Subject: Strange Fire ??
Posted by Mark L on Sun, 06 Nov 2016 00:10:36 GMT
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John MacArthur's church did a conference several yrs ago called Strange Fire. Meaning the Charismatic. One of the talks was on cessationism

Meaning . . . the gifts and ministries have ceased (prophets/apostles)

A bro named Tom Pennington who I have never heard of did that particular talk I would like to do a point to point rebuttal to it. I don't want to reproduce the entire talk so I will just copy out the relevant points. Theirs in bold. Also I can't speak to every sentence. It would just take too much time. Besides that to some extent at least I'm preaching to the converted.

Before I say anything else let me say these people take extremely narrow definitions on things. An eg is â€œprophecy is speaking the very words of Godâ€• That can't be supported in either NT or OT. I'm not going to address some of these issues as it would just take too much time.

I'm going to sometime soon put up some of my opinions on
Apostles/Prophets so I'm not going to reply in depth to some of their points on this issue.

Here is a link to the talk. Has both the video and the text.

https://www.gty.org/resources/sermons/TM13-7/a-case-for-cess ationism

I'm going to put the Bro Pennington's words in bold print

So what is it that secessionists believe the Spirit has ceased. Letâ€™s be very clear. We only believe He has ceased one function and that is He no longer gives believers today the miraculous spiritual gifts, gifts like speaking in tongues, prophecy and healing.

So what do we mean by cessationism? We mean that the Spirit no longer sovereignty gives individual believers the miraculous spiritual gifts that are listed in the Scripture and that were present in the first century church. It is neither the Spiritâ€™s plan, nor His normal pattern to distribute miraculous spiritual gifts to Christians and churches today as He did in the times of the Apostles. Those gifts ceased as normative with the apostles.

All of us here of course would strongly disagree with that.

On the other hand, continuationists believe either that the miraculous gifts have continued

unabated since Pentecost or other sects would say, no, they have waned through much of the church age but have now been restored.

That is us to one degree or another right there.

The chief arguments that they put forward for the defence of their view, the ones that you will hear most commonly are these.
First of all, theyâ€™ll say the New Testament nowhere directly states that the miraculous gifts will cease during the church age. But that argument cuts both ways because the New Testament doesnâ€™t directly say they will continue either.

To my mind that is a silly argument. But to respond the bible does say they will continue. I will deal with that last

They counter with the second argument. There are a couple of New Testament passages that imply that the miraculous gifts will continue until Christ returns. Their favorite example of that is 1 Corinthians 13:10, â€œWhen the perfect comes, the partial will be done away.â€• They argue that that means that only when Christ returns will the partial gifts of tongues and prophecy cease.
Ask the average cessationist and he will turn you to 1 Corinthians 13, and I personally believe a case can be made there. But cessationism does not rise or fall on 1 Corinthians 13

In 1 Cor 13 Paul is making the same point 3 different ways. That this world is going to pass away. There is a flow of thought to the whole passage. Vs 10-12 flow out of vs 8. Chap 13 is giving balance to chap 12 & 14. I will speak more to this point later. In vs 8-12 he is saying in different ways that this world will pass away and the gifts will go with it. Because we won't need them anymore.

Their third main argument for the continuation of the miraculous gifts is that the New Testament speaks only of the church age and therefore the gifts that began this age must continue throughout it. They say that we artificially divide the church age into the apostolic and the post-apostolic.

That is exactly what they are doing. Making an artificial distinction between the apostolic and post apostolic age.

But unless they believe that there are Apostles today at the same level as Peter and Paul, and most Charismatics do not, they also divide the church age and they relate at least apostleship solely to the apostolic era. They have become defacto cessationismâ€¦secessionists, I should say, at least in part.

Why do all apostles have to be Peters and Pauls with world wide ministries. That wasn't true even

in the early church.

But by far the most common argument that continuationists put forward for their view, and this is the one Iâ€™m sure youâ€™ve heard, it is everywhere, and that is 500 million professing Christians who claim Charismatic experiences canâ€™t all be wrong.

That is a specious argument regardless of who is making it.

The first biblical argument for cessationism is the unique role of miracles. Many evangelicals, and I think most Charismatics, think that miracles litter almost every page of biblical history. In reality there were only three primary periods in which God worked miracles through uniquely gifted men. In other words, there were only three primary periods when God gave human beings miracle working power.

God gave human beings miracle working power.

