

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

Systematic Theology Series

PNEUMATOLOGY

The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit

UNIT 8: THE GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT — A CESSATIONIST THEOLOGY

Lesson 23

The Cessation of the Extraordinary Gifts

Why the Miraculous Sign Gifts Ceased with the Apostolic Age

Five Lines of Argument, One Secure Conclusion

Key Texts: Hebrews 2:3–4; Ephesians 2:20; 2 Corinthians 12:12; 1 Corinthians 13:8–12; Jude 3

***“God Also Testifying with Them, Both by Signs and Wonders and by Various Miracles
and by Gifts of the Holy Spirit”***

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Series Verse

*“But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes,
He will guide you into all the truth;
for He will not speak on His own initiative,
but whatever He hears, He will speak;
and He will disclose to you what is to come.”*

John 16:13, NASB 1995

Introduction

Lesson 23 is the exegetical and theological centerpiece of Unit 8, the lesson toward which the entire cessationist argument has been building since Lesson 21 introduced the ordinary/extraordinary distinction. This lesson presents the positive case for cessationism: the exegetical and theological reasons why the extraordinary sign and revelatory gifts of the apostolic era, tongues, miraculous healing, apostolic authority, and revelatory prophecy, belonged to a specific, bounded redemptive-historical period and have not continued beyond the close of the apostolic age and the completion of the New Testament canon.

Let the framing of this lesson be set from the outset with both precision and pastoral care. Cessationism is not primarily the conviction that the Spirit has stopped working; it is the conviction that the Spirit's work in the present age is accomplished through the ordinary means He has ordained, the Word, the gospel, the sacraments, the continuing gifts, and the community of faith. The Spirit is not less active in the post-apostolic church than in the apostolic church; He is differently active, in accordance with the different redemptive-historical stage the church now occupies. The foundation has been laid; the canon has been closed; the authenticating work of the sign gifts has been completed. The Spirit who authenticated the apostolic message through miraculous signs is the same Spirit who now illuminates, applies, and empowers the apostolic message as Scripture. The work has changed its mode; the Spirit has not diminished His presence.

Five distinct lines of argument together constitute the cessationist case: the Purposes argument (the sign gifts served the specific function of authenticating apostolic revelation), the Foundational argument (the apostolic foundation is laid once, not perpetually), the Sufficiency argument (Scripture's completeness renders further revelatory gifts unnecessary), the Historical argument (the extraordinary gifts demonstrably ceased in the post-apostolic era), and the Canonical argument (the close of the canon marks the completion of the revelatory gifts' purpose). Each argument has independent weight; together they constitute a cumulative case of considerable force. After presenting the case, this lesson will close with a section on engaging the continuationist position with the Christian charity, intellectual honesty, and ecumenical care that a secondary-order theological disagreement within the household of faith deserves.

I. The Extraordinary Gifts Identified

What the Cessationist Position Addresses

Before presenting the case for cessation, the gifts under discussion must be clearly identified, because cessationism does not claim that all spiritual gifts have ceased. The cessationist position is the specific claim that the extraordinary sign and revelatory gifts, a specific subset of the Spirit's charismata, were given for a specific, bounded redemptive-historical purpose that has now been fulfilled.

The extraordinary gifts include: the apostolic office in its foundational sense (not every elder or teacher is an apostle in this sense, but the Twelve and Paul, who were uniquely commissioned by the risen Christ with foundational authority, constitute the once-for-all foundation of Ephesians 2:20); revelatory prophecy in the sense of new, extracanonical divine communication of specific information, events, or doctrines (not the general sense of Spirit-illuminated preaching, which continues); tongues in the sense of the Spirit-given ability to speak in unlearned human languages as a sign to Israel and the nations (Acts 2:4–6; 1 Corinthians 14:21–22); interpretation of tongues as the complement of the tongues gift; miraculous healing as an immediately-effective, publicly-verifiable, apostolically-authenticated restoration of health that bypassed natural processes of recovery; and other sign-gifts (miraculous powers, etc.) that operated by suspending or bypassing the normal operation of the physical world.

The key qualifier distinguishing these from the ordinary gifts is their mode of operation: they bypass or suspend the normal operation of natural human capacities or physical processes. They are not merely the Spirit's empowerment of natural abilities but the Spirit's direct, immediate production of effects that exceed what natural ability, however empowered, could explain. And the cessationist argument is that this specific mode of operation, and the specific purposes it served, have a defined beginning (the inauguration of the apostolic era) and a defined ending (the close of the apostolic canon and the completion of its foundational purposes).

II. The Purposes Argument

The Sign Gifts Served the Specific Function of Authenticating Apostolic Revelation

The most exegetically direct argument for the cessation of the extraordinary gifts is the Purposes argument: the sign gifts served the specific redemptive-historical function of authenticating the apostolic message as genuinely divine, and this function was inherently tied to the unique, unrepeatable situation of the apostolic era. Hebrews 2:3–4 is the key text: “how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will” (NASB 1995).

