

New Calvinism and Cessationism

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“Cessationism” is an important topic, but, unfortunately, a negative one. Too often, it seems, we are forced to define our theological position in terms of what we’re *against*. And, I suppose that’s simply because we start out with the positive affirmation that we believe everything that’s in the Bible, but then we respond when someone teaches something false. When that happens, we are forced to reject the false doctrine, and we end up being against something. I think that sometimes people get the impression that we are against this, against that, and against something else. We are frequently viewed as simply being negative. I’d like to begin by saying that the position known as “Cessationism” can be stated positively as an affirmation of *Sola Scriptura* – The Bible as a complete canon, and the Bible alone, is the authoritative, inspired, inerrant Word of God. *Sola Scriptura* was not only an important watch-cry of the Reformation, it was clearly the position taught by both Christ and the Apostles. The belief in the continuation of the gifts of prophecy, miracles and tongues poses a serious threat to *Sola Scriptura*. Opposition to these things is not based on a fear of the Holy Spirit, as some would charge. Rather, such opposition is based on a desire to honor and respect the authority of the Word of God, as it has been given to us in the sixty-six Books of the canonical Scriptures.

This paper’s topic is narrower than merely a defense of Cessationism. My concern is specifically with what has come to be known as “New Calvinism” and its position on the charismatic gifts. In 2009 *Time Magazine* identified “New Calvinism” as one of the “10 Ideas Changing the World Right Now.”¹ So, what exactly is “New Calvinism”? Well, like most new movements, it can be difficult to define. All new movements suffer from this problem. But let me make an initial, albeit broad, attempt at it. By “New Calvinism” I refer to that movement that appears to have taken on considerable momentum in Evangelical Christianity in the early twenty-first century that promotes reformed theology, has become increasingly popular among young evangelicals, and is drawing many away from Dispensationalism. Some prominent names and figureheads in the New Calvinist movement include John Piper, Mark Driscoll, Wayne Grudem, Tim Keller, and Matt Chandler. Some of the prominent organizations and ministries involved in promoting New Calvinism include: Together for the Gospel, Desiring God Ministries, 9 Marks ministry, The Gospel Coalition, Redeemer City to City, and the Acts 29 Network. To a lesser degree, I would also include some Cessationists as within the sphere of influence of New Calvinism, while not truly being “New Calvinists,” themselves, such as John MacArthur and Al Mohler. New Calvinists generally claim to represent the historic reformed faith, and they tend to claim some degree of credence for their position precisely *because* it is the historic position of the reformation. This is why it is perplexing to me that many of these New

¹ David Van Biema, “10 Ideas Changing the World Right Now,” *Time Magazine*, March 12, 2009.

Calvinist proponents have adopted a Continuationist position that holds to the continuing validity of all the spiritual gifts, including miracles, prophecy and tongues.

In contrasting Old Calvinism with New Calvinism, Mark Driscoll noted the following 4 differences, and I think this is important for any attempt at defining “New Calvinism”:

FOUR WAYS 'NEW CALVINISM' IS SO POWERFUL

1. Old Calvinism was fundamental or liberal and separated from or syncretized with culture. New Calvinism is missional and seeks to create and redeem culture.
2. Old Calvinism fled from the cities. New Calvinism is flooding into cities.
3. Old Calvinism was cessationistic and fearful of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. New Calvinism is continuationist and joyful in the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.
4. Old Calvinism was fearful and suspicious of other Christians and burned bridges. New Calvinism loves all Christians and builds bridges between them.²

New Calvinism clearly breaks with Old Calvinism over the issue of Cessationism. I have already mentioned both John MacArthur and Al Mohler as being “within the sphere of influence” of New Calvinism, but not truly New Calvinists themselves. Piper, Grudem, Chandler, Driscoll and Keller all believe that prophecy, miracles and tongues are for today. If there is one major theological work that characterizes New Calvinism, it is undoubtedly Wayne Grudem’s *Systematic Theology*. Piper, Driscoll and Keller, in their statements on the spiritual gifts, all show a dependence on Grudem’s *Systematic Theology*. So, I would like to examine Grudem’s arguments for Continuationism. But before I do that, it’s important that we first classify the charismatic gifts. Most treatments of this subject refer to three particular gifts: (1) Miracles, (2) Prophecy, and (3) Tongues. Miracles and prophecy are clearly distinguished from each other, the one being in the realm of signs, the other in the realm of revelation. But where do tongues fit in? Some classify tongues as a revelatory gift, others as a sign gift. Was the purpose of tongues primarily to communicate information? or was it to serve as a sign? On the strength of 1 Corinthians 14:22, I prefer to treat them as a sign gift. The verse says quite plainly, “So then, tongues are for a sign (σημεῖον).”³

My plan for this paper is to begin with an evaluation of Grudem’s general argument for the continuation of all the charismatic gifts, then proceed to examine his specific arguments for

² Driscoll, Mark. “Time Magazine Names New Calvinism 3rd Most Powerful Idea.” March 12, 2009, <http://theresurgence.com/2009/03/12/time-magazine-names-new-calvinism-3rd-most-powerful-idea>. Accessed 8/16/2013.