Here again narrow incorrect definitions. I'm not sure where he is coming from here but just to make the point . . . We don't have any power nor did they. Even Jesus himself (while on earth) had no power to work miracles. It is and was the Holy Spirit.

Let me also say here that he uses his words very carefully. All through his talk. Normally I think that is a good thing. In his case it leaves too strict of a definition on his terms. So for eg I'm going to expand miracles to â€œthe supernaturalâ€• and speak to that issue.

So were there only 3 primary periods? Of men having miracle working power?

It would be more correct to say that every time in the bible where it takes a close look at a man or a time we see lots of supernatural happening. Most of the bible is just a quick glimpse because to record everything would require a lot of libraries. Wherever it zeros in we see God acting supernaturally.

He gives 3 times. Moses/Joshua Elijah/Elisha Jesus/ Apostles.
All 3 of the times he gives were very important times. Which is why the bible zeros in for a close look at them.
Moses -set up the nation sacrifices and temple
Elijah turned the nation back to God. He dealt with the greatest threat the nation ever faced. Baal worship under Ahab/Jezebel
Jesus the messiah and his divinity
Paul set up the church

But what its doing there is giving a close look. Everywhere you look in the bible you see the

supernatural

Before the flood Enoch a prophet & Noah Abraham Issac Jacob all prophets
The Judges another good eg. A quick overview and when it takes a close look we see Samson. Lots of supernatural.
David Solomon the kings wherever there is a close look you see it. Look at Daniel.
The time between the testaments. Apocrypha Not scripture but no reason not to accept it as history.

Luke 2 / 25-38 Recorded in the NT but not part of the church age. Really in the time between the testaments. God speaking to men and the prophetic office.
According to early church historians like Eusebuis the gifts and ministries continued right up into the 3thd century.

It is seen right down through church history. Patrick of Ireland for eg. I think he and the men who followed after him stood in the apostolic office. John Knox Luther & Wesley all walked in the supernatural at least to some degree.
A.J. Gordon, Andrew Murray and A.B. Simpson were all well known 19th c. preachers who all believed in the supernatural and divine healing

George Fox (1624-91) autobiography. The person who edited the version I read said . . .

No reader of the Journal can fail to be impressed with the fact that George Fox believed himself to be an instrument for the manifestation of miraculous power. Diseases were cured through him; he foretold coming events; he often penetrated states and conditions of mind and heart; he occasionally had a sense of what was happening in distant parts (pg 24 intro)

Imagine that . . . an honest christian man. That is a big problem with some (many?) of these editors. They don't believe the supernatural stuff so they edit it right out of the biographies. In one of Jack Deere's â€œSurprisedâ€• books he gives a lot of info on this point

We see it in our day of course. Everywhere you go. I'm sure all of us reading this have seen things happen. We also see it at the end of the world. Book of Revelation. Supernatural stuff happening and God speaking.

Another response in regards to only 3 periods of miracles is this. They are making an arbitrary distinction again. But going only with their argument of 3 periods if God can do 3 periods why can't he do another? In the late 20th C for eg. Where do they get the authority to stop God from doing another? If the miracles were present in certain periods then waned then why cannot God do another period of miracles.

Because the primary purpose of miracles has always been to confirm the credentials of a divinely appointed messenger to establish the credibility of one who speaks for God, not one who teaches or explains the Word of God as Iâ€™m doing this morning, but one in whose mouth God has put His very words.

confirm the credentials

. That is certainly one purpose. Jesus said if you don't believe my words believe the miracles. But is that the only purpose? I would strongly disagree.

Because he cares about his people and wants to help us
To show his power ie. Pharaoh
To bring God's will out of the spiritual realm into this one
To strengthen and encourage Gods people
In response to our prayers
etc.

God has put his very words

again these very narrow definitions. Non charismatics and secessionists make a very big deal out of this. They teach the speakings of a prophet are Gods own words and equal with scripture.

And so here in Deuteronomy, Moses laid down three criteria for discerning a true prophet from a false prophet.If youâ€™ll notice in verses 21 and 22 of this chapter, he says that the true prophetâ€™s predictions just always come true. Thatâ€™s number one, criteria number oneâ€¦the true prophetâ€™s predictions must always come true.

Well I certainly agree with that. If a man is a prophet and he speaks by the word of the Lord it will come to pass. If it doesn't he isn't a prophet. I realize though I'm in disagreement with much of the current charismatic church on that.

In Deuteronomy 13 verses 1 to 5, God says that if he chose to authenticate a true prophet, He would do so by empowering him to work miracles, as He did with Moses.

