

The Case for Cessationism

Definitions:

Continuationism – all the gifts of the Spirit continue today, specifically prophecy, tongues, miraculous healings.

Cessationism – the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit (prophecy, tongues, miraculous healings) were only given for the foundational period of the church and have thus ceased.

The basic argument for Continuationism:

- (1) All the gifts of the Spirit are for the benefit of the church and therefore have enduring value.
- (2) There is no Bible verse that declares certain gifts will cease.

Romans 12:4-8

⁴ For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, ⁵ so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. ⁶ Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; ⁷ if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; ⁸ the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness. (See also 1 Corinthians 12:7-11, 28)

Ephesians 4:11-12

¹¹ And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, ¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry.

1 Thessalonians 5:19-21

¹⁹ Do not quench the Spirit. ²⁰ Do not despise prophecies, ²¹ but test everything; hold fast what is good.

The basic argument for Cessationism:

- (1) Revelation has ceased. This includes apostolic teaching (NT writings), prophecy and tongues.
- (2) There is a once-for-all foundational period of the church – the Apostolic Age. The signs and wonders of the apostolic age are prophecy, tongues and miraculous healings.

The unique role of apostles: *those sent by Christ*

Mark 3:13-15

¹³ And Jesus went up on the mountain and called to him those whom he desired, and they came to him. ¹⁴ And he appointed twelve (whom he also named apostles) so that they might be with him and he might send them out to preach ¹⁵ and have authority to cast out demons.

John 20:20-23

²⁰ When Jesus had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. ²¹ Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.” ²² And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive the sins of anyone, they are forgiven; if you withhold forgiveness from anyone, it is withheld.”

The apostles are the *foundation of the church*

Ephesians 2:19-21

¹⁹ So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, ²¹ in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. (See also Matthew 16:17-19)

Apostles are *foundational eye-witnesses*

Acts 1:21-26

²¹ “So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, ²² beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us – one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection.” ²³ And they put forward two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was also called Justus, and Matthias. ²⁴ And they prayed and said, “You, Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which one of these two you have chosen ²⁵ to take the place in this ministry

and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place.”²⁶ And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias, and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.

Acts 10:39-42

³⁹ And we are witnesses of all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree,⁴⁰ but God raised him on the third day and made him to appear,⁴¹ not to all the people but to us who had been chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.⁴² And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead. (*See also Acts 4:33, etc*)

1 Corinthians 9:1

Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?

This eye-witness testimony is accompanied by signs and wonders

Acts 1:1-9

¹ In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach,² until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen.³ To them he presented himself alive after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.

⁴ And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, “you heard from me;⁵ for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”

⁶ So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?”⁷ He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority.⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”⁹ And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.

John 20:21-22

²¹ Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.”²² And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit.” (*See also Mark 13:11, John 14:26.*)

Apostles and the “power of the Spirit”

Romans 15:18-19

¹⁸ For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to bring the Gentiles to obedience – by word and deed,¹⁹ by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God – so that from Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ.

Acts 4:33

And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all.

Acts 5:12

Now many signs and wonders were regularly done among the people by the hands of the apostles.

Acts 2:41-43

⁴¹ So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.⁴² And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.⁴³ And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles.

2 Corinthians 12:12

The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with utmost patience, with signs and wonders and mighty works.

Since there are no more apostles, the signs and wonders of the apostolic age have also ceased.

Purpose of signs and wonders are for attestation

Acts 2:22

“Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know.”

Hebrews 2:3-4

³ It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard,⁴ while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.

Acts 14:1-4

¹ Now at Iconium Paul and Barnabus entered together into the Jewish synagogue and spoke in such a way that a great number of both Jews and Greeks believed.² But the

unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers. ³ So they remained for a long time, speaking boldly for the Lord, who bore witness to the word of his grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands. ⁴ But the people of the city were divided; some sided with the Jews and some with the apostles.

Attestation is no longer needed with the completion of the apostles' ministry.

Apostleship is a revelatory office

Ephesians 3:1-5

¹ For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles – ² assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you, ³ how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly. ⁴ When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, ⁵ which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit.

Acts 2:42

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

Jude 1:3

Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.

With the death of the apostles, revelation ceased.

1 Corinthians 12:28

And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues.

At least one gift, apostleship, has ceased!

Prophecy is also a revelatory gift

Ephesians 2:19-21

¹⁹ So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, ²¹ in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.

Ephesians 3:4-5

⁴ When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, ⁵ which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit.