The structure of Hebrews 2:3–4 is the cessationist argument in condensed form: the salvation was first spoken through the Lord (the original, authoritative divine source), then confirmed by the apostolic eyewitnesses who heard it (the first human transmission), and God authenticated

the apostolic confirmation with signs, wonders, miracles, and gifts of the Spirit. The divine authentication was the sign gifts' specific function: to certify the apostolic proclamation as genuinely from the God who spoke it through His Son. The signs were God's own signature on the apostolic message, His public testimony that these specific human messengers were delivering His genuine word.

Second Corinthians 12:12 provides the confirmation from a different angle: "The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles." The sign gifts (signs, wonders, miracles) are identified as the "signs of a true apostle", the specific credentials that authenticated the apostolic office. The connection between signs and apostolic identity is the Purposes argument's decisive link: if signs authenticate apostles, and apostles are a once-for-all foundational office (Ephesians 2:20), then the sign gifts that authenticate apostolic authority belong to the once-for-all apostolic era.

The Purposes argument does not require the claim that God cannot work miraculously today; it requires only the claim that the specific gifts that served the authenticating function of the apostolic era served that function in the apostolic era and that the function has been fulfilled. God remains entirely free to work miraculously in any way He pleases, in any era, without being bound by the expectations of either cessationist or continuationist theology. The cessationist claim is the more limited claim: that the specific charismata of tongues, apostolic miracles, and revelatory prophecy served a specific purpose that was completed with the close of the apostolic era, and that the Spirit's work in the present age is conducted through the ordinary gifts and the ordinary means He has ordained.

III. The Foundational Argument

Ephesians 2:20, Foundations Are Laid Once

Ephesians 2:19–20 presents the church's foundational structure in terms that are directly relevant to the cessationist case: "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone" (NASB 1995). The church's foundation is the apostles and prophets of the New Testament era, those who received, transmitted, and inscripturated the foundational revelation of the new covenant. And the building metaphor that Paul employs carries an inherent logic: foundations are laid once. They are not relaid; they do not need perpetual additions; once the foundation is complete, the building's subsequent work is on the foundation, not of it.

The apostles and (New Testament) prophets were the foundation's unique instruments because they were the unique recipients of the revelatory gifts, the gifts through which the new covenant revelation was received, authenticated, and transmitted. When the foundational apostolic and prophetic work was complete, when the last apostle had died and the last canonical book had been written, the foundational function was fulfilled. The foundation had been laid. The sign gifts that authenticated the foundation-layers and confirmed the foundation's divine origin had accomplished their purpose. The building now rises on the foundation; it does not continue laying the foundation.

The Foundational argument also addresses the Charismatic claim that the New Testament identifies multiple categories of prophets and apostles and that the continuing prophetic and apostolic ministry does not require the extraordinary gifts of the founding apostles and prophets. The cessationist response is to distinguish the foundational apostles and prophets of Ephesians 2:20 (those who laid the once-for-all foundation of the church's authoritative revelation) from the continuing ministry of proclamation and application of the apostolic message (which every preacher and teacher exercises). The former required the extraordinary gifts of authentication; the latter is adequately served by the ordinary gifts of teaching, exhortation, and pastoral care.

“God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit” | “The signs of a true apostle were performed among you by signs and wonders and miracles” | “Built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone”

Hebrews 2:4; 2 Corinthians 12:12; Ephesians 2:20, NASB 1995

IV. The Sufficiency Argument

If Scripture Is Sufficient, Further Revelation Is Unnecessary

The Sufficiency argument for cessationism is both the most theologically foundational of the five arguments and the one most directly connected to the doctrine of Scripture established in the Bibliology unit of this systematic theology series. The argument is this: if Scripture is the sufficient and complete Word of God for all matters of faith and practice (2 Timothy 3:16–17), then no further divine revelation is needed; and if no further divine revelation is needed, then the gifts whose primary purpose was to deliver or authenticate new divine revelation have fulfilled their purpose and are no longer necessary.

Second Timothy 3:16–17 is the locus classicus of biblical sufficiency: “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work” (NASB 1995). The sufficiency claim is comprehensive: the man of God is “adequate” (artios, complete, fitted, fully equipped) and “equipped for every good work.” Not some good works, not most good works, but every good work. If the man of God who has the completed Scripture is fully equipped for every good work, then additional divine revelation would be not merely unnecessary but actually redundant. A revelation that adds to what the completed Scripture already fully equips the man of God to do is a revelation whose addition contributes nothing that the existing revelation does not already supply.

The Sufficiency argument connects directly to the doctrine of Scripture's canon. If Scripture is not yet closed, if new divine revelation continues to be delivered through prophets and apostles, then the Bible is not yet complete and the Spirit's guidance into all truth (John 16:13) is still in progress through new revelatory gifts. The cessationist holds that the Spirit's guiding into all truth was completed with the apostolic canon: the Spirit guided the apostolic community into all the truth that needed to be inscripturated for the church's permanent guidance, and this guidance is now fully accessible in the completed canon. The continuationist

who holds to a continuing revelatory gift of prophecy must account for the relationship between this new revelation and the canonical sufficiency of the completed Scripture, and the cessationist finds none of the available accounts satisfactory.