³ I do not mean to impose a false dichotomy here. It is possible for tongues to be a sign gift and still maintain some revelatory content. However, the primary purpose for tongues appears to be its function of serving as a sign.

the continuation of prophecy, then tongues, and finally miracles. For this reason I'll be taking prophecy first, because I really think that's the most crucial of these three, and the argument that has been Grudem's real strong point.

I. General Arguments for Continuation of Miracles, Prophecy and Tongues

Grudem addresses the continuation of all three charismatic gifts generally by appealing to two passages of Scripture, 1 Corinthians 1:7 and 1 Corinthians 13:8-10.

1. 1 Corinthians 1:7 states, "So then, you are not lacking in any gift (χάρισμα), while you eagerly await the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ." Grudem argues that this verse is:

A ... general statement from Paul about the purpose of spiritual gifts in the New Testament age. In 1 Corinthians 1:7 Paul ties the possession of spiritual gifts (Gk. χαρίσματα, from χάρισμα, G5922) to the activity of waiting for the Lord's return: "you are not lacking in any spiritual gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ."⁴

His point is that as long as Christians are waiting for Christ's return, all the spiritual gifts should be considered normative. But the fact that the carnal Corinthian believers possessed the gifts (in general) as they awaited the Lord's return in no way signifies that the exceptional gifts of chapter 13 were intended by God to last until the return of Christ! The fact is that in chapter 13 Paul singles out prophecy, knowledge and tongues as somehow unique because they cease. All 1:7 proves is that the other gifts continue at least until Christ's return. If anything, the fact that prophecy knowledge and tongues are singled out for special comment about their cessation in 13:10-12 forms a contrast with the statement of 1:7 about the gifts in general being in possession until the return of Christ.

2. 1 Corinthians 13:8-10. I find it interesting that this passage is claimed both by many Continuationists and by many Cessationists as the bullet-proof argument for their position! This, alone, should caution us against simplistic approaches to the interpretation of this passage. Cessationists focus on vv. 8, 10; whereas Continuationists focus on vv. 10, 12. The passage in its entirety reads as follows:

⁸ Love never fails; but if *there are gifts of prophecy*, they will be done away; if *there are tongues*, they will cease; if *there is knowledge*, it will be done away. ⁹ For we know in part and we prophesy in part; ¹⁰ but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away. ¹¹ When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things. ¹² For now we see in a

⁴ Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2004), 1034.

mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known. (NASB95)

All are in agreement that v. 8 speaks of the cessation of these gifts, where we differ is on the timing. Cessationists generally hold that τέλειον of v. 10 refers to maturity and may also refer to the completion of the canon. The idea of maturity appears to be supported by the following illustration relating to childhood and manhood. Continuationists, on the other hand, take the expression “face to face” of v. 12 to refer either to (1) Second Coming, or (2) our presence with God in heaven. Grudem puts it as follows:

... the meaning of verse 12 seems to require that verse 10 is talking about the time of the Lord’s return. The word “then” (Gk. τότε, G5538) in verse 12 refers to the time “when the perfect comes” in verse 10. This is evident from looking at verse 12: “For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know even as I have been known” (Grudem’s translation).

When shall we see “face to face”? When shall we know “even as we have been known”? These events can only happen when the Lord returns.

The phrase “see face to face” is several times used in the Old Testament to refer to seeing God personally. [footnote 24, Grudem cites Gen. 32:30; Ex. 33:11; Deut. 5:4; 34:10; Judg. 6:22; Ezek. 20:35]⁵

Grudem’s argument was adopted by Mark Driscoll in a sermon preached at Mars Hill Church on June 9, 2013 entitled, “Empowered by the Spirit to Follow Jesus.” Driscoll’s dependence on Grudem is apparent.

When, when does it cease? When does tongues conclude? When is it over, right? What’s the expiration date on the box for tongues? When’s it over? Was it over in the first century, or is it not over yet? What’s the answer?

Well, let’s read the book that the Holy Spirit wrote: “When the perfect comes, the partial will pass away.” The cessationists then say, “And the perfect is the perfect Word of God. Now that we have the perfect Word of God, we don’t need certain supernatural, miraculous, spiritual gifts.” OK, Mars Hill, do we believe that the Word of God is perfect? Absolutely. Absolutely. But the perfect being spoken of there is not the conclusion of the writing of the Bible.

Read with me. “For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face.” Oh, so the perfect has a face. The perfect has a face. Well, who are we talking about now? OK, just so you know, one perfect guy, OK? Let’s all say it together. His name?

[*Congregation responds “Jesus.”*] Nailed it. Good job, Mars Hill. OK, so one perfect guy shows up, and we see him face to face—that’s the Bible’s language for friendship.

⁵ Grudem, 1033.