2 Peter 3:1-3

¹ This is now the second letter that I am writing to you, beloved. In both of them I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder, ² that you should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles, ³ knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires.

Cessationism: prophecy = God's words (revelation)
OT prophecy = NT prophecy

Continuationism: prophecy = fallible human words
OT prophecy ≠ NT prophecy

1 Corinthians 14:29

Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said. (See also 1 Thessalonians 5:19-21)

Acts 17:10-11

¹⁰ The brothers immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived they went into the Jewish synagogue. ¹¹ Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.

1 John 4:1

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.

1 Corinthians 14:29-32

²⁹ Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said. ³⁰ If a revelation is made to another sitting there, let the first be silent. ³¹ For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged, ³² and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets.

Continuationist redemptive-history:
|--OT---|---Jesus--| |-----church history-----|

Cessationist redemptive-history:
|--OT---|---Jesus--|---apostles--| |--church history--|

A case of fallible NT prophecy?

Acts 20:22-24

²² And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there, ²³ except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me. ²⁴ But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.

Acts 21:1-14

¹ And when we had parted from them and set sail, we came by a straight course to Cos, and the next day to Rhodes, and from there to Patara. ² And having found a ship crossing to Phoenicia, we went aboard and set sail. ³ When we had come in sight of Cyprus, leaving it on the left we sailed to Syria and landed at Tyre, for there the ship was to unload its cargo. ⁴ And having sought out the disciples, we stayed there for seven days. And through the Spirit they were telling Paul not to go on to Jerusalem. ⁵ When our days there were ended, we departed and went on our journey, and they all, with wives and children, accompanied us until we were outside the city. And kneeling down on the beach, we prayed ⁶ and said farewell to one another. Then we went on board the ship, and they returned home. ⁷ When we had finished the voyage from Tyre, we arrived at Ptolemais, and we greeted the brothers and stayed with them for one day. ⁸ On the next day we departed and came to Caesarea, and we entered the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, and stayed with him. ⁹ He had four unmarried daughters, who prophesied. ¹⁰ While we were staying for many days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. ¹¹ And coming to us, he took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands and said, "Thus says the Holy Spirit, 'This is how the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.'" ¹² When we heard this, we and the people there urged him not to go up to Jerusalem. ¹³ Then Paul answered, "What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be imprisoned but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." ¹⁴ And since he would not be persuaded, we ceased and said, "Let the will of the Lord be done." (*Other examples of NT prophets: Acts 11:27-30, 13:1-2 and 15:32.*)

This is an example of true and accurate prophecy – Paul will suffer in Jerusalem – but from which people have drawn the wrong conclusion, that Paul shouldn't go.

The gift of tongues is the gift of language

Acts 2:1-13

¹ When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. ² And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. ³ And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. ⁴ And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. ⁵ Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. ⁶ And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. ⁷ And they were amazed and astonished, saying, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?" ⁸ And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? ⁹ Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, ¹¹ both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians – we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God." ¹² And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" ¹³ But others mocking said, "They are filled with new wine."

But isn't tongues an ecstatic prayer language?

1 Corinthians 13:1-3

¹ If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. ² And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. ³ If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I am nothing.

1 Corinthians 14:1-4

¹ Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy. ² For one who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but to God; for no one understands him, but he utters mysteries in the Spirit. ³ On the other hand, the one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation. ⁴ The one who speaks in a tongue builds up himself, but the one who prophesies builds up the church.

In short, Paul is not describing what the gift of tongues is, but what the gift of tongues is not.

Tongues is a foundation-laying gift of revelation

1 Corinthians 14:20-23

²⁰ Brothers, do not be children in your thinking. Be infants in evil, but in your thinking be mature. ²¹ In the Law it is written, “By people of strange tongues and by the lips of foreigners will I speak to this people, and even then they will not listen to me, says the Lord.” ²² Thus tongues are a sign not for believers but for unbelievers, while prophecy is a sign not for unbelievers but for believers. ²³ If, therefore, the whole church comes together and all speak in tongues, and outsiders or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are out of your minds?