The Sufficiency argument also bears on the pastoral practice of the church. If the completed Scripture is sufficient for all matters of faith and practice, then every aspect of the church's life, its worship, its governance, its mission, its ethics, and its spiritual formation, can and must be grounded in the Word. The claim to prophetic revelation that supplements or corrects the Word of Scripture creates an authority structure in which the prophet's word stands alongside or above the canonical Word in directing the community's life, and the cessationist's concern is not merely exegetical but pastoral: communities that operate on the basis of ongoing prophecy tend to become vulnerable to the manipulation of charismatic leaders whose prophetic authority is, in practice, unchallengeable. The completed Scripture's sufficiency is the safeguard against this pastoral danger.

V. The Historical Argument

The Extraordinary Gifts Demonstrably Ceased in the Post-Apostolic Era

The Historical argument for cessationism draws on the testimony of the early church fathers and the demonstrable pattern of the extraordinary gifts' decline and disappearance in the post-apostolic era. This argument is sometimes treated as the weakest of the cessationist arguments, since it is an argument from absence rather than an argument from explicit scriptural assertion, and since Charismatic historians have challenged the claim that the extraordinary gifts were entirely absent from the post-apostolic church. Nevertheless, the historical evidence is significant and deserves careful presentation.

The most important early patristic testimony comes from John Chrysostom (349–407 AD), the great preacher of Antioch and Constantinople, who wrote with candor about the absence of the extraordinary gifts in his own era: "This whole place [1 Corinthians 12:1–32] 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." Chrysostom's fourth-century observation, that the gifts described in 1 Corinthians 12 were no longer occurring in his era, is not an argument for their cessation; it is the testimony of a first-hand observer that they had, in fact, ceased. Augustine of Hippo (354–430 AD) made similar observations in his earlier writings, and his later writings show a more complex position on miracles in his own era, but his early witness to the cessation of the apostolic sign-gifts remains a significant piece of the historical record.

The pattern visible in the New Testament itself is also suggestive. The Pauline epistles, written toward the end of the apostolic era, show a diminishing emphasis on extraordinary miraculous gifts and an increasing emphasis on the ordinary means of ministry, sound doctrine, faithful teaching, godly character, church order, and the ongoing ministry of the Word. The Pastoral Epistles (1–2 Timothy, Titus), Paul's latest writings, are entirely silent on tongues, miraculous healing, and revelatory prophecy while emphasizing teaching, exhortation, sound doctrine, and church governance in every paragraph. Paul's advice to Timothy in 1 Timothy 5:23 ("no longer

drink water exclusively, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments”) suggests that the miraculous apostolic healing gift was no longer available to be deployed for Timothy’s benefit; if it were, one would expect Paul to have directed Timothy toward it rather than toward medicinal wine.

The cessationist acknowledges that the historical argument does not stand alone: it is possible to argue that the early church’s experience of the gifts’ decline was the result of declining faith and institutional decline rather than the Spirit’s own redemptive-historical withdrawal of the gifts. But the historical argument is significant as confirming evidence for the theological arguments of Sections II–IV and VII: the pattern that the theological arguments predict, that the extraordinary gifts would decline with the passing of the apostolic era, is the pattern that the historical record shows.

VI. The Canonical Argument

The Close of the Canon Marks the Completion of the Revelatory Gifts’ Purpose

The Canonical argument for cessationism draws on two texts that speak to the completeness and the finality of the apostolic revelation: Jude 3 and Revelation 22:18–19. Jude 3 is the more foundational of the two: “Dear friends, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints.” The phrase “once for all handed down” (*hapax paradotheise tē hagiois*) is the cessationist canon-closure text: the faith, the body of apostolic teaching that constitutes the church’s authoritative rule of belief and practice, has been “handed down once for all.” Not progressively transmitted, not continuously augmented, not regularly updated by ongoing prophetic revelation, but definitively, finally, completely handed down.

The adverb *hapax* (once for all, not to be repeated) is the same adverb used in the New Testament for the once-for-all character of Christ’s sacrifice (Hebrews 9:26–28; 10:10) and the once-for-all character of Christ’s death (Romans 6:10; 1 Peter 3:18). Just as the sacrifice was offered once for all and needs no repetition, the faith was handed down once for all and needs no augmentation. The apostolic delivery of the faith’s content was a completed, unrepeatable act, and the gifts whose purpose was to authenticate and transmit that delivery were, accordingly, gifts that served a purpose that is now complete.

Revelation 22:18–19 adds the canonical close’s most solemn attestation: “I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book.” The warning applies most immediately to the book of Revelation, but its placement at the conclusion of the canonical book that closes the New Testament canon carries a broader significance: the warning against addition to the words of prophetic revelation is the canonical canon’s own claim to finality. A continuing gift of revelatory prophecy that delivers new divine revelation would, by definition, be adding to the

words of prophetic revelation that the canon has declared complete. The cessationist takes this warning with full seriousness.

VII. 1 Corinthians 13:8–10 and Engaging the Continuationist with Charity

Tongues Will Cease, and the Dispute Must Be Conducted in Love

A. 1 Corinthians 13:8–10, The Cessationist's and the Continuationist's Reading

First Corinthians 13:8–10 is the New Testament's most direct statement about the cessation of specific gifts: "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. For we know in part and we prophesy in part; but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away" (NASB 1995). The cessationist and the continuationist agree that prophecy and tongues will eventually cease; the dispute is over the timing: when does "the perfect" (to teleion) come, and therefore when do the gifts cease?