So, when do these gifts cease? When? When Jesus comes back, when we see him face to face.⁶

As I see it, both Grudem and Driscoll have misunderstood Paul's rhetoric in this verse. The expression, "face to face" is not a reference to our face to face presence with the Lord, but is still a part of the metaphor. First, with respect to Grudem's insistence that "face to face" in the Bible regularly refers to "seeing God personally," this is simply not the case. In fact, it is also used in Scripture of seeing others face-to-face (e.g. Amaziah and Jehoash, 2Ki. 14:8; 2Chr. 25:17; Zedekiah and the king of Babylon, Jer. 32:4; 34:3; an accused before his accusers in Roman law, Ac. 25:16; Paul with the Corinthians, 2 Corinthians 10:1; Paul with the Colossians, Col 2:1; Paul with the Thessalonians, 1Th. 2:17; 3:10; John and the recipient of 2 John, 2John 12; John and the recipient of 3 John, 3John 14). In fact, unless 1 Corinthians 13:12 is the lone exception, Paul *never* uses the phrase of seeing God face-to-face, but uses it five times of seeing man face-to-face. More importantly, however, in verse 12 Paul is using a metaphor about a man seeing his face in a mirror. It is just poor hermeneutics to understand "now we see dimly in a mirror" as metaphorical, but to understand "but then face to face" as literal. No, they are both part of the metaphor. The seeing face to face is part of the mirror metaphor. Twenty-first century western culture has a difficult time understanding this metaphor. In the first-century A.D. metal coated glass mirrors were almost unknown. They appear for the first time in the late first-century Sidon, and then only among the very elite and wealthy. For most people in Paul's day, a "mirror" consisted either of a bowl/pool of water, or, among the wealthy, a highly polished piece of bronze. The point of Paul's metaphor seems to be that when you met someone "face to face" that person could actually see you with greater clarity than you could see yourself. Gordon D. Fee, one who is certainly sympathetic with New Calvinism's position on the gifts, gets the metaphor right, although he makes the wrong application. Fee said, "The emphasis is ... to the *indirect nature* of looking into a mirror as opposed to seeing someone face to face."⁷ Unfortunately, he then goes on to make the following incorrect (in my opinion) conclusion:

The analogy, of course, breaks down a bit since one sees one's own face in a mirror, and Paul's point is that in our present existence one "sees" God (presumably), or understands the "mysteries," only indirectly. It is not a *distorted* image that we have in Christ through the Spirit; but is as yet *indirect*, not complete. To put all this in another way, but keeping the imagery, "Our present 'vision' of God, as great as it is, is as nothing when compared to the real thing that is yet to be; it is like the difference between seeing a reflected image in a mirror and seeing a person face to face." In our own culture the comparable

⁶ Mark Driscoll, "Empowered by the Spirit to Follow Jesus," <http://www.christianpost.com/news/cessationists-are-wrong-about-speaking-in-tongues-says-pastor-mark-driscoll-95341/> accessed 8/3/2013.

⁷ Gordon D. Fee, NICNT *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 648.

metaphor would be the difference between seeing a photograph and seeing someone in person. As good as a picture is, it is simply not the real thing.⁸

Fee still wants to have the “face-to-face” image fulfilled only when we are in God’s actual presence. As I understand the mirror metaphor, Paul’s point was that, during the foundational stage of the church, there was not a mature knowledge of the things of the Lord, and this was due to an incomplete, i.e., immature, canon of Scripture. The early church’s knowledge was akin to a man’s seeing a dim image of himself in a piece of polished bronze. A time would come, however, when the church would possess a completed, mature, canon, and then knowledge would be as clear as when one man sees another man face-to-face. I think this approach makes the best sense of the context, is culturally informed as to the use of mirrors in the first century, and avoids the difficulty of cutting the metaphor in two. However, I must conclude that neither side in this debate has a bullet-proof case in 1 Corinthians 13, but I do believe the completed canon view has good merit. In the end, the argument for Cessationism needs to go elsewhere than 1 Corinthians 13.

II. Specific Argument for Continuation of Prophecy

Grudem’s argument for the continuation of prophecy rests entirely on the presumption that NT prophecy is somehow different than OT prophecy, and that therefore NT prophecy can be less than 100% authoritative and inerrant. Grudem admits that this point is absolutely essential to his continuationist position:

Now *if* New Testament congregational prophecy was like Old Testament prophecy and New Testament apostolic words in its authority, then this cessationist objection would indeed be true. ... I have argued extensively elsewhere that ordinary congregational prophecy in New Testament churches did *not* have the authority of Scripture.⁹

... a fresh examination of the New Testament teaching on this gift will show that it should be defined not as “predicting the future,” nor as “proclaiming a word from the Lord,” nor as “powerful preaching—but rather as “*telling something that God has spontaneously brought to mind.*”¹⁰

Grudem does something here that he does frequently in his continuationist arguments, he simply redefines terms to his own liking, and then argues on the basis of his redefinition. So the real cessationist argument then must be against the continuationist re-definition of “prophecy” as something that can be errant. Grudem’s expression, “a fresh examination of the New Testament,” reveals that he is committing the same kind of hermeneutical error here that leads to Amillennialism and Covenant Theology, namely that of reading the New Testament without

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Grudem, 1039.

