



To Be Continued

(www.continuationism.com)

A Response to Michael Patton's, "Why I'm Not Charismatic"

Presented by:

Marvin Cotten

&

Scott Lencke

Two Notes:

- 1) You will notice that, in the varying sections, it might seem as if there are consistent spelling errors. This is because Marv uses American English, whereas Scott uses British English.

- 2) Some of the material might seem repetitive at times. But please remember that this full series was not written all at once, but rather over a period of 7 to 8 weeks in which Marv and Scott interacted with particular material from each section of Michael Patton's series. So, at times, Patton would revisit a thought here or there that had already been shared previously. And, thus, Marv or Scott might pick up that same thought again. And, of course, this might also be helpful for those reading anew one of the sections of the series that had been posted on *To Be Continued*. Also, because Marv and Scott switched back and forth in writing the articles of this series, one might address a particular issue during one post and do so in their own words, while the other would pick up that same issue later on in the series and do so in their own particular words as well. Hence, reasons why their might seem some repetitiveness. Thanks for your understanding.

Part 1 – by Marvin Cotten
(I'm Not Charismatic, Either, Michael.)

Michael,

Glad we could have this chat. You know, Paul warns us against wrangling about words, but your first post was mainly geared toward setting some definitions. So I think we'd better start with some of the terminology.

1. First of all, "**Charismatic**." Looks like we're going to get tangled up there. You seem to want to use this as a blanket term, the way I'd use "Continuationist." Trouble is, it isn't a blanket term. It's a reference to a specific movement, circa mid-20th century, and adherents of that movement. Now you might think it *ought* to refer to any non-cessationists, for etymological reasons, and you might even hear folk using it that way, but I can't agree.

First of all, early in the 20th century the Pentecostal movement sprang up, and as far as I know they did not refer to themselves as Charismatics, even though they'd fit your definition.

They had other distinctions, a particular doctrine about the baptism of the Holy Spirit, a second blessing. Also they tended to found new denominations. Mostly, I guess, because no one else would have them. Anyway, at some point, a couple of generations or so later, their practices started to catch on among non-Pentecostals. These people bought into the second blessing, baptism of the Spirit thing, with some modifications, but stayed in their own denominations, and spread their understanding there. They called themselves Charismatics.

Now, there are others who overlap with these people in terms of finding Biblical practices such as prophecy and healing... well, Biblical... Yet these people were never part of the Charismatic movement, and distance themselves from a great deal of the teaching and practice of that movement. For example, they may not at all buy into the baptism of the Spirit thing à la the Charismatic movement.

So what do you call these people, who don't self-identify as Charismatic, but are not Cessationist? Well, Continuationist works well for me. And that's what I am. (As if you haven't already figured that out from our blog title.)

I understand that in part two you are going to refer to "Continuationism," and you say "all Charismatics are Continuationists." And you *should* have said "not all Continuationists are Charismatics." But you didn't; you said, "all continuationists, properly speaking, are charismatics (even if you must use a small 'c')."

Now, Michael, you had been going pretty well there, until then. Maybe you can correct it on the next reprint. (heh, heh, I know it's an e-book...)

Look at it this way. I hear a lot of people misuse the term “dispensationalist” as if it meant “cessationist.” Now some people even think all dispensationalists are cessationists, which is also wrong. But what if I decided, well, doggone it, I’m just going to use the word that way anyway. So I say something like, “all cessationists, properly speaking are dispensationalists (even if you must use a small ‘d’).” I mean, it does nothing, really, to the other guy, but it sure makes me look uninformed. Just sayin’, Michael.

Nevertheless, I realize this is a bit unfair, since you’ve already written all your posts. So anyway, I’ll read “Continuationist” when you say “Charismatic.” But I might bring it up again. Probably will.

2. The next word I want to bring up is “**normative**.” That’s a great one. I’m not sure I’ve heard anyone use it except a Cessationist (and by the way, I should disclose, I used to be one). What does it even mean, anyway? Does it mean the same as *normal*? I Google it, and I still can’t find anything that really fits in this context. It’s simultaneously kind of an empty word and a loaded word. Now, *that’s* hard to pull off.

Does it mean “something everyone should expect in his or her Christian life?” I guess that would mean pastoring a church is not “normative.” Does it mean when you see it happening, you don’t have to automatically assume it’s fake? Well, I guess not, because you seem to believe in divine healing, and yet wouldn’t exactly call it “normative.” Does it mean something God intended for the Church to be engaged in throughout the Church age? Well, I think we’re getting somewhere with this one, but there certainly seem to have been ebbs and flows in history, for whatever reason.

There was a period of time when for some centuries Israel had no prophets. Does that mean prophecy wasn’t *normative* for Israel? Or should we really describe historical oddities in a different way?