That is not the intent of the passage. He is reading into it his own personal bias.

Also in Deuteronomy 13 He says that even if He works miracles, the third criteria thatâ€™s to be used is that the prophetâ€™s message must always be in complete doctrinal agreement with previous revelation.

Agreed. Actually strongly agreed.

A second related argument to that is the end of the gift of Apostleshipâ€¦ Most Christians and most evangelical Charismatics agree there are no more Apostles like the Twelve, or like Paul. Why is that? Because an apostle, to be a true apostle, you had to meet three qualifications.

The problem here is they are mixing up a number of things. The 12 were a unique group which is why one was added to take Judas place. This was unique group of witnesses to the entire ministry of Jesus. One problem here is that Paul didn't qualify. Another is that there were many apostles in the NT. There are over 20 men â€œnamedâ€• as apostles. Others referred to but not named.

In Acts chapter 1 as theyâ€™re sorting through after the suicide of Judas, theyâ€™re sorting through whoâ€™s going to take his place. In chapter 1 verse 22 of Acts, beginning with the baptism of John until the day that he was taken up from us, one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection. You had to be a witness of the life of Christ, and of His resurrection.

If Matthias hadn't already been an apostle they would never have considered him. This was a unique group witnessing to the life and resurrection of Christ. I am of the opinion that at least some of the 70 were apostles.

Secondly, to be an Apostle, you had to be personally appointed by Christ. . . . You have chosen.â€•

I actually agree with that. To be a prophet or Apostle you are set in the ministry by Christ himself. My question is â€œis Christ deadâ€• ? He appeared to people in the OT & NT in church history and today. I know several people who have seen the Lord. But it doesn't line up to their theology to have Jesus appearing or even speaking. If someone is a prophet or apostle he has seen the Lord.

Thirdly, to be an Apostle in the true sense, you had to be able to work miracles. In Matthew chapter 10 verses 1 and 2, Jesus summoned His Twelve disciples and He gave them authority over unclean spirits to cast them out, to heal every kind of disease, every kind of sickness, not lower back pain. Now these are the Twelve Apostles. You come to 2 Corinthians chapter 12:12, chapter 12 verse 12, it says, â€œThe signs of a true Apostle were performed among you with all perseverance by signs and wonders and miracles.â€• To be an Apostle, you had to be able to work miracles

Again in general I agree. I believe that a true apostle will have all the gifts operating. I don't think I am making a point they aren't but again they are making these narrow points. â€œeveryâ€• By that they mean these men had the power to heal â€•everyâ€• disease. And that this power as apostles was resident within them. As opposed to the gifts of the spirit operating when the HS

wills.

Look at those three qualifications and you realize immediately that there is no one alive today who meets those three qualifications.

It is common in the non charismatic to make statements like this. They simply have no way to back this up.

Itâ€™s also significant, I think, that the gift of Apostleship ceased without a crystal-clear New Testament statement that it would.

The truth is there is a crystal clear statement to that effect in Eph 4/11. I will refer to that later.

The third argument for cessationism is the foundational nature of the New Testament Apostles and prophetsâ€¦the foundational nature of the New Testament Apostles and prophets. You see, the New Testament identifies the Apostles and prophets as the foundation on which the church was built.

We would agree with that. But then he goes on to say that since the foundation has been laid there is no longer any need for Apostles and Prophets. Which he claims to have already proved. It shows a real misunderstanding of the work of Apostles/Prophets.
And if that is true why have all the other apostles in the NT? They were pretty much superfluous to the 12 and Paul. Again it shows a real misunderstanding of the work of these ministries.

A fourth argument for cessationism is the nature of the miraculous giftsâ€¦the nature of the New Testament miraculous gifts.
If the Spirit were still gifting believers today with the miraculous gifts, they would be the same gifts that we find in the New Testament. However, the Charismatic gifts claim today bear almost no resemblance to their New Testament counterparts

Again we have these huge statements that simply have no basis in reality.

. . . yet Luke still defines speaking in tongues as we hear them in our own language, or our own dialect. No mention of anything ecstatic. That was the New Testament, gift, speaking in a known language or a known dialect.

Yup I agree. Hef prayed for people to receive the HS and on many occasions they started speaking in tongues but he heard them speaking in Hebrew. Someone in Faith Assembly I knew had a Korean sister in law who attended on occasion. There was an utterance in tongues with the interpretation. The person spoke in tongues but she heard him speaking in Korean.