The cessationist interpretation of "the perfect" is the completed canon of Scripture: when the apostolic revelation was complete and permanently inscripturated, "the perfect", the complete, teleologically finished revelation of God in Christ, arrived, and the partial revelatory gifts that were serving as the means of delivering that revelation were done away. The continuationist interpretation most commonly identifies "the perfect" with the return of Christ and the eschatological consummation: when Christ returns, the gifts will cease, but until then they continue. The debate over to teleion is the exegetical crux of the 1 Corinthians 13 gift-cessation argument.

The cessationist exegetical points are these. First, the neuter gender of to teleion (the perfect thing) most naturally refers to something, a state or a completion, rather than to a person (which would more naturally use the masculine telos or an explicitly personal descriptor). Second, the contrast of 13:12 ("For now we see in a 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") describes the transition from partial knowledge to complete knowledge, which the cessationist reads as the transition from the partial revelation of the apostolic era to the complete revelation of the completed canon. Third, the specific gifts mentioned in verse 8, prophecy, tongues, knowledge, are all revelatory gifts, consistent with the cessationist reading that it is the revelatory function that is specifically addressed by the coming of the perfect. The continuationist counter-arguments are substantial and the debate is genuine; the cessationist does not claim to have a knock-down exegetical argument from 1 Corinthians 13:8–10 alone but treats the passage as confirming evidence alongside the stronger arguments of Sections II–VI.

B. Engaging the Continuationist with Charity

The cessationist and continuationist debate is one of the most practically consequential theological disagreements within evangelical Christianity, not because it is a first-order matter of salvation but because it touches the worship life, the community culture, the pastoral

practices, and the spiritual expectations of millions of sincere believers on both sides of the question. The cessationist who engages this debate must do so with the Christian charity, intellectual honesty, and genuine respect for genuine disagreement that a secondary-order theological dispute within the household of faith deserves.

Several commitments characterize the charitable engagement this lesson commends. First, genuine acknowledgment of shared convictions: both cessationists and continuationists confess the full deity and personality of the Holy Spirit, the sovereign authority of Scripture, the reality of the Spirit's empowerment for ministry, and the necessity of the Spirit's ongoing work in the life of every believer. The disagreement is about the specific form of that ongoing work in relation to the extraordinary gifts, not about the Spirit's presence, power, or activity. Second, genuine acknowledgment of the continuationist's exegetical case: there are serious, biblically engaged continuationist theologians, Wayne Grudem, Gordon Fee, D. A. Carson on the open question, who have made substantive exegetical arguments that the cessationist must engage rather than dismiss. The cessationist can hold firm convictions while acknowledging that the exegetical debate is genuinely complex.

Third, genuine distinction between the question of cessationism and the question of church fellowship: cessationism is a secondary-order theological position that does not constitute grounds for the breaking of fellowship with continuationist believers. The reformational tradition has consistently distinguished between first-order matters (the doctrines essential to the gospel) and second-order matters (important theological convictions on which genuine Christians differ). Cessationism belongs to the second order: the cessationist and the continuationist who both confess the triune God, the inerrancy of Scripture, the substitutionary atonement, and justification by faith alone are brothers and sisters in Christ, whatever their disagreement about the extraordinary gifts.

Fourth, genuine self-examination about the pastoral harm that can attend both positions. The cessationist must examine whether the principled rejection of the extraordinary gifts has produced a pneumatological tepidity in which the ordinary gifts are also undervalued and underutilized, a culturally Protestant pragmatism masquerading as cessationist theology. The continuationist must examine whether the claim to extraordinary gifts has produced the spiritual pride, the manipulation, the pastoral harm, and the shipwreck of faith in the lives of those who sought the extraordinary gifts and did not receive them that this series has consistently identified as the two-tier pneumatological system's most damaging fruits. Both sides of the debate have pastoral accounts to give before the Chief Shepherd who will evaluate not only the correctness of the theology but the faithfulness of the pastoral care.

*“Dear friends... contend earnestly
for the faith which was once for all
handed down to the saints.”*