¹⁰ Grudem, 1049.

taking its Old Testament background into consideration. The words “prophet,” “prophecy,” and “prophecy” all have a foundation in the OT. The NT authors used these words in a way that is consistent with their meaning in the OT. David Aune writes,

In early Christianity the exclusive use of the term *prophētēs* as a designation for a human medium of divine revelation is consciously borrowed from the widely accepted equation in Judaism of the Greek word *prophētēs* with the Hebrew term *nabi*’ (reflected in the LXX). The term *prophētēs* occurs 144 times in the NT, 86 of which refer to OT prophets. Similarly, in the Apostolic Fathers the word occurs 58 times, 37 of which refer to OT prophets. The early Christian application of the designation *prophētēs* to individual Christians, then, was originally determined by the prevalent conception of the prophetic role in the OT. In early Judaism the term “prophet” (*nabi*’ or *prophētēs*) was rarely applied to those who were not OT prophets or eschatological prophets. In early Christianity this reluctance to apply the designation to contemporary figures was completely overcome, and the term *prophētēs* was freely applied to those who were regarded as inspired spokesmen of God. In the gospels the title is used of John the Baptist ten times and of Jesus nine times.¹¹

There were other Greek words available to Paul that might have meant a “word brought spontaneously to mind,” such as ὑποφήτης, μάντις, προμάντις, θεομάντις, θεοπρόπος, χρησμολόγος, χρήτης, etc.¹² Grudem’s definition is a theological definition, not a lexical one.

1. Is NT prophecy different from OT prophecy?

According to Grudem, “the Greek word προφήτης (G4737, ‘prophet’) at the time of the New Testament had a very broad range of meanings. It generally did not have the sense ‘one who speaks God’s very words’ but rather ‘one who speaks on the basis of some external influence’ (often a spiritual influence of some kind).”¹³ Not only does he flatly deny the standard meaning of “prophet,” he attempts to shift this meaning to another word,

In the New Testament there were also people who spoke and wrote God’s very words and had them recorded in Scripture, but we may be surprised to find that Jesus no longer calls them “prophets” but uses a new term, “apostles.” The apostles are the New Testament counterpart to the Old Testament prophets (see 1 Cor. 2:13; 2 Cor. 13:3; Gal. 1:8–9; 11–12; 1 Thess. 2:13; 4:8, 15; 2 Peter 3:2). It is the apostles, not the prophets, who have authority to write the words of New Testament Scripture.¹⁴

¹¹ David E. Aune, *Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 195.

¹² *Ibid.*, f.n. 23.

¹³ Grudem, 1050.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

In response, we should note that the terms προφητεύω, προφήτης, and προφητεία have a history of usage in the OT. The NT writers frequently used these terms precisely the same way as in the OT. The fact that in the 1st century Greek in extra-biblical contexts these words were also used in other senses in no way requires us to import such meanings into their biblical usage. Grudem's strategy amounts to redefining terms in order to fit his theology. Substituting "apostles" as the NT equivalent of the OT prophets sets up a false dichotomy between prophets and apostles. The term "prophet" can be inclusive of "apostles." If so, then this argument is completely invalidated. Grudem even admits later on in his treatment of prophecy that such was the case: "Of course, the words *prophet* and *prophecy* were *sometimes used of the apostles* in contexts that emphasized the external spiritual influence (from the Holy Spirit) under which they spoke (so Rev. 1:3; 22:7; and Eph. 2:20; 3:5)"¹⁵

2. Testing of prophets

The OT saint was commanded in the law to test prophets as to whether they were true or false prophets. Deut. 13:1-5 established a test of doctrine, and Deut. 18:20-22 established a test of fulfillment. The punishment for a false prophet under the OT theocracy was death by stoning. Now under the age of grace we are not under a theocracy, and we no longer stone false prophets to death, but the NT saint was urged to test the prophets as was the OT saint (see 1Thess 5:19-22; 1 John 4:1-3). This points to a strong continuity between OT prophecy and NT prophecy. Nevertheless, Grudem comments on 1Thess. 5:21,

... when Paul tells them to "test everything" it must include at least the prophecies he mentioned in the previous phrase. He implies that prophecies contain some things that are good and some things that are not good when he encourages them to "hold fast *what is good*." This is something that could never have been said of the words of an Old Testament prophet, or the authoritative teachings of a New Testament apostle."¹⁶

Likewise, Piper said in an interview recorded Jan. 17, 2013, "Prophecy in the New Testament, at least the way it's treated in 1 Corinthians 12,13,14, doesn't appear to have the same Scripture quality inerrant, inspiration and authority that when in Isaiah, 'Thus saith the Lord.' You don't go up to Isaiah and say, 'I'm gonna test what you've said now and hold fast to what is good and throw the rest away.' But you do that with New Testament prophecy."¹⁷

¹⁵ Grudem, 1051. Aune claims that this attempt to "regard the early Christian *apostles* as the true functional equivalents of the OT prophets, appears to oversimplify the role of the OT prophet" (Aune, 217).

