

“Cessationism”
Romans 12:6
(Preached at Trinity, December 12, 2010)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. In **Verse 4** Paul used the human body to describe the great diversity in the body of Christ.
Romans 12:4 – “For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function,”
2. One of the areas of our diversity is in the area of giftedness.
There are many members of the Body of Christ, each with a different function, just as there are many parts to our physical body – each are different but necessary
3. Each of us have been gifted and equipped to serve in our particular local church.
1 Peter 4:10 – “As each one has received a *special* gift, employ it in serving one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.”
Your gifts are distinct and the exercise of your gifts is essential for the health of our church.
NAS **1 Corinthians 12:7** – “But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.”
4. As we come to **Verses 6-8** Paul gives us a list of several gifts. This list isn’t exhaustive. For one thing, this list isn’t the same as we find in **1 Cor. 12** or **1 Peter 4**.
The gifts God gives His people in service to His church are many and varied. We need to see this list as only an example of some of the gifts to be used in the church.
Paul’s main point is to describe the diversity of gifts.
5. Next week we’ll look at these various gifts Paul describes for us.
This morning, however, I want to delve into an important question. Do all of these gifts still exist today? Have any of them ceased? This is an important question, particularly because of the affect the answer has upon the practice of the church.
6. There are people on both sides. Some say that all of the gifts exist today. Others say that some of the gifts have ceased.
The issue surrounds those gifts that are considered miraculous gifts, particularly those that are considered revelatory gifts.
7. Those who say some of the gifts have ceased place in the gifts into two different categories – Ordinary Gifts and Extraordinary Gifts
 - A. Extraordinary gifts –
 1. These gifts were given as "signs" to authenticate the Gospel message
1 Corinthians 14:22 – “So then tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe, but to unbelievers; but prophecy *is for a sign*, not to unbelievers, but to those who believe.”
 2. Many of these were revelatory in nature and were no longer needed with the completion of the fullness of Scripture.

3. These gifts were practiced during the period of extraordinary offices. These offices were also empowered by the Holy Spirit. These extraordinary and temporary offices were the offices of apostle, prophet, and evangelist.
 4. These miraculous gifts would include prophesy, tongues, healing and other signs and wonders.
 5. It doesn't deny that God can perform miracles today. It denies that God gives miraculously gifted people to the church today.
- B. Ordinary gifts
1. These gifts are given to believers for the ongoing edification and administration of the church as long as it shall exist upon the earth.
 2. Each and every believer is equipped for service.
 3. These gifts are sovereignly administered by grace and according to the will of God.
8. This issue comes to the front here in **Romans 12:6** because the first gift Paul mentions is the gift of prophesy.
Romans 12:6 – “And since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, *let each exercise them accordingly*: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith;”
9. Is this a gift that God gave to the church to be demonstrated until the end of time? Does this gift exist today? Are their prophets today?
10. Most of the reformed tradition hold that the miraculous gifts have ceased.
- a. These include John Calvin, Martin Luther, John Owen, Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield, Charles Spurgeon, Benjamin Warfield.
 - b. It was also the position of our Puritan forefathers.
 - c. It is also important to note that this is the position of ARBCA, the association with which we are in fellowship. In a position paper on the subject we read: “We affirm *sola scriptura* as the clear position of the LBC identifying the only source of objective and prepositional revelation of God to man today. We deny the continuation of objective revelation in any form, “Those former ways of God’s revealing his will to his people, now being ceased (1:1).”
- I. First, we need to look at the nature of the Biblical prophet
- A. The office of prophet finds its beginnings in the Old Testament
1. The Old Testament prophet was the spokesman of God
NAS **Hebrews 1:1** – “God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, ² in these last days has spoken to us in *His* Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.”
 2. This is seen clearly with God’s call upon Moses – the greatest of the Old Testament prophets
Exodus 4:10-12 – “Then Moses said to the LORD, "Please, Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither recently nor in time past, nor since You have spoken to Your servant; for I am slow of speech and slow of tongue." ¹¹ The LORD said to him, "Who has made man's mouth? Or who makes *him* mute or deaf, or seeing or blind? Is it not I, the LORD? ¹² "Now then go, and I, even I, will be with your mouth, and teach you what you are to say."

Numbers 12:6-8 – “He said, "Hear now My words: If there is a prophet among you, I, the LORD, shall make Myself known to him in a vision. I shall speak with him in a dream. ⁷ "Not so, with My servant Moses, He is faithful in all My household; ⁸ With him I speak mouth to mouth, Even openly, and not in dark sayings

3. The office was carefully regulated. If his prophecy was proven false he was considered a false prophet

Deuteronomy 18:20-22 – “But the prophet who shall speak a word presumptuously in My name which I have not commanded him to speak, or which he shall speak in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.’ ²¹ "And you may say in your heart, 'How shall we know the word which the LORD has not spoken?' ²² "When a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing does not come about or come true, that is the thing which the LORD has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.”

4. While not all Old Testament prophecies found their way into the Biblical canon they all carried the authority of that all prophecy contained.

B. Prophets in the Old and New Testaments were essentially the same.

1. All prophesy is a revelation from God and all contains the authority of God

2. New Testament prophets were under the same regulations as the Old Testament prophets

3. The prophets were foundational to the church just as the Apostles
NAS **Ephesians 2:20** – “having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone,”

4. While not all New Testament prophecies found their way into the canon they carried the authority of God’s Word – “Thus saith the Lord”

5. If prophets exist today their word carries the same authority as the Word of God - the authority of “Just saith the Lord.”