Jude 3, NASB 1995

Theological Terms and Definitions

Term	Definition
Sign Gifts	The extraordinary gifts that served the specific redemptive-historical function of authenticating the apostolic message as genuinely divine: tongues, miraculous healing, signs, wonders, and miraculous powers. Identified as the authenticating marks of the apostolic office in 2 Corinthians 12:12 (“the signs of a true apostle were performed among you by signs and wonders and miracles”) and described as God’s own testimony to the apostolic message in Hebrews 2:3–4. Distinguished from the continuing gifts by their mode of operation (bypassing or suspending normal natural processes) and their purpose (authentication of apostolic revelation), both of which are tied to the specific, bounded redemptive-historical situation of the apostolic era.
The Purposes Argument	The first and most directly exegetical of the five cessationist arguments: the sign gifts served the specific function of authenticating the apostolic message as genuinely divine (Hebrews 2:3–4; 2 Corinthians 12:12), and this authenticating function was inherently tied to the unrepeatable situation of the apostolic era in which the new covenant revelation was being delivered and needed to be certified. Once the apostolic message had been delivered, authenticated, and permanently inscripturated in the canon, the authenticating function was fulfilled and the gifts that served it were no longer needed in the same way. The cessationist does not deny that God can work miraculously today; only that the specific charismata of apostolic authentication are no longer operative.
The Foundational Argument	The second cessationist argument, drawn from Ephesians 2:19–20: the church is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ as the cornerstone. The building metaphor’s inherent logic: foundations are laid once, not perpetually. When the foundational apostolic and prophetic work was complete, when the last apostle died and the last canonical book was written, the foundational function was fulfilled. The sign gifts that authenticated the foundation-layers belong to the once-for-all foundational era, not to the church’s ongoing construction on that foundation.
The Sufficiency Argument	The third cessationist argument, drawn from 2 Timothy 3:16–17: if Scripture is sufficient to equip the man of God for every good work, then additional divine revelation is unnecessary, and the revelatory gifts that delivered additional revelation have fulfilled their purpose. The Sufficiency argument connects to the doctrine of canon: the completed Scripture is the fully sufficient rule of faith and practice for the entire post-apostolic church. The claim to continuing revelatory gifts necessarily challenges the sufficiency of the completed Scripture by implying that additional revelation beyond the canon is needed for the church’s adequate guidance.

Term	Definition
The Historical Argument	The fourth cessationist argument: the extraordinary gifts demonstrably diminished and ceased in the post-apostolic church, as testified by the early church fathers. Chrysostom (4th century) observed the gifts' cessation directly ("this whole place is very obscure, but the obscurity is produced by our ignorance of the facts referred to and by their cessation"). The Pastoral Epistles' silence on tongues and miraculous healing, combined with Paul's advice to use medicinal wine for Timothy's ailments (1 Timothy 5:23), suggests the apostolic healing gift was no longer operative even within the New Testament era. The historical argument is treated as confirming evidence rather than a standalone argument.
The Canonical Argument	The fifth cessationist argument, drawn from Jude 3 (the faith was "once for all handed down to the saints", hapax paradotheise) and Revelation 22:18–19 (the solemn warning against adding to the words of the book of prophecy). The hapax (once for all) of Jude 3 establishes the apostolic delivery of the faith as a completed, unrepeatable act parallel to the once-for-all character of Christ's sacrifice. The Revelation warning, placed at the conclusion of the canonical book that closes the New Testament, carries a broader significance: a continuing revelatory gift would by definition be adding to the completed canonical deposit.
To Teleion	Greek: the perfect, the complete, the mature thing (neuter). The crux of the 1 Corinthians 13:8–10 cessationist debate: "when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away." The cessationist interpretation: to teleion refers to the completed canon of Scripture, the perfect and complete revelation of God in Christ that arrived with the close of the apostolic era. The continuationist interpretation: to teleion refers to the eschatological consummation at Christ's return. The cessationist exegetical arguments: the neuter gender more naturally refers to a thing than a person; the contrast is between partial and complete revelation (consistent with the canon-completion reading); and the gifts mentioned are specifically revelatory gifts.
Hapax Paradotheise	Greek: once for all handed down. The key phrase from Jude 3 for the Canonical argument: the faith was "once for all handed down to the saints." The adverb hapax (once for all, not to be repeated) parallels its use in the New Testament for the once-for-all character of Christ's sacrifice (Hebrews 9:26–28; 10:10) and death (Romans 6:10; 1 Peter 3:18). Just as the sacrifice was offered once for all and requires no repetition, the faith was handed down once for all and requires no augmentation. The gifts whose purpose was to authenticate and transmit the apostolic delivery of the faith were accordingly gifts that served a function which is now complete.
Continuationism	The theological position, broadly identified with Pentecostal and Charismatic traditions, that all spiritual gifts, including tongues, miraculous healing, and revelatory prophecy, continue in the church throughout its entire history until Christ's return. Grounded in readings of Acts, 1

Term	Definition
	Corinthians 12–14, and Joel 2:28–29 that treat the Pentecostal gifts as normative for all subsequent generations of the church. Distinguished from cessationism by its refusal to recognize a redemptive-historical boundary between the extraordinary gifts of the apostolic era and the gifts available in the present age. The cessationist engages continuationist theologians with charity, acknowledging the genuine exegetical complexity and the secondary-order character of the disagreement.
Secondary-Order Doctrine	A theological conviction that is important and worth defending but does not constitute the doctrinal core of the gospel or the basis for determining genuine Christianity. Distinguished from first-order doctrines (the Trinity, the deity of Christ, the authority of Scripture, justification by faith alone) that are essential to Christian orthodoxy. Cessationism is a secondary-order doctrine: the cessationist and the continuationist who both confess the essential doctrines of the gospel are brothers and sisters in Christ, whatever their disagreement about the extraordinary gifts. Cessationism should be held with conviction but without treating continuationists as outside the household of faith.