¹⁶ Grudem, 1054.

¹⁷ John Piper, "What Is the Gift of Prophecy in the New Covenant." David Matthews interviewing John Piper, Jan. 17, 2013. Audio recording of interview. <http://www.desiringgod.org/blog/posts/piper-on-prophecy-and-tongues>. Quotation begins shortly after 0:18.

Both Grudem and Piper assume that Paul has in view prophecies that contain both good and bad. But much more likely is that there were good prophets (to be accepted) and bad (i.e. false) prophets that were to be rejected. Paul's admonition is precisely in line with what God had commanded the OT saint to do with respect to the OT prophets.

3. NT examples Prophecy

Grudem puts forth 2 examples of NT prophets whom he says gave prophecies that contained errors. The first is Acts 21:4. The disciples of Tyre "kept telling Paul through the Spirit not to set foot in Jerusalem." Grudem claims that Paul "disobeyed" this prophecy which he would never have done if it had authority equal to Scripture. Yet this could simply mean that the disciples correctly and accurately prophesied that Paul would be arrested in Jerusalem, and that on the basis of this inerrant prophecy, they urged him not to set foot in Jerusalem.

The second, and more important, example is Acts 21:10-11. Here we read that Agabus "took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands, and said, 'This is what the Holy Spirit says: 'In this way the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.''" Grudem contends that this prophecy was "nearly correct but not quite." He finds two faults with the prophecy: (1) It was the Romans, not the Jews, who bound Paul (Acts 21:33; 22:29), and (2) the Jews, rather than delivering him voluntarily, tried to kill him and he had to be rescued by force (21:32). However, (1) The argument that it was the Romans, not the Jews, who bound Paul is an argument from silence. The account in Acts does not say that the Jews did not bind Paul. In fact, they probably did restrain him in some way in order to beat him in the temple. (2) The argument that the Romans rescued Paul by force ignores the fact that v. 32 specifically says that as the Roman official was approaching the scene, the mob stopped beating Paul. Thus, the Jews did in fact deliver Paul to the Romans.¹⁸ Aune concludes, "... there is no reason to regard the claims of Agabus (Acts 21:11) ... as in any way inferior to those of John the prophet."¹⁹

So, Grudem has not proved that NT prophecy was in any way different in character or degree of accuracy from OT prophecy. By his own admission, Grudem claimed that he must prove that NT prophecy is different than OT prophecy. He attempts to do this simply by redefining words in order to fit his theology. His redefinition of prophecy in the NT fails in 3 ways: (1) linguistically, (2) in terms of the testing of prophets, and (3) in his failed attempt to find examples of errant NT prophecy.

¹⁸ Nathan Busenitz, "Throwing Prophecy under the Agabus," *The Cripple Gate for a New Generation of Non-conformists*. <http://thecripplegate.com/throwing-prophecy-under-the-agabus/>, March 15, 2012, accessed August 21, 2013. Busenitz serves on the pastoral staff of Grace Church and teaches theology at The Master's Seminary in Los Angeles.

¹⁹ Aune, 208.

III. Specific Argument for Continuation of Tongues

In Pentecostalism, tongues takes on special importance as the one gift, given to all who are truly saved, that gives absolute proof of one's salvation. New Calvinism, on the other hand, while promoting the idea that the gift of tongues continues today, does not view it as a proof of one's salvation, nor does it believe that genuine Christians must have this gift. Compared with Pentecostalism, New Calvinism can be said to play down the importance of tongues. Nevertheless, belief in this gift's continuance leads New Calvinist John Piper to pray longingly that he may have the gift of tongues. In an interview with David Matthews recorded January 17, 2013, Piper said the following:

As far as my own experience goes, I don't believe that I have ever authentically spoken in tongues. ... Just this morning, I was pacing in my living room memorizing some words from Jude ... "praying in the Holy Spirit" ... I don't think praying in the Holy Spirit means praying in tongues ... I think it means being in sync with the Holy Spirit in the way you pray. But I thought of tongues, and I said, "I haven't asked for tongues for a long time." ... And I said, "Lord, I'm still eager to speak in tongues. Would you give me that gift?" ... I used to sit out in the car outside church singing in tongues, but I knew I wasn't; I was just making it up. And I said, "This isn't it; I know this isn't it." But this is what they try to get you to do if you're in that certain group. And I did everything to try to open myself to this. And the Lord has always said to me, without words, "No." ... But I don't assume that's His last word, and so every now and then I'm just going to go back to Him just like a child and say, "A lot of my brothers and sisters have this toy, this gift, can I have it too?" And if He says "No, because it might go to your head," or "because you misuse it," or because of whatever, it's His business.²⁰

Paul's discussion of prophecy, knowledge and tongues in 1 Corinthians 13 appears to separate tongues from the other two. Paul mentions all three in verse 8 as gifts that will cease or pass away. Then, he drops the topic of tongues for the remainder of the chapter while he discusses prophecy and knowledge (two revelatory gifts). He takes the matter of tongues up again in chapter 14 as a contrast to prophecy. When he comes to 14:22, he identifies tongues as a "sign" gift, which is probably the reason why its cessation is treated separately from the cessation of prophecy and knowledge which are revelatory gifts. Grudem, however, understands tongues as falling within the same category of gifts as prophecy and knowledge. Nevertheless, he puts forth three specific continuationist arguments that are unique to tongues.

