

# CHIEF

## MINISTRIES

March 2019

*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. (Hebrews 13:8)*

There are many streams of cleansing – beginning with the blood of Christ. I want to study and experience them all! God works among us to free, heal, and mature His people. – Jack Hayford.

Charles, who had been a firm believer in “cessation” – a term used for those who believe that God, by His own will, “ceased” long ago to deal with His people in a direct manner supernaturally. No more supernatural healings. No visions. No direct revelations. None of the gifts of the Holy Spirit in operation. Charles was entrenched in 5 point Calvinism for many years and was the pastor at Primitive Baptist Church in Atlanta, Georgia. But one day he prayed something like this: “Lord, I want to be filled with Your Holy Spirit. But I have three conditions. I don’t want to shout, I don’t want to be a spectacle, and I don’t want to speak in tongues. Now with that in mind, You may proceed.” Nothing happened. But as it turns out, he was also a chaplain at a federal prison in Atlanta, Georgia. He was assigned to a man who had been converted and filled with the Holy Spirit after being imprisoned.

Whereas Charles went to minister weekly to this man, the prisoner began to minister to Charles. It is one of the most amazing reversal of roles I have come across. Little by little Charles became hungry for God in a fresh way. His story is written up elsewhere. The bottom line is this: after a long while Charles became willing to ask this prisoner to lay hands on him – with the prison guards watching. He invited the Holy Spirit to fall on him without any preconditions. He was filled with the Holy Spirit that day and was never to be the same again. He was eventually forced to resign his church.

I’m not exactly sure the first time I heard the word “cessationist.” I grew up in a Baptist church at first, later Pentecostal after we started one in our home. I suppose in Bible College I realized that not everyone believes all of the Bible even though they say they do.

When did God first withhold His power? Some say around 70 AD. This meant that the Holy Spirit worked powerfully for the first generation of the church alone. Some, however, think the year 100 was when the power diminished (when the apostle John died). Some stretch the period of supernatural power to the era of Constantine (337 AD). In any case, with the choice of the canon of Scripture led by Athanasius (296-373) finally agreed upon, there was no need for supernatural power. That kind of power was a launching pad for the earliest church, giving the Christian faith credibility and encouragement. But at any rate, the gifts of the Spirit, including

speaking in tongues, healing, prophecy and receiving direct revelation by the Holy Spirit eventually ceased, according to these “cessationists.”

There are a good number of ministers, chaplains, Therapon graduates, Darrington field ministers who are cessationists. Some of them are my friends. They are good men of God but what they have experienced in knowledge, there may be a lack in experience in the Spirit. Some equate cessationism and the teaching of deism. Deism is a belief in God that seems harmless if not respectable at first. Many of the Founding Fathers of the American Constitution were deists. But they denied a supernatural revelation. Some refer to the Deist God as an “absentee watchmaker” – He made the world but then left it to run on its own. Deists believe in one God but could not accept the supernatural. Cessationists do believe in the supernatural in Scripture of course, but have no expectation that God will intervene supernaturally today except, perhaps through providence. But the notion of the gifts of the Spirit being in operation today, as in 1 Corinthians 12:10-12 is out of the question:

*To another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. <sup>v11</sup> All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills. <sup>v12</sup> For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. (1 Corinthians 12:10-12)*

As every Christian is worth understanding, so is nearly every movement in the history of the Christian church. Sometimes movements are reactions to extremes. There are a couple of things worth noting about the origin of cessationism.

Cessationism sprang up in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, as far as I can tell, led by the Martin Luther’s and the John Calvin’s of this world. The last thing on their minds, however, was to cause a teaching to spring forth that could be unhelpful. Luther wrote in his hymn, “A Mighty Fortress is Our God”, the line, “the Spirit and the gifts are ours.” But don’t hastily assume he believed we should expect to receive the gifts of the Spirit. There are of course exceptions, but intellectuals sometimes tend to fear any emphasis on experiencing God directly. Calvin’s doctrine of the inner testimony of the Spirit meant the “analogy of faith” based on Romans 12:6: prophesying, that is, preaching, should be done according to one’s “proportion” (Gr. analogia) of faith. This means comparing Scripture with Scripture. Few if any have exceeded Calvin in the ability to expound Holy Scripture. And yet Calvin himself, refers to the anointing of oil for healing in James 5:14, said that this refers to “miraculous powers which the Lord was pleased to give for a time.” It was relevant only to the apostles and pertains not to us, to whom no such powers have been committed.