Lots of other eg's of that. Point is it isn't nonsense or gibberish or ecstatic.

Compare that with todayâ€™s tongues which are ecstatic speech. Itâ€™s not the same thing.

Again these big statements they have no way to back up. Which of course won't bother them in the least.

Also, the New Testament gift of tongues, including 1 Corinthians 14, was a public gift meant for at one level the edification of others. There had to be someone to interpret. Todayâ€™s tongues, on the other hand, are primarily a private prayer language.

Those are two different issues. Both are in the bible and both are present today. Examples abound.

Or consider the nature of the gift of prophecy. ... Contrary to Charismatic doctrine, nowhere does the New Testament distinguish the Old Testament prophets from the New Testament prophets.

I agree! The NT office of a prophet is exactly the same as the OT office of a prophet. Unfortunately much of the charismatic world today disagrees. Mostly because they don't meet the OT conditions but don't want to give up their prophets.

So New Testament prophecy then is direct, infallible revelation.

Again these strict narrow straitlaced definitions. What they mean and (they say this) is that NT prophesy is on a par with scripture. Paul said (speaking of disciples not a prophet) we know in part and prophesy in part. 1 Cor 13/9. There are two kinds of prophesy in the NT. 1 Cor 12 & 14. Prophesy by a prophet which comes by revelation & Prophesy by a disciple which comes by inspiration. 1 Cor. says all can prophesy and have the gifts & the gifts are given to each. Not just the ministry.

It should be noted here that often in the Prophets (OT) the Hebrew way of doing things was to just throw all the information in and expect the reader to sort it out. Hosea is a good eg of that. Paul came directly out of the OT Hebrew tradition and at times he acted that way 1 Cor 12 & 14. Jesus himself did that. Being of course an OT prophet. Matt 24 Mark 13 Luke 21 he goes back and forth from the near future to the far future and expects the reader to sort it out. If we as serious students of the bible expect to read and understand it we have to read it and interpret it properly. In other words set aside our 21st c. logical 123- ABC way of looking at things and see it and read it the way ancient Hebrews did.

Consider another example, the gift of healing. In the New Testament when someone with the New Testament gift of healing used his gifts, the results were complete, immediate, permanent,

undeniable, every kind of sickness, every kind of illness. The purported healings of todayâ€™s faith healers are the antithesis of those biblical miracles. They are incomplete. They are temporary, at best. And they are unverifiable.

The facts are that is simply not true. â€œcomplete, immediate, permanent, undeniable, every kind of sickness, every kind of illness.â€• That was not true even in the bible. Dr. Pennington should simply know better. (and probably does)

When Charismatics do claim that their miracles are on the same level as the New Testament gifts and there are those, such as the wild claims of limbs restored, or of resurrections, for example, they are almost always hearsay and if theyâ€™re not hearsay, theyâ€™ve not been verified.

Well here we go. Talk about wild claims!! When you challenge them on some of their statements the onus is put on us to prove it. Which I don't mind doing but I'm not the one making the â€œhearsayâ€• and â€œunverifiedâ€• statements. They are.

I'm not going to say anything here other than to point to John G Lake As I recall they had 100,000 medically verified healings in their healing rooms over a 1 (or maybe 3) yr period. Some of the medical reports were reproduced in his books. This won't sway the doubters though. I'll give my reasons why later.

A fifth argument for cessationism is the testimony of church history. Now letâ€™s start with New Testament church history.

The entire argument here is at best circumstantial. In other words nothing is directly said. They make a lot of hay out of the fact that the gifts aren't mentioned in the later epistles. Maybe because the NT writers didn't want to write a library and the subject was already dwelt with.

When we leave New Testament history, we discover that the testimony of the church after the New Testament era, was exactly the same, in both what was taught and practised. It was that the miraculous gifts ceased with the Apostles.
. . . continuationism provides no convincing theological explanation for the disappearance of certain gifts during most of church history. Thereâ€™s no way to explain it.

The truth though is that they didn't. You find throughout church history that while they may have waned the gifts and ministries were present in virtually all ages. Especially in times of great revival.

The sixth argument for cessationism is the sufficiency of Scripture.

Now we here in the faith camp would actually find a lot of agreement with these people on this point. As opposed to much of the charismatic church. We actually take a far stronger stand than

they do.