²⁰ John Piper, "What Is Speaking in Tongues?" David Matthews interviewing John Piper, Jan. 17, 2013. <http://www.desiringgod.org/blog/posts/piper-on-prophecy-and-tongues>. Quote begins at approximately 4:18.

1. Identifying tongues as a phenomenon that is “unique to the new covenant age”²¹

Grudem argues that since the gift of tongues never occurred at any time in the OT it is unique to the new covenant. But “*unique* to the new covenant age” is not the same thing as “*characteristic* of the new covenant age.” For example, apostles are unique to the church age, but not characteristic of the church age. And, in fact, apostles were limited to the first century and ceased to function in the church after that. Just because something is “unique” to this age, does not mean that it cannot cease at some time within this age.

In contrasting tongues in what he calls the “new covenant age” with tongues (i.e. languages) in the OT, Grudem argues that in the OT “languages” came about as a result of God’s judgment at Babel (Gen. 11), but that in the kingdom age, the whole world will speak one language to the praise of God. Grudem actually raises a good point here. I agree that “languages” came about as a result of God’s judgment at Babel. In fact, I think this is a really important observation in understanding the purpose of tongues in the early church age. 1 Corinthians 14:21 cites Isaiah 28:11-12 and also makes an allusion to Deuteronomy 28:49. Both of these are passages which refer to tongues (i.e. foreign languages) as a sign of God’s judgment against unbelieving Israel. Immediately after referring to these two OT passages, Paul states in v. 22, “So then, tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe, but to the unbelieving.” I’m grateful to Dr. Renald Showers who first brought this to my attention, and for making the connection between tongues and the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70.²² In Showers’ view, tongues functioned as a warning to unbelieving Israel of impending judgment via the Roman army, as foretold by Jesus in His Olivet Discourse. After AD 70, there would have been no reason for the continuation of tongues.

2. Making 1 Corinthians 14 normative for understanding tongues

The practice of making one Biblical reference normative and then forcing all other references to conform to one’s understanding of the one reference is poor methodology both for exegesis and for theology. Both Grudem and Piper do this, however, when it comes to an understanding of tongues. They both acknowledge that in Acts 2 known human languages were being spoken, but they then observe that 1 Corinthians appears to present tongues as a private prayer language, based on 1 Corinthians 14:4-5.²³ In this way, Tongues is presented as “speaking to God,” rather than speaking to men, and Acts 2 is presented as only a single instance, not to be taken as normative. For instance, Grudem writes,

Some have objected that speaking in tongues must always consist of speech in *known* human languages, since that is what happened at Pentecost. But the fact that speaking in tongues

²¹ Grudem, 1069.

²² Renald E. Showers, “The Connection of Isaiah 28:11 To the Gift of Tongues,” *Israel My Glory*, February-March 1989.

²³ Piper, “What is Speaking in Tongues.” Grudem, 1071-74.

occurred in known human languages *once* in Scripture does not require that it *always* happen with known languages, especially when another description of speaking in tongues (1 Cor. 14) indicates exactly the opposite.²⁴

But this ignores the fact that tongues occurred not once, but three times in Acts (chapters 2, 10, and 19). In each occasion in Acts, tongues was intended to be heard and observed by man. It was not “primarily speech directed toward God.” To take the phenomenon as exercised by the carnal Corinthian church and make it normative is just bad theology! Indeed, Grudem acknowledges this weakness in his theology, but he hides this acknowledgment in footnote 42:

I do not want to rule out the possibility that speaking in tongues could sometimes include speech directed to people, not to God, because it is just possible that Paul’s statement in 1 Cor. 14:2 is a generalization that is not intended to cover every instance, and, in any case, the main point of the verse is that only God can *understand* uninterpreted tongues, not that God is the only one to whom speech in tongues can be addressed. In fact, speech to men might be what is happening in Acts 2. Nevertheless, the evidence that we do have in 1 Cor. 14 indicates speech directed toward God, and it seems safe to say that that is generally what speaking in tongues will be.²⁵

Surely if anything is to be considered as “normative,” it should be the description in Acts, not the solitary reference in 1 Corinthians. That the carnal Corinthians would use tongues in a manner not designed by God should not surprise us. Paul’s suggestion that the Corinthian tongues-speaker “edifies himself” (v. 4), does not necessarily mean that God intended tongues as a private prayer language. The use or abuse of a spiritual gift is subject to the will of the one who possesses the gift (1 Cor. 14:32). No doubt the tongues-speaker, experiencing the supernatural ability to speak a foreign language that he had not formally learned would sense some sort of self-“edification.” But this neither requires that the speaking was done in private, nor that it was necessarily a prayer.