In the 16<sup>th</sup> century they are also called mystics. Luther tried to find help from them and embraced them for a while. But they let him down. Their way of reading Scripture was allegorical and not likely to convince anyone such as Calvin, who was trained in reading text in their historical context and with linguistic accuracy. The charismatics and mystics of the 16<sup>th</sup> century were famous for their eccentricity and instability at times. You could say that the Reformed tradition inherited a fear of the charismatic.

B.B. Warfield was a great opponent of mysticism. He disliked the tendency in his day to move away from apologetics and put more trust in the witness of the Spirit. There are Christians who are no doubt too intellectualistic, there are those who are also too anti-intellectualistic. There are those who are too emotional – too flaky; there are those who are too anti-emotional. The man is made up of heart, mind, and will. The mind is given to think, the heart to feel, and the will whereby he can act. It is not always easy to maintain the balance, but we should try.

One should never underestimate our cessationist friends' love for God, Scripture, sound teaching and holy living. They are the salt of the earth. Some of them are great upholders of Christian orthodoxy: I repeat: they certainly do except the miraculous in the Bible. They simply do not believe that God reveals Himself immediately and directly by revelation anymore. God of course, could do it, He has sovereignly chosen not to show His power as He did in the early church. The absence of power therefore is not owing to our unbelief, lack of faith or expectancy. God Himself decided that kind of power was for the earliest church. Any amount of praying, fasting, intercession, and waiting on God will not bring about His power. You cannot twist God's arm to do what He decreed isn't going to happen.

And yet, that is what indeed happened to me and so many believers around the world who have a hunger for a wave of God in power. Reformers, Calvinists, Armenians are sometimes annoyed by people's experience of healing, speaking in tongues, and prophecy. Many have been spoon-fed the 5 points of Calvinism (following the acrostic TULIP= total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, and perseverance of the saints). When they hear of "experiences:" visions, dreams, tongues, prophecy, or words of knowledge, they responded with a polite silence usually.

People who adhere to cessationism would by in large change their stance if they saw hard evidence of undoubted miracles today. Cessationists do not want to appear smug or unreachable, they simply do not believe the claims of charismatics and Pentecostals who have reportedly seen the miraculous. They are not questioning our honesty, they feel we have been either too optimistic, perhaps gullible, if not actually deceived. Furthermore, cessationists understandably get turned off by flamboyant healing evangelists who make extravagant claims. Those people who are slain in the Spirit and fall backward are also supposedly healed. This scenario has been repeated again and again and some people who say the Holy Ghost fell on us only to find out it wasn't the presence of the Dove but pigeon religion. It's not about falling down, it's about getting up and walking out what the Holy Ghost did in you while you are on the ground.

Cessationism is a hypothesis. It is not a teaching grounded in Holy Scripture – like the virgin birth, the deity of Christ, the resurrection of Jesus, and salvation by the blood of God's Son. Cessationists have chosen to believe that God does not reveal Himself directly and immediately today. I also think many cessationists would sincerely welcome supernatural healing if they actually saw a person healed or if they themselves were healed (should they become willing to be prayed for) and remained healed. Most cessationists would be thrilled with a miracle – if indeed it was genuine and had undisputed facts before the healing and after the healing. Sometimes this actually happens – when a cessationist is convinced of a miracle and changes his or her views. But not often. Why? I can't be sure.

But I have my own hypothesis; it is to test the faith of those who actually see the miraculous but have to enjoy it in relative solitude, without their friends being convinced. That solitude can in a sense become downright painful – when one’s integrity is questioned and yet they know for a fact what God did. It is like the earliest church being convinced of Jesus’s resurrection – whether they saw the resurrected Christ or because of the immediate and direct witness of the Spirit – so real to them and so foreign to others.