If the gift of prophesy that we see in **Romans 12:6** exists today then their words should be written down as the Word of God. This means the Bible needs to get larger and larger with each new prophesy.

II. There are several different groups today that believe that prophesy still exists

A. There are some groups today who agree that prophets today speak with Divine authority

1. They hold that there is no distinction between OT and NT prophets and that the gift of prophesy exist today.
2. There are some Charismatics in this group

B. There are some today who believe that prophets in the Old Testament and the New Testament are different.

1. They claim that New Testament prophets are of a different sort and their prophecies do not have the same authority as the Old Testament prophecies and are not infallible.
2. Wayne Grudem is a continuationist who believes that prophecy exists today but that it is of a different sort than the Old Testament prophecy

- a. Wayne Grudem - “Now if New Testament congregational prophecy was like Old Testament prophecy and New Testament apostolic words in its authority, then this cessationist objection would be true.” (*Systematic Theology*)
 - b. Grudem has a strange way to describe New Testament prophets. While he admits that Old Testament prophesy was a direct revelation from God and infallible he says that NT prophesy is only semi-revelational and potentially fallible
 - c. According to Grudem NT prophesy is nothing more than God bringing a thought to our mind that we then express in our own words.
 - d. Instead of “Thus saith the Lord” it was more like, “It seems to me God may be saying.”
- C. And then there are some who take what is called a “Cautious but open” position
1. John Piper falls into this group
 2. Piper says, “We ought to be open to the real possibility that this too might be a unique moment in history, and in this moment it may well be God’s purpose to pour out his Spirit in unprecedented revival—revival of love to Christ and zeal for worship and compassion for lost people and a missionary thrust with signs and wonders.”
 - a. You have to admire his high view of God and God’s independent exercise of His divine will.
 - b. No one questions what God is *able* to do. The question is what *does* God do?
 - c. It demands clarification as to God’s purpose for the signs and wonders of the New Testament.
 - d. And we must ask the all important question, will God ever bring fresh new revelation apart from His Word?
 3. The “cautious but open” people do not deal with the important question: Have the former ways of God revealing Himself to His people ceased? If God only reveals Himself through His Word today; if the Bible is God’s full and complete revelation of Himself then we must conclude that He will not in the future begin revealing Himself in some other way.
 4. As we consider the gift of prophesy we have to answer the question, what was the purpose of the miraculous or extraordinary gifts?
- III. What was the purpose and meaning of the signs and wonders of the New Testament?
- A. These gifts were given for the purpose of validating the gospel and confirming the Word of God prior to the completion of Scripture.
 1. These gifts were connected inseparably with the office of Apostle and those immediately associated with them
2 Corinthians 12:12 – “The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles.”

Romans 15:18-19 – “For I will not presume to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me, resulting in the obedience of the Gentiles by word and deed, ¹⁹ in the power of signs and wonders, in the power of the Spirit; so that from Jerusalem and round about as far as Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ.”

2. The Book of Acts affirms this over and over.

^{NAS} **Acts 2:43** – “And everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles.”

- Notice the signs and wonders were done by the Apostles, not by Christians in general.

^{NAS} **Acts 5:12** – “And at the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were taking place among the people . . .”

- Notice the signs and wonders were being done by the Apostles, not at the hands of all the Christians.

^{NAS} **Acts 14:3** – “Therefore they (*Paul and Barnabas*) spent a long time *there* speaking boldly *with reliance* upon the Lord, who was bearing witness to the word of His grace, granting that signs and wonders be done by their hands.”

- Notice the signs and wonders again were by the hands of the Paul and Barnabas.

^{NAS} **Acts 15:12** – “And all the multitude kept silent, and they were listening to Barnabas and Paul as they were relating what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles.”

- Notice Paul and Barnabas were speaking as if the signs and wonders were something extraordinary, not something performed often by average Christians.

B. These gifts were not used even of the Apostles or anyone else on a regular basis.

1. Sometimes reading the NT it would appear that these miracles were performed constantly but the truth is they were relatively rare.
2. The signs and wonders that accompanied the ministry of Christ and the office of Apostle were designed by God for a very particular period in church history.
3. In Hebrews 2 it would seem that the church looked back on this unique period

Hebrews 2:3-4 – “How shall 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, ⁴ God also bearing witness with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will.”

C. Since these gifts were connected inseparably to the office of Apostle when this office ended the office of prophet has also ended.

Conclusion:

1. This is not an insignificant topic. Today there are scores of churches that are claiming the presence of miracles. More important, many are claiming to receive fresh revelation from God. This includes new prophesy as well as speaking in tongues.
2. The issue of the cessation of the gift of prophet is of infinite importance. It calls into question the very nature of Scripture.
3. There is one more important point in **Verse 6**

Paul writes:

Romans 12:6 – “And since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, *let each exercise them accordingly*: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith;

- A. The word for “proportion” is ἀναλογία from which we get our word “analogy.” The word “faith” here has the definite article attached to it – “the faith.”
- B. Paul seems to be placing a limitation upon the prophet. The limitation is this. The message he brought to the church would always be consistent with the doctrines of “the faith.” In other words, he was bound by previous revelation.
- C. This is where we get the all important hermeneutical principle – “analogy of faith” – that is, Scripture must be interpreted in the light of Scripture.
 1. A passage that is less clear is to be interpreted in light of those passages that are more clear.
 2. In addition, Scripture is to always be interpreted in light of the theology of Scripture, the theology of “the faith.”
 3. Paul applied this limitation to himself in **Galatians 1:8**
NAS **Galatians 1:8** – “But even though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we have preached to you, let him be accursed.”