3. I love it that you define some gifts as **ordinary** and others as *extra-ordinary*. Hey, here’s a question for you: are the extra-ordinary gifts normative? Heh, heh. You picking up a hint of circularity there, Michael? You practically say a Charismatic is one who believes the extra-ordinary is normative. It’s kind of like saying X is someone who believes you can see the invisible or hear the inaudible. It’s a great schtick, really it is, Michael.

Only, yeah, you’re really begging the question by this “extra-ordinary” business. It prejudices the discussion. Similar ways to treat this are to refer to these as “dramatic” or “spectacular.”

The fact is, you’ve gotten yourself latched onto a faulty idea from the start. Yes, God’s acts in our lives do often commend themselves as being of divine origin, unexplainable otherwise. They do in fact, in a sense, make the invisible visible. They call attention to the reality of God, his eternal power and divine nature, and such. That is, they bring glory to him. Yet what has that effect on someone maybe very, very ordinary? It *ought* to be

the case when looking at the starry sky, for example. It's something we experience when prayers are answered, divine timing, that sort of thing.

But these aren't characteristic of prophecy on the one hand and not of teaching on the other. Or healing, but *not* encouragement. When any of these are done in the power of the Holy Spirit, the extra-ordinary, i.e. divine and not merely human, heavenly and not merely mundane, nature of these acts commend themselves.

4. That brings us to **supernatural**. Honestly, Michael, you are a teacher. I suppose you avow the gift of teaching. Anyway, I guess you see it as "normative." Yet it is not supernatural?

My goodness, your very faith is the gift of God given to you through the Spirit. You can't even believe in Christ apart from a supernatural act of God. Cessationists are fond of saying conversion is the greatest miracle of all. And so it is. Yet, beyond that the obvious point goes missing. Your ability to analyze, to express yourself, to persuade may all be "natural" abilities, but when you teach in the Body of Christ—I mean if you're doing it right—you are exercising the power of God through you. Read Acts 1:8 for goodness sake.

Michael there are no non-supernatural gifts of the Spirit, none. To make that distinction for the so-called sign gifts is simply a failure to properly grasp what God is doing through his Body the Church.

5. So let's talk about "**sign gifts**." This is something of a personal *bête noir* for me. I have a particular post¹ just on that term. I don't need to repeat myself, or my other recent post² on Heb. 2:3-4, but that verse states that God co-testifies to the gospel by the gifts of the Holy Spirit. It doesn't say sign gifts, some gifts or the extra-ordinary, non-normative, spectacular, or dramatic gifts. In fact, it says through signs, wonders, various miracles AND gifts of the Holy Spirit. May we not understand from the Word of God that any gift ministered by the Holy Spirit functions as God's witness to salvation in Christ?

6. I won't take issue with your definition of **Cessationist**. You lay out some particular claims made by this perspective. You make a lot of distinctions, categories, lists to help define this camp. I'm sorry, Michael, but I find this truly a house of cards: revelatory, confirmatory, temporary, permanent. (Egad, there's that monstrosity "pastor-teacher." Don't get me started!) Ever feel your boxes are a tad artificial? Hey, I don't think your charts are *normative*.

Essentially, by your own description, you say Cessationists are those who make the following assertions:

- a. Certain spiritual gifts serve to (and have the purpose of) confirming the gospel, *while others don't*. [I've already spoken to this one.]

¹ <http://continuationism.com/2010/03/11/sign-gifts/>

² <http://continuationism.com/2010/05/26/what-about-hebrews-23-4>

- b. There is no other (primary/significant) reason for these *confirmatory* gifts to exist apart from this purpose.
- c. The close of the Canon makes this sole purpose of these confirmatory gifts obsolete.
- d. Since they are obsolete, we *know* that God no longer performs them through His church.

But, Michael, there is not a single one of these propositions that is taught in the Bible.

Yet the ongoing Spirit-empowered ministry of the Body of Christ is present all through the New Testament: The Upper Room Discourse (John 14-16), Acts, Rom. 12, 1 Cor. 12-14, Gal. 3:5, Heb. 2:3-4, and so on.

It's there, but it's *obsolete*, and should be understood to be such? Is it like the Constitution of the U.S. the text of which still refers to senators as chosen by state legislatures, and still contains language about that deplorable 3/5 compromise? Only we know when we read them they are no longer in force?

So where are the amendments to the the New Testament, Michael? Cessationists seem to be those who proclaim phantom amendments to our Church Constitution.

All Continuationists are really saying is, old orders are good orders.

Part 2 – by Scott Lencke

Thus far at *To Be Continued*³, Marv has interacted with part 1. In that post, Marv clarified that the usual (or ‘normative’?) words put forth in describing the continuationist-cessationist debate are not always helpful. Thus, Marv looked to challenge some of Patton’s definitions when discussing such a topic – words like charismatic, normative, ordinary, extraordinary, supernatural, and sign gifts.

I now proceed to interact with Patton’s part 2.

