup>1</sup> This question is the name of the book edited by Grudem on the Charismatic debate. He argues there are four views on this issue, “(1) cessationist, (2) open but cautious, (3) Third Wave, (4) Pentacostal/charismatic.” Wayne A. Grudem, ed., *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today?*, Counterpoints (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 10–13. The argument advanced in this paper will be identified as the cessationist view.

<sup>2</sup> The argumentation will largely follow the logic flow that is helpfully set forth by Samuel E Waldron in his masterpiece, *To Be Continued?* (Merrick, NY: Calvary Press, 2015). The four gifts can be termed alternatively with the related non-personal nouns, apostleship, prophecy, tongue-speaking, and miracle-working.

(or, to be clear, capital-A Apostles) means “those select individuals directly appointed and authorized by Jesus Christ to be His immediate representatives on earth.”<sup>3</sup> It is with this technical sense that the gift of Apostles is concerned (Eph 2:20; 3:5; 4:11; 1 Cor 12:28–29). Only the twelve plus Paul are said to be the Apostles of Christ in this sense.

Who can be an Apostle of Christ? The Bible clearly lays out three qualifications. First, he has to be an eyewitness of the resurrected Christ (Acts 1:22; 10:39–41; 1 Cor 9:1; 15:7–8). Second, he has to be appointed directly by Christ (Mark 3:14; Luke 6:13; Acts 1:2, 24; 10:41; Gal 1:1). Third, he has to confirm his mission and message with miraculous “signs of a true [A]postle” (Matt 10:1–2; Acts 1:5–8; 2:43; 4:33; 5:12; 8:14; 2 Cor 12:12; Heb 2:3–4).

### *Has It Ceased?*

It should be obvious that no one meets these qualifications in our world today. Most charismatics would readily agree with this statement. This alone should suffice to conclude that the gift of Apostles has ceased. Some attempt to make room for modern apostles by appealing to Paul’s Apostleship, but Paul’s own statement bears witness to the uniqueness and finality of His Apostleship as “the least of the [A]postles,” as “one untimely born,” to whom Christ appeared “last of all” (1 Cor 15:8–9; cf. Acts 9:1–20), implying there would not be any Apostle after him. In addition, Ephesians 2:20 says the church has “been built on the foundation of the [A]postles and prophets,” indicating a foundational role of the gift of Apostles in the life of the church, in a period where Christ was still revealing canonical truth through these Apostles to the church (John 14:26; 16:12–15). With the canon closed, the foundation of the church is established, and Apostles are no longer needed. Therefore, we see at least one of the gifts has ceased.

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<sup>3</sup> Nathan Busenitz, “TH 786 Charismatic Theology” (course notes, The Master’s Seminary, 2017), 59.

## Prophets

### *What Is It?*

A prophet in a strict biblical sense is not someone who speaks forth God's truth that has already been revealed, as in preaching, but someone who receives direct revelation from God and communicates it to the people. Therefore, the gift of prophets is a revelatory gift; and, as such, it is closely related to Apostles (Eph 2:20; 3:5) and the canon (2 Pet 1:20–21).

As with Apostles, the Bible has given us three specific criteria by which we can test the genuineness of a prophet.<sup>4</sup> First, a true prophet must be doctrinally orthodox. The importance of this criterion is seen in Deuteronomy 13:1–5 where a self-claimed prophet who leads people away from the one true God is to be stoned to death (cf. 2 Pet 2:1). Second, a true prophet must be marked by moral integrity. Jeremiah 23:14–16 clearly describes morally corrupt prophets as false prophets and forbids God's people to listen to them (cf. 2 Pet 2:2–3). Third, a true prophet must be 100% accurate in their predictions. Again, Deuteronomy 18:20–22 says a prophet should die whose presumptuous prophecy fails to come true (cf. Ezek 13:3–9). Because of the danger of false prophets and the presence of authentic prophetic activity in the New Testament period prior to the closure of the canon, the church needed to apply these tests to determine if a self-claimed prophet and his message were authentic (1 Cor 14:29; 1 Thess 5:20–22).

### *Has It Ceased?*

As with Apostles, the biblical criteria alone should make it clear that there is no authentic prophet today. Many charismatic theologians attempt to defend the continuation of this gift by defining it differently. They argue that the New Testament prophets are different from the Old in that their prophecy can contain error. There is no text that supports such a distinction. In fact,

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 74–79.

Peter quoted Old Testament on prophecy and said that was exactly what happened on Pentecost (Acts 2:18 quoting Joel 2:28). Moreover, the notion that the God of truth would give fallible prophecy is theologically unacceptable. In addition, since prophets are closely connected with Apostles, it is no surprise that they share the same foundational role in the initial building of the church (Eph 2:20), which, as has been argued above, is no longer needed today.