One danger of taking 1 Corinthians as the normative passage is that 1 Corinthians is a somewhat contextualized epistle. This is especially so in regards to the issue of tongues. Ecstatic utterances were known among the Greeks, particularly in the region around Athens and Corinth. The Greek prophetic oracles issued their prophecies in ecstatic speech.²⁶ It would be entirely within the character of the Corinthians for them to import some of their past heathen practices into the church. Such appears to have been the case with reference both to sexual immorality (1 Cor. 6-7) and to cultic practices regarding pagan sacrifice (1 Cor. 8-10), possibly also with reference to social customs of dress (1 Cor. 11). If their particular practice of tongues was influenced by their Greek culture, we would certainly not want to consider their practice as

²⁴ Grudem, 1072.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Aune, 199.

normative. If it be objected that Paul did not attempt to correct the misuse of tongues as prayer language at Corinth, it should be noted that often Scripture regulates a malpractice, rather than correcting it. For example both divorce and slavery were regulated in the OT, but not forbidden. Even in the NT, slavery is not forbidden, although masters are commanded to treat their slaves with Christian grace. Thus, in 1 Corinthians, Paul does not forbid the use of tongues as a prayer language (1 Cor. 14:14), but he says that clearly understood speech is to be preferred over tongues (verses 15-20).

3. Redefining the phenomenon of tongues

Building on his understanding of 1 Corinthians being normative for understanding the gift of tongues, Grudem defines tongues as, “Speaking in tongues is prayer or praise spoken in syllables not understood by the speaker.”²⁷ If applied to the occurrences of tongues in Acts, this “definition” falls short on at least three counts: (1) There is no evidence in Acts that the phenomenon consisted of “prayer or praise.” The word “praise” might approach the meaning of “magnificent things about God” (Acts 2:11 τὰ μεγαλεῖα τοῦ θεοῦ), but this was not a “praise service” in church! (2) The word “syllables” is not an adequate description of the words that were understood by all the diaspora Jews in their native languages. It is clearly an attempt to justify auditory units that fall somehow short of what we understand as “words.” (3) The phrase “not understood by the speaker,” while true, actually turns the description in Acts around. The point being made in Acts was that the hearers understood the languages. The fact that the speakers did not understand what they were saying, while heightening the effect of the miracle, is actually beside the point. Piper, likewise, understands tongues in 1 Corinthians 12 as,

more of an ecstatic utterance that didn't have any ordinary human meaning, but tongues of men and of angels seems to be spoken about, and so it's a kind of utterance where your heart is full to the point of overflowing, with the Holy Spirit, He looses your tongue to utter those syllables and they are of spiritual value to you, and if there is someone with an interpretation, then they become spiritually valuable to others.²⁸

Not only does Grudem redefine tongues, but he also provides his own definition of the gift of interpretation of tongues. This he defines as, “reporting to the church the general meaning of something spoken in tongues.”²⁹ Once again, Grudem is simply making up a definition that fits his preconceived notion of the phenomenon of tongues. What justifies his use of the word “general” in the expression “general meaning”? This implies that the interpretation is not specific. But if “tongues” refers to “languages,” as Grudem admits, then an interpretation should be a precise translation, not just a vague “general meaning.” But what Grudem is doing here is

²⁷ Grudem, 1070.

²⁸ Piper, “What is Speaking in Tongues.” Quotation begins just after 1:51.

²⁹ Grudem, 1076.

paving the way for interpretation of tongues to have the same kind of general force as his understanding of NT prophecy. This lets both the tongues speaker and the interpreter off the hook in case their message somehow falls short of inerrant authority.

As discussed briefly above, 1 Corinthians 14:22 appears to identify the purpose of tongues as a sign of impending judgment for unbelieving Israel. New Calvinists, however, define the purpose to be either for (1) worldwide evangelism (Acts 2), or (2) a private prayer language (1 Cor. 14:14). This ignores the clear statement of 1 Corinthians 14:22, “So then, tongues are for a sign, not for believers, but for unbelievers.”

IV. Specific Argument for Continuation of Miracles

It is important when discussing miracles in the context of the cessationist/continuationist debate, to distinguish between miracles that are worked by the sovereign activity of God and miracles performed by men who have a gift of working of miracles. Nearly all Cessationists believe that the former kind of miracles is still a part of the way God works in the world today. It is only the gift of working miracles that has ceased. Failure to make this distinction actually led Augustine to change his position from cessationism to continuationism.³⁰

Grudem puts forth 3 arguments to show the continuation of miracles:

1. He redefines “miracle.”

Grudem’s definition of miracle is taken from John Frame: “A *miracle is a less common kind of God’s activity in which he arouses people’s awe and wonder and bears witness to himself.*”³¹ My main concern with this definition is that it appears to water down what most people consider to be truly miraculous. Compare, for example, the definition given by A.H. Strong, “A miracle is an event in nature, so extraordinary in itself and so coinciding with the prophecy or command of a religious teacher or leader, as fully to warrant the conviction, on the part of those who witness it, that God has wrought it with the design of certifying that this teacher or leader has been commissioned by him.”³² But there is another point that needs to be made concerning Grudem’s definition. By defining a miracle as “less common,” Grudem actually paves the way for Cessationism, since, if miraculous works continue throughout the church age, they are *ipso facto* “common,” not “less common.”