Isaiah 28:11-16

¹¹ For by people of strange lips and with a foreign tongue the LORD will speak to this people, ¹² to whom he has said, “This is rest; give rest to the weary; and this is repose”; yet they would not hear. ¹³ And the word of the LORD will be to them precept upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little, there a little, that they may go, and fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken. ¹⁴ Therefore hear the word of the LORD, you scoffers, who rule this people in Jerusalem! ¹⁵ Because you have said, “We have made a covenant with death, and with Sheol we have an agreement, when the overwhelming whip passes through it will not come to us, for we have made lies our refuge, and in falsehood we have taken shelter”; ¹⁶ therefore thus says the Lord GOD, “Behold, I am the one who has laid as a foundation in Zion, a stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, of a sure foundation: ‘Whoever believes will not be in haste.’” (Also *Psalms 118*)

Romans 9:32-33

³² Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works. They have stumbled over the stumbling stone, ³³ as it is written, “Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.” (Also *1 Peter 2:6*)

Matthew 21:42-43

⁴² Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the Scriptures: ‘The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes?’” ⁴³ Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits.”

The gift of tongues has *ceased* because the purpose of cleaving off unbelieving Israel has been fulfilled.

It is a foundation-laying redemptive-historical event.

Tongues is divine revelation

1 Corinthians 14:2

For one who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but to God; for no one understands him, but he utters mysteries in the Spirit.

Romans 16:25-27

²⁵ Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages ²⁶ but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith – ²⁷ to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ!

Ephesians 3:1-6

¹ For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles – ² assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God’s grace that was given to me for you, ³ how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly. ⁴ When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, ⁵ which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. ⁶ This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. (See also *1 Corinthians 15:51-52, Colossians 1:26-27, 4:3, Ephesians 5:32, 6:19, 1 Timothy 3:9, etc.*)

Tongues and prophecy are linked

Acts 2:11

“We hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.”

Acts 2:17-18

¹⁷ “And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophecy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; ¹⁸ even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophecy.”

Acts 19:6

And when Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking in tongues and prophesying. (See also *Acts 10:45-46, 1 Peter 4:10-11*)

The gift of tongues has ceased because revelation has ceased.

What about the gift of healing?

Acts 9:36 - 43

³⁶ Now there was in Joppa a disciple named Tabitha, which, translated, means Dorcas. She was full of good works and acts of charity. ³⁷ In those days she became ill and died, and when they had washed her, they laid her in an upper room. ³⁸ Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, hearing that Peter was there, sent two men to him, urging him, "Please come to us without delay." ³⁹ So Peter rose and went with them. And when he arrived, they took him to the upper room. All the widows stood beside him weeping and showing tunics and other garments that Dorcas made while she was with them. ⁴⁰ But Peter put them all outside, and knelt down and prayed; and turning to the body he said, "Tabitha, arise." And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter she sat up. ⁴¹ And he gave her his hand and raised her up. Then calling the saints and widows, he presented her alive. ⁴² And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed in the Lord. ⁴³ And he stayed in Joppa for many days with one Simon, a tanner.

Acts 20:7-12

⁷ On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul talked with them, intending to depart on the next day, and he prolonged his speech until midnight. ⁸ There were many lamps in the upper room where we were gathered. ⁹ And a young man named Eutychus, sitting at the window, sank into a deep sleep as Paul talked still longer. And being overcome by sleep, he fell down from the third story and was taken up dead. ¹⁰ But Paul went down and bent over him, and taking him in his arms, said, "Do not be alarmed, for his life is in him." ¹¹ And when Paul had gone up and had broken bread and eaten, he conversed with them a long while, until daybreak, and so departed. ¹² And they took the youth away alive, and were not a little comforted.

2 Corinthians 12:12

The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with utmost patience, with signs and wonders and mighty works.

Miraculous healings are part of the signs and wonders of the Apostolic Age; thus have ceased.

Most Continuationists will concede that people no longer rise from the dead. But why should kind of healing alone cease but the rest continue?

Continuationist proof-texts?

Acts 1:8

⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

The apostles have fulfilled this commission.

1 Corinthians 13:8 - 13

⁸ Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. ⁹ For we know in part and we prophesy in part, ¹⁰ but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. ¹¹ When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. ¹² For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known. ¹³ So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

Ephesians 4:11-13

¹¹ And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, ¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

Paul is contrasting *this present age* with *eternity*, and not the question of whether these gifts will cease after the Apostolic Age.

1 Corinthians 14:39-40

³⁹ So, my brothers, earnestly desire to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. ⁴⁰ But all things should be done decently and in order.

Paul is addressing the first-generation of Christians, not all Christians throughout all time.

Summary arguments:

- (1) The Apostolic Age was a foundational redemptive-historical period that is unrepeatable.
- (2) Prophecy, tongues and miraculous healings are signs and wonders of the Apostolic Age.
- (3) Prophecy and tongues are revelatory gifts, and thus have ceased along with the closing of the NT canon.