### **Tongue-Speaking**

#### *What Is It?*

The first instance of tongue-speaking took place on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2, where all would agree the tongues spoken were human languages which the speakers had never learned. In fact, the term “tongue” is never used of unintelligible speeches in the Bible. Charismatics appeal to Paul’s mention of “tongues of angels” in 1 Corinthians 13:1 in support of a different kind of tongue-speaking that is not human language, but in context, the “tongues of angels,” in parallel with “know[ing] all mysteries and all knowledge” and “all faith ... to remove mountains” (v. 2), is clearly a rhetorical hyperbolic impossibility. The charismatic argument that tongue-speaking in 1 Corinthians 12–14 is entirely a different kind than in Acts 2 is untenable if one sees the strong correlations between tongues of the two contexts,<sup>5</sup> and the fact they can be translated (1 Cor 14:26–28) implies that they are genuine human languages. The genuineness of tongue-speakers, then, lies largely in whether what they speak are genuine human languages. The purpose for the gift of tongue-speaking is to be a sign to the unbelievers (1 Cor 14:22) and, when used in the church when translated, to edify the church (1 Cor 14:26).

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<sup>5</sup> Busenitz (ibid., 107–10) helpfully observes that they have the same 1) terminology, 2) description, 3) source, 4) recipients, 5) primary purpose, 6) connection to other gifts, and 7) reaction from unbelievers. Also helpful is the observation that Luke wrote Acts under Paul’s apostolic authority after Paul wrote 1 Corinthians, and so it is highly unlikely “that Luke would have used the exact same terminology as Paul if he understood there to be an essential difference between the two gifts (especially since such could lead to even greater confusion about the gifts — a confusion which plagued the Corinthian church)” (ibid., 109).

### *Has It Ceased?*

Most modern-day charismatic tongue-speakers readily acknowledge that their tongues are not human languages. The single criterion noted above immediately dismisses their practice as unbiblical as far as spiritual gift is concerned. There is further indication that the gift of tongue-speaking in the biblical sense was never designed to continue. The key argument lies in its close connection with prophecy. In Acts 2, Peter explains the extraordinary sign of tongue-speaking to the confounded crowd by citing Joel's prophecy that "I will in those days pour forth of My Spirit and they shall prophesy" (Acts 2:18). The *tongue-speaking* on the day of Pentecost thus fulfilled the Old Testament prophecy about end-times *prophesying*. This connection is also clear in the extended comparison between the two in 1 Corinthians 14, where verse 5 says prophecy is greater than tongue-speaking "unless he interprets," which essentially equates interpreted tongue-speaking with prophecy. The nature of tongue-speaking is thus similar to prophecy in that it is directly revelatory. It is simply prophecy in a foreign language. Since it has been argued that prophecy as a foundational revelatory gift has ceased, why should tongue-speaking still exist?

## **Miracle-Working**

### *What Is It?*

The last extraordinary gift to be addressed is miracle-working, which includes various kinds of supernatural power manifestation. Though the most emphasized miracle in charismatic circles is the gift of healing, there apparently are other kinds of miracles, as is evidenced by the various related terms used in the Bible (cf. 2 Cor 12:12). It is important to recognize that miracles were never meant to be an end themselves. The purpose for the gift of miracle-working was for it to be an accompanying sign of God's spokesmen in order to validate their message as genuinely from God (2 Cor 12:12; Heb 2:3-4). A miracle can thus be defined as a "revelatory,

extraordinary, external, astonishing manifestation of the power of God.”<sup>6</sup> As for the miracles of healing in particular, it is important to recognize that biblical healings did not depend on the patient’s faith (Luke 17:17-19), were always instantaneous, complete, 100% effective, undeniable, and they were never prearranged.<sup>7</sup>

### *Has It Ceased?*

The modern charismatic healing practice stands in sharp contrast to biblical healing in the points mentioned above. Since the gift of miracle-working had by design a confirmatory purpose to validate God’s messengers and their message as divine revelation, it can hardly be maintained that revelation is sealed while the gift of miracles is still in operation. This is not to deny that miracles can and do still happen. We wholeheartedly affirm that God is the God of miracles. But the gift of miracle-working in its biblical sense has ceased

### **Conclusion**

In summary, starting from the gift of Apostles, the cessation of which is most undeniably acknowledged, a biblical case has been made that all extraordinary gifts have ceased by God’s design. The foundational, revelatory nature of Apostles and prophets argue decisively for their cessation after the foundational, canon-forming period of the church; and the close association of tongue-speaking and miracle-working with the Apostles and prophets argue for their cessation together with them.

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<sup>6</sup> Waldron, *To Be Continued*, 100.

<sup>7</sup> Busenitz, “TH 786 Charismatic Theology,” 121–24.