Practical Application

A. For the Mind: *What Must We Believe?*

We must believe the cessationist case with its five-fold cumulative force: the Purposes argument from Hebrews 2:3–4 and 2 Corinthians 12:12 (sign gifts authenticated apostolic revelation); the Foundational argument from Ephesians 2:20 (foundations are laid once, not perpetually); the Sufficiency argument from 2 Timothy 3:16–17 (the completed Scripture fully equips for every good work); the Historical argument from the early church fathers and the Pastoral Epistles' silence (the extraordinary gifts ceased with the apostolic era); and the Canonical argument from Jude 3 and Revelation 22:18–19 (the faith was once for all handed down; adding to the prophetic word carries a solemn warning). Together these five arguments constitute a cumulative case that is, in this series' judgment, exegetically and theologically compelling.

But we must also believe the cessation conviction in its proper scope: cessationism addresses the extraordinary sign and revelatory gifts, not the Spirit's activity in general. The Spirit works powerfully, constantly, and sufficiently through the ordinary gifts, the Word, the sacraments, and the community of faith. The cessationist church is not a pneumatologically impoverished church; it is a church that has received the Spirit's permanent, comprehensive, ordinary provision for the permanent mission of a post-apostolic community. Hold the cessationist conviction with the confidence it deserves, and hold it with the pastoral care for the many sincere continuationist believers for whom the extraordinary gifts have been the primary framework of their pneumatological experience.

B. For the Heart: *What Must We Feel and Desire?*

Let the Jude 3 charge to "contend earnestly for the faith once for all delivered" be the emotional temperature of the cessationist's engagement with this question: earnest, because the stakes are real, the sufficiency of Scripture is at issue; the authority of the completed canon is at issue; the pastoral harm of false claims is at issue. But the contending must be for the faith, not against the continuationist brother. The emotional posture toward fellow believers who hold a different position on the extraordinary gifts must be the love that 1 Corinthians 13 places at the center of every pneumatological discussion, patient, kind, and oriented toward the other's genuine good, even in the midst of firm theological disagreement.

Desire the intellectual honesty that the complexity of this debate demands. The cessationist case is a cumulative case; no single argument is knock-down. The exegetical debate over teleion is genuinely complex. The historical argument has significant continuationist counter-arguments. The sufficiency argument depends on a specific understanding of the relationship between prophecy and Scripture. Hold the cessationist conviction with the confidence that the cumulative weight of the evidence warrants, and with the intellectual humility that acknowledges the genuine difficulty of the exegetical questions and the genuine faith of those who reach different conclusions.

C. For the Hands: *What Must We Do?*

- Study Hebrews 2:1–4 as the Purposes argument’s foundational text. Note the three stages of revelation transmission: spoken through the Lord (divine source), confirmed by those who heard (apostolic transmission), testified by God through signs and wonders (divine authentication). Construct a brief written argument for cessationism from this passage alone, without reference to any other text. What does Hebrews 2:3–4 establish specifically about the purpose of signs and wonders, and what does the Purposes argument conclude from this about the gifts’ expected duration?
- Read Ephesians 2:19–22 and trace the architectural metaphor: the church as the building (v. 21), with the apostles and prophets as the foundation (v. 20), Christ as the cornerstone (v. 20), and believers as the walls being built on the foundation (v. 21–22). Apply the architectural logic to the Foundational argument: foundations are laid once; the apostolic and prophetic foundation is complete; the building continues on the foundation. What does this metaphor establish about the unique, unrepeatable character of the foundational apostolic and prophetic ministry? And how does it bear on the continuationist claim that apostles and prophets continue today?
- Study the key texts of the Sufficiency and Canonical arguments in sequence: 2 Timothy 3:16–17 (the sufficiency claim), Jude 3 (the once-for-all delivery), and Revelation 22:18–19 (the warning against addition). For each text, write a brief statement of what the text establishes and what the cessationist concludes from it. Then write the strongest continuationist objection to each argument and your best cessationist response. The exercise of stating the objection clearly is essential to the intellectual honesty that this debate demands.
- Read Chrysostom’s statement about the cessation of the gifts in its historical context. Reflect on the Historical argument’s significance: the absence of the extraordinary gifts in the fourth century is not conclusive proof of their cessation by the Spirit’s own intention, but it is confirming evidence for the theological arguments that predict their cessation. How does the Historical argument function in the cessationist case, as a primary argument, a secondary argument, or a confirming argument? And how should the cessationist respond to the continuationist’s evidence of apparent miraculous gifts in the post-apostolic era?
- Prepare a brief (five to ten minute) verbal explanation of the cessationist position that you could offer to a continuationist friend, colleague, or family member, one that presents the five arguments clearly, acknowledges the genuine exegetical complexity, and engages the continuationist position with the charity and respect that the secondary-order character of the disagreement warrants. Practice the explanation in a way that does not communicate that the continuationist is outside the fellowship of genuine Christians or that the cessationist’s confidence is arrogance. Firm conviction and genuine charity can and must coexist.

Study and Discussion Questions

Opening Question

1. Before examining this lesson's cessationist arguments, what do you believe about the extraordinary gifts, and why? Is your position primarily influenced by Scripture, by theological tradition, by your community's pneumatological culture, by personal experiences, or by some combination? And which of the five cessationist arguments presented in this lesson do you find most persuasive, and which do you find least persuasive?