³⁰ Beth Y. Langstaff, *Temporary Gifts: John Calvin’s Doctrine of the Cessation of Miracles*, Ph.D. Dissertation, Princeton Theological Seminary, 1999, pp. 40-41. Pavel Hejzlar, “John Calvin and the Cessation of Miraculous Healing,” *Communio Viatorum*, 49 no 1, 2007, p. 42.

³¹ Grudem, 355. In a footnote, Grudem notes, “I have adapted this definition from unpublished lectures given by John Frame, professor of systematic theology at Westminster Theological Seminary.”

³² Augustus Hopkins Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1907), 118.

2. Miracles are characteristic of the New Covenant Age.³³

To prove his point, Grudem notes that miracles continued on beyond the ministry of Jesus to include the Twelve, the Seventy, the Corinthians, and the Galatians. He claims that this is unlike the miracles of the OT that tended “to occur primarily in connection with one prominent leader at a time, such as Moses or Elijah or Elisha.”³⁴ But Grudem is not quite being honest with the facts, for Moses’ miracle working was also shared with Aaron and Joshua, and Elijah’s miracle working was shared with Elisha’s and, presumably the school of the prophets. But, beyond this observation, one should also note that the mere fact that miracles continued on into the early church age among the Corinthian and Galatian believers does not contradict the position of Cessationism. His argument here is flawed in the same way it was flawed to argue that the gift of tongues was characteristic of the new covenant age (see above). “*Unique* to the new covenant age” is not the same thing as “*characteristic* of the new covenant age.” While a heightened or concentrated occurrence of miracles may have been unique to first century Christianity, this does not mean that it was *characteristic* for all of the church age.

3. Miracles have 5 purposes.

(1) To authenticate the message of the gospel.³⁵ (2) To bear witness to the fact that the kingdom of God has come.³⁶ (3) To help those who are in need.³⁷ (4) To remove hindrances to people’s ministries.³⁸ (5) To bring glory to God.³⁹ For the most part, I would agree with these purposes. However, depending on how one defines terms, I would take issue with the second purpose. A dispensationalist will have no problem with identifying the purpose of Jesus’ miracles as bearing witness to the fact that the kingdom of God was “at hand,” i.e., being offered to Israel. However, this is not what Grudem means. For Grudem, the kingdom age began with the first coming of Christ and continues without interruption throughout the church age. Therefore, to argue that miracles bear witness that the kingdom of God has come, means necessarily that miracles continue throughout the church age.

³³ Grudem, 358-59.

³⁴ Grudem, 359.

³⁵ Grudem, 359.

³⁶ Grudem, 360.

³⁷ Grudem, 360.

³⁸ Grudem, 361.

³⁹ Grudem, 361.

Conclusion

The preachers of New Calvinism have succeeded in drawing many away from Dispensationalism. One of the ways they have succeeded in this task has been to promote a tolerant position vis-à-vis the charismatic gifts. They have avoided the extreme position of Pentecostalism by not requiring speaking in tongues as evidence of salvation. But they have also rejected the historic reformed position of Cessationism, which happens also to be shared by dispensational teachers. By striking a middle of the road position, the New Calvinists give the appearance of being a “gentler, kinder Calvinism.” But in order to offer this tolerant position, they must adopt arguments that really do not stand up to solid Biblical exegesis. New Calvinists tend to redefine terms and employ sloppy exegesis in an effort to allow the continuation of the charismatic gifts for today. Grudem sums up the New Calvinist appeal on page 1046 of his *Systematic Theology*:

... those in the charismatic and Pentecostal camps, and those in the cessationist camp (primarily Reformed and dispensational Christians) really need each other, and they would do well to appreciate each other more. The former tend to have more practical experience in the use of spiritual gifts and in vitality in worship that cessationists could benefit from, if they were willing to learn. On the other hand, Reformed and dispensational groups have traditionally been very strong in understanding of Christian doctrine and in deep and accurate understanding of the teachings of Scripture. Charismatic and Pentecostal groups could learn much from them if they would be willing to do so. But it certainly is not helpful to the church as a whole for both sides to think they can learn nothing from the other, or that they can gain no benefit from fellowship with each other.⁴⁰

His admission that the Dispensationalist’s position on Cessationism is based on a “very strong ... understanding of Christian doctrine and ... deep and accurate understanding of the teachings of Scripture” ought not to be ignored.

⁴⁰ Grudem, 1046.