The New Testament teaches that the result of Godâ€™s completed revelation is an all-sufficient Scripture in many places. Second Timothy chapter 3 verse 16, â€œAll Scripture is inspired by God, itâ€™s 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.â€• Thereâ€™s nothing left. The man of God needs no additional revelation from God, he has it all right here. . . . The Spirit speaks only in and through the inspired Word.

In many ways and here is a good eg they are arguing in a circle. Having â€œprovedâ€• God doesn't speak anymore outside scripture they point to these vs. Problem is they haven't proved their earlier point. That God doesn't speak anymore etc.

There is a seventh and final argument for cessationism, itâ€™s the New Testament rules laid down for the miraculous gifts. I want you to turn with me to 1 Corinthiansâ€¦1 Corinthians chapter 14â€¦1 Corinthians 14 where Paul lays out specific guidelines for how two of the miraculous biblical gifts were to be practised in the church.

Several responses here
If things in the early churches were so wild that Paul had to lay down some guidelines why is it not alright for us. If the early church had times in some churches where things were out of order and needed guidelines then why is it such a terrible thing for modern churches to need guidelines.

Secondly the guidelines are just that. Guidelines. Not hard and fast rules. If there is so much prophesy and public tongues in a church that rules need to be laid down then reasonable people would lay them down or apply them. Just like Paul did.

Thirdly this Bro calls them guidelines then applies them as hard and fast rules. He makes a lot of hay out of grieving the HS here.

Fourthly Pauls point is that things need to be done decently and in order with time for everything to happen. Reasonable people would agree with that.
Some non-charismatic authors write books about stuff like this. They take the worst eg's of charismatic issues and then present them as normal charismatic behaviour. Not very honest or Godly for that matter. I won't mention here that the book â€œCharismatic Chaosâ€• falls into that category.

If you're interested the vineyard did a response to the book several yrs ago. Somewhat lengthy but interesting to read
https://vineyardusa.org/library/position-paper-the-vineyards
-response-to-charismatic-chaos/

So what do I believe?
I'm not going to labour this point because I'm preaching to the converted here.

1 Cor 12/7,11 given to every man. Not just apostles.

1 Cor 12/28-30 these gifts are set â€œin the churchâ€• All the silly talk about the gifts today are not the original gifts are disingenuous at best and dishonest at worst.

Eph 4/11-14 these ministries are given UNTIL the church comes to the same maturity and perfection Jesus walked in.
That should settle it for the true xian. Unfortunately it probably won't for the reasons I give below.

Lastly . . . WHY do these people teach these things. Cessationism. I have several reasons. Let me say here with these reasons I am not pointing at Pennington or anyone else. These are just reasons why people believe these things.

I AM NOT POINTING AT ANYONE.

1. First it is possible there is someone somewhere in the world who simply believes this because they see it in the bible. Possible but not likely.

2. Unbelief. This is a spiritual substance in the same sense as faith is. Its something real in the heart. Its the reason why the heathen don't believe. It is a spiritual sickness. It renders you incapable of believing. Paul said in Heb 3/12 if there is too much of it in the heart of a xian it will walk you away from the Lord. As a xian ones own heart will take them away from the Lord. Hence the very strong warning.

3. Fear. This really is the legacy of this teaching. One man who is on 1000's radio and TV stations fasted for 40 days to get the Holy Spirit and couldn't because he couldn't overcome the fear. Someone I know who lives down under went to a charismatic meeting and came away terrified. Because people were singing and clapping and raising their hands.
Jesus said if you ask the Father for the HS he won't give you a snake. Luke 11

4. Demonic. This true a lot of times. I don't want to point fingers here but it is common. One well known preacher known for his ability to explain the scriptures can hardly even mention the word tongues. 1000's of radio and TV stations

5. Dishonesty. They are simply not very honest. One very well known minister who is a bastion or tower of opposition to the charismatic knows better but doesn't care. Simply. Doesn't. Care. Again 1000's of radio and TV stations.

6. Because they are Pharisees. Their doctrine or their place in church life or society is more important to them than forsaking all and following Jesus. Jesus gave scathing denunciations of these people. I'm not Jesus so I'm not going to point any fingers.

Last Word

1. Mat 25. Its the parable of the talents. If these people don't want their blessings then God will give them to someone who does.

2. 11 Tim 3/5 From such turn away. I didn't write this Paul did. Its interesting that the vs comes right out of a passage dealing with last days. Lots I could say here but I think I will just stick with the Word and leave it at that. Everyone can interpret it for themselves.

3. Heb 13/8Jesus Christ the same yesterday today and forever.