Observation Questions (What Do the Texts Say?)

2. Read Hebrews 2:1–4. The passage identifies three successive transmitters of the salvation: the Lord (v. 3a), the eyewitnesses who heard (v. 3b), and God who authenticated through signs, wonders, miracles, and gifts of the Spirit (v. 4). What is the temporal and logical relationship between these three transmission stages? And note that verse 4 says God testified “with them” (the apostolic eyewitnesses), what does the “with them” indicate about the relationship between the sign gifts and the specific apostolic messengers?
3. Read Ephesians 2:19–22. The passage describes the church as a building whose foundation is the apostles and prophets and whose cornerstone is Christ. Note that verse 21 says the building is “being fitted together” (present tense) and “growing into a holy temple.” The foundation was laid at a specific past point (the apostolic era); the building continues growing on it. What does this architectural metaphor establish about the relationship between the apostolic foundation (past, completed) and the church's ongoing growth (present, continuing)? And does the metaphor require that the apostles and prophets be foundational only in the past, or could it be consistent with ongoing apostolic and prophetic ministry?
4. Read 1 Corinthians 13:8–12 carefully. Verse 8 says prophecy and knowledge “will be done away” (*katargethēsontai*) while tongues “will cease” (*pausōntai*). Note the different verbs: *katargeō* (to render inoperative, to bring to an end by fulfillment of purpose) for prophecy and knowledge, and *pauō* (to stop, to cease) for tongues. Does the difference in verbs have exegetical significance? And what does verse 12 (“for now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face”) suggest about the nature and the timing of “the perfect”?
5. Read Jude 3–4. Jude originally intended to write about “our common salvation” but felt compelled to write instead about contending for “the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints.” What prompted this shift, what is the threat Jude is

addressing? And note the hapax (once for all): does Jude's use of hapax in this context necessarily mean that the canonical deposit is complete, or does it mean something more specific, such as that the faith's "content" was definitively established at a specific moment in the apostolic era?

6. Read 2 Timothy 3:14–17. Paul grounds his exhortation to Timothy in the completeness and sufficiency of "the sacred writings" (v. 15) and "all Scripture" (v. 16). Note that in verse 15, Paul says Timothy has "known the sacred writings since childhood", so the "Sacred Writings" available in the first century were already sufficient to make Timothy "wise for salvation." What does this suggest about the relationship between Scripture's sufficiency and the ongoing apostolic revelation that was still being delivered (the New Testament letters were being written)? And how does the sufficiency argument account for the fact that some New Testament documents were written after the sufficiency claim appears to have been established?

Interpretation Questions (What Does It Mean?)

7. The Purposes argument claims that sign gifts authenticated apostolic revelation, and that the authentication function has been fulfilled. The continuationist response is that God can authenticate whatever He wishes, whenever He wishes, that limiting the sign gifts to the apostolic era imposes a human constraint on divine sovereignty. How does the cessationist respond to this objection? Does the Purposes argument require the claim that God cannot work miraculously today, or only the claim that the specific charismatic gifts of apostolic authentication no longer operate?
8. The Sufficiency argument claims that the completed Scripture is sufficient for every good work, making continuing revelatory gifts unnecessary. The continuationist response (articulated by Wayne Grudem and others) is that "prophecy" in the New Testament era was not equivalent to canonical Scripture in its authority, that there was a category of non-canonical, fallible prophecy that is still possible today without challenging the sufficiency of Scripture. How does the cessationist evaluate this "fallible prophecy" position? Is it exegetically warranted, and what are its pastoral implications?
9. The Historical argument notes that Chrysostom and other early fathers testified to the cessation of the extraordinary gifts in their eras. The continuationist response is that the gifts' decline was the result of the early church's spiritual decline and institutional compromise, not the Spirit's own intentional withdrawal, and that the gifts have been restored in the Pentecostal revival of the twentieth century. How does the cessationist evaluate this "decline and restoration" narrative? What criteria would be needed to determine whether present-day charismatic phenomena are the genuine restoration of apostolic gifts or a different phenomenon?
10. The Canonical argument draws on Jude 3's hapax (once for all) and Revelation 22:18–19's warning against addition. The continuationist response is that Revelation 22:18–19 applies specifically to the book of Revelation, not to the entire biblical canon, and that Jude 3's hapax describes the definitive apostolic proclamation of the faith's content

rather than the close of a fixed canon. Evaluate these responses: Do they successfully undermine the Canonical argument, or do they leave the argument's substance intact? And what is the relationship between the Canonical argument and the broader doctrine of the canon's formation and closure?

11. The lesson argues that cessationism is a secondary-order doctrine, important but not a first-order gospel matter that determines the bounds of genuine Christianity. Some cessationists hold that the continuing claim to extraordinary gifts is spiritually dangerous enough to warrant treating continuationism as a more serious error. Evaluate this stricter position: at what point, if any, does a theological error about the extraordinary gifts rise to the level of a first-order concern? And are there specific forms of continuationism (e.g., word-of-faith theology, the claim to new canonical-level revelation) that the cessationist should treat more seriously than others?