What if God in some cases keeps some skeptics from seeing the miraculous even though it actually takes place? What if miracles are largely for those believers in God’s family who have accepted the stigma of being “outside the camp”, *Therefore let us go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured. (Hebrews 13:13)*. After all, why didn’t the resurrected Christ appear to everybody on Easter Sunday? One might choose to argue that this would have been a reasonable thing to do if God truly wanted everybody to believe in His Son. Why did Jesus reveal Himself only to a few? Why didn’t Jesus knock on Pontus pilots door on Easter morning and say “Surprise!”? Why didn’t Jesus go straight from the empty tomb to Herod’s palace and say, “I’m back! Bet you weren’t expecting me!” He appeared only to a few – those who were His faithful followers.

I also suspect that God sometimes allows just a little bit of doubt when it comes to the objective proof of the miraculous. This keeps us humbled. And sobered.

Miracles always leave room for doubt as they were not intended to replace faith, only to reveal the heart. Also, the fact that Jesus’ miracles were not believed shows that the very best of them were not knock down proof for those who are hard of heart and unbelieving, and to reject their testimony is to bring greater judgment on those who witness them.

Perhaps it is out of God’s mercy that God is pleased sometimes, to withhold them, at least until the time is right to bring to light the true state of people’s hearts – to bring in the elect and to reveal the apostates.

Perhaps you and I need patience while our friends or loved ones are totally convinced that “there is nothing to it” when it comes to the miraculous. After all, how could Peter prove that Jesus had ascended to the right hand of the Father on the Day of Pentecost? He couldn’t! But he believed it. And all the rest could do was to believe his word – or reject it.

Jesus was “vindicated by the Spirit” *Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory (1 Timothy 3:16)* in the days of his early ministry. This meant that He got His approval through the Holy Spirit from the Father alone – not from people’s approval. It also referred to His followers who were drawn to Him in faith by the Holy Spirit. Faith is a gift of God: *And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed (Acts 13:48): For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, <sup>v9</sup> not a result of works, so that no one may boast. (Ephesians 3:8-9)*. This means that those who believed in Jesus had been drawn to Him by the Spirit. *No one can come to me unless*

*the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day. (John 6:44).* Jesus' vindication by the Holy Spirit continues to this day. Even though He is at the right hand of God and is highly exalted in heaven, the only ones who believe this are those whose hearts have been drawn to Him by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit witnesses in our hearts. Furthermore, those who are faithful believers in Jesus's power today are more likely to see His healing miracles than those who say, "I will believe it when I see it". In other words, as Jesus appeared to those who were previously drawn to Him, it may be that God shows His manifest power to those who have previously believed He is willing to show His glory.

So, could it be that God withholds the lack of hard evidence to skeptical people for our sakes? If so, it becomes a rather huge testing for us. The issue is this: Will you and I still be faithful without our cessationist friends seeing God's manifest power for themselves? Many of us would so love to be openly vindicated. But what if God is behind the withholding of His manifest power to our critics in order that we get our vindication not from people's approval but from the Father alone? This would mean that we too are vindicated by the Spirit – His internal witness – and not by the external, visible, and tangible proofs of His power.

God could show His healing power at any moment. I've met those who think charismatics and Pentecostals are out there. But I've had those who came when someone close to them were critically ill and expected to die. We're the ones they come to for prayer, and I've seen great healings take place and those same people make 180° turn. But why doesn't God do that all the time? You tell me!

My point is simply this. Let us not live for the vindication of our theological views. God wants us to receive the praise that comes from Him alone (John 5:44). If we become openly vindicated of our position that God manifests His power and glory today through the gifts of the Spirit, we might succumb to the praise of the people. We could. We all have fragile egos. God forbid that this should happen to us – that we would start saying, "I told you so"!

I believe that cessationism quenches the Holy Spirit. One may become too content with their intellectual grasp of the gospel. The consequence is that we don't even consider – much less expect – that God will manifest His power in our lives. Cessationism is consistent with the view that all Christians are baptized with the Holy Spirit at conversion. If you take that position, such a Christian never expects more after being saved.

One of these days somebody is going to come along and pick up a Bible and believe it! And put the rest of us to shame. I pray it's you! I pray it's me!

Stay connected and believe!

**Chief**

*If you want to know more about CHIEF Ministries or would like to be a part of this, please go to [www.chiefministries.com](http://www.chiefministries.com) and [www.chiefshouse.org](http://www.chiefshouse.org)*

*Christ's*

*Heart*

*In*

*Every*

*Felon*