Application Questions (What Does It Demand of Us?)

12. The lesson proposes preparing a brief verbal explanation of the cessationist position for a continuationist dialogue partner. Draft this explanation now, five to eight sentences presenting the most persuasive argument(s) you would lead with, acknowledging the genuine exegetical complexity, and distinguishing the cessation of extraordinary gifts from the Spirit's full ongoing activity through ordinary means. How do you balance the firmness of the conviction with the charity toward a fellow believer that the lesson commends?
13. The lesson closes with the self-examination question for cessationists: has the principled rejection of extraordinary gifts produced a pneumatological tepidity in which ordinary gifts are also undervalued and underutilized? Honestly evaluate your own congregation's pneumatological culture against this question. Is the community's life characterized by the earnest, Spirit-dependent, Word-saturated, gift-deploying vitality that the ordinary gifts make possible? Or has the cessationist conviction functioned as permission for a pneumatologically comfortable, predictable, and insufficiently Spirit-dependent community culture?
14. The lesson argues that the cessationist and continuationist are brothers and sisters in Christ who disagree on a secondary-order matter. Do you personally know any continuationist believers, Charismatic or Pentecostal, with whom you can have a genuine, charitable, intellectually honest conversation about this question? If so, what would it look like to engage in such a conversation in the spirit of 1 Corinthians 13, patient, kind, not arrogant, not seeking its own, while still contending earnestly for what you believe the Scriptures teach?
15. The lesson presents five lines of argument whose cumulative weight the cessationist regards as compelling. Which argument do you find personally most persuasive, and which least? Are there additional arguments, exegetical, theological, historical, or pastoral, that you would add to the five presented? And are there continuationist

arguments that, after studying this lesson, you regard as genuinely challenging to the cessationist position and that you have not yet adequately answered?

Prayer Focus

Open this lesson with a reading of Jude 3–4, the Canonical argument’s foundational text and the community’s vocational charter: “Dear friends, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints.” Allow the word “earnestly” to set the temperature for the prayer: not the anxious urgency of someone uncertain of his ground, but the earnest, confident, love-motivated urgency of someone who knows what the stakes are and who cares enough about the community’s spiritual welfare to contend for the truth that guards it. Then allow the “once for all handed down” to provide the ground for the contending: the faith is not in dispute, not augmented by ongoing prophecy, not supplemented by new revelation. It has been delivered. The Spirit who inspired and completed the apostolic canon is the Spirit who now illuminates, applies, and empowers it.

Begin the prayer with extended gratitude for the completeness and sufficiency of the apostolic revelation. Not merely gratitude that the Bible exists or that it is reliable, but the specific gratitude of the cessationist who understands what the completed canon means: the Spirit guided the apostolic community into all the truth that the church would need for the entire span of its existence; nothing essential to the church’s mission, worship, ethics, or spiritual formation is lacking from what the Spirit has already given; and the God who spoke through the prophets and apostles speaks with the same authority and with no less clarity through the completed text of Scripture than He spoke through the living voices of His apostolic messengers. This is the cessationist’s pneumatological confidence, and it is worth celebrating with the gratitude that it deserves.

Pray then for the intellectual humility and the charitable spirit that the cessationist-continuationist dialogue requires. Ask the Spirit for the capacity to hold firm convictions about the extraordinary gifts’ cessation without treating the conviction’s firmness as permission for condescension toward the sincere believers on the other side of the question. Ask for the 1 Corinthians 13 character in theological discourse: the patience that does not dismiss what it cannot yet fully answer; the kindness that genuinely honors the exegetical seriousness of the continuationist case; the humility that acknowledges the genuine complexity of teleion and the hapax and the historical evidence; and the love that governs the manner of the contending as rigorously as the firmness of the conviction.

Close with the missional prayer that the sign gifts’ cessationist theology demands: the prayer for the ordinary gifts’ faithful and Spirit-empowered deployment in the church’s permanent mission. Ask the Spirit to empower the teaching with the illuminating, transforming energy that merely natural eloquence cannot produce. Ask for the giving gift’s cheerful liberality to sustain the ministry’s financial needs. Ask for the evangelism gift to extend the gospel into the specific unreached communities that surround the congregation. Ask for the shepherd gift to keep the flock from straying, feeding it faithfully on the apostolic Word. These are the Spirit’s own permanent, comprehensive provision for the church’s permanent mission, ask for them

earnestly, deploy them faithfully, and trust the Spirit who gave them to make them fully sufficient for the work He has called the church to do. Soli Deo Gloria.

*“How will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?
After it was at the first spoken through the Lord,
it was confirmed to us by those who heard,
God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders
and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit
according to His own will.”*

Hebrews 2:3–4, NASB 1995

Key Texts: Hebrews 2:1–4; Ephesians 2:19–22; 2 Corinthians 12:12; 2 Timothy 3:14–17; Jude 3–4; Revelation 22:18–19; 1 Corinthians 13:8–12; Romans 6:10; 1 Peter 3:18; Hebrews 9:26–28; 10:10; 1 Timothy 5:23

Soli Deo Gloria

To God Alone Be the Glory

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

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