I will first begin by saying that part 2 is somewhat of an easier section to deal with, being that Michael Patton presents what he believes are five strong points for the continuationist case. Even if, in the end, Patton would not identify himself as a continuationist with regards to all the gifts of the Spirit, his willingness to identify positive points from the ‘other side’ shows his own integrity. We can very easily fall into the trap of speaking antagonistically or misrepresenting the other side. Yet it is obvious that is not Patton’s desire in his articles.

So let’s look at the five specific points Michael lists as the stronger arguments for continuationism.

1. Acts chapter 2 seems to suggest that the gifts of the Spirit (particularly prophecy) would be normative for the church.

In points 1 and 2, Patton begins with the book of Acts. From a New Testament perspective, I would have begun with the Gospels, looking at the teachings and works of Christ Himself as well as what He promised to His subsequent followers. Well, in reality, we could start with Genesis. And, in one sense, Patton does recognise this in point number 3. But let me explain a little more of why we need to centre this discussion in Christ (if we are not already aware of why).

In all, if we have anything, we have a Christ-centred faith. Every aspect of our faith – belief and practise – must be centred in Christ. And so we turn to centre our practise of the gifts in Jesus Christ Himself.

With regards to this practical part of our life, I am a firm believe that, whatever work Jesus took up in His life and ministry on earth, He would expect His church to continue that work. That is simply how the story is to unfold. Hence why we see a continuation of the works of Jesus in the book of Acts:

1 In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus **began** to do and teach, 2 until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. (Acts 1:1-2)

³ <http://continuationism.com>

Jesus said He was going away, but He would send another like Him that would continue the same exact work (i.e. John 14:16-17, 26; 16:7; etc). And the Holy Spirit would specifically continue that work through the body of Christ.

The Spirit of Christ was sent by Christ to empower the body of Christ to continue the work of Christ. Did we catch that? Read it again.

So this all centres in Christ. If Christ was prophet, then the Spirit is prophetic and has been sent to empower the *whole* body of Christ to be prophetic (more on that here⁴). If Christ was teacher, the Spirit also is a teacher and has been sent to empower the *whole* body to carry a didactic dimension in their ministry (even if we each are not specifically teachers).

So, while we need to look at Acts, for it presents a very positive outlook for the continuation of all of God's gifts, we as new covenant believers must centre all of our theology in Christ Himself.

As for my own personal thoughts on Acts 2, after the Spirit had fallen on the 120, Peter has a revelation: This is the fulfilment of Joel's words spoken so long ago. Joel said that, in the last days, God would pour out His Spirit on all flesh. This was happening right in front of eyes and ears as the tongues of fire descended and new tongues were spoken.

The last days⁵ had just been initiated right then and there. This was not to be some few final years before the *parousia* (presence/coming of Christ). The last days began some 1977 years ago at that great Pentecost.

What was the fruit of this outpouring?

As I hinted at above, God's people would become of prophetic *community*. Oh sure, God would continue to have those specifically gifted as prophets (1 Corinthians 12:28; Ephesians 4:11; etc). But from now on, during the last days of the Messianic age when Messiah would reign over all heaven and earth, God's Spirit would allow all of God's people to be utilised in the prophetic. Moses had longed for it (Numbers 11:24-30), but this was the beginning of the prophethood of all believers, as I've written about before⁶.

This work of the Spirit would break all gender barriers and age barriers: sons and daughters; young men and old men; male servants and female servants.

Because the last days are the entire age from Pentecost onwards (or we might technically say first advent of Christ to second advent), *we must expect God's people to always function as a prophetic community*. This includes revelations, prophecies, visions, dreams, words of knowledge, words of wisdom, etc. None of this has to be leather bound

⁴ <http://continuationism.com/2010/05/23/the-prophetic-body-of-christ>

⁵ <http://prodigalthought.net/2008/06/13/when-are-the-last-days>

⁶ <http://continuationism.com/2010/02/21/the-prophethood-of-all-believers>

and added to the New Testament, and thankfully Scripture stands as a measuring stick of whether such prophetic words and actions are truly of God today. But there is no doubt that the last days are to be a continuing work of Jesus by the prophetic Spirit amongst His prophetic church in the world.

2. The entire book of Acts seems to show that the supernatural gifts are common within the Church.

There are two problematic words or phrases that come forth in Patton's words under this point:

- Normative
- It is very difficult to build too much theology from narrative

I'll refer you back to Marv's thoughts on this enigmatic word *normative*, for he does a fine job in the first installment of this series, as I quote from below:

Does it mean "something everyone should expect in his or her Christian life?" I guess that would mean pastoring a church is not "normative." Does it mean when you see it happening, you don't have to automatically assume it's fake? Well, I guess not, because you seem to believe in divine healing, and yet wouldn't exactly call it "normative." Does it mean something God intended for the Church to be engaged in throughout the Church age? Well, I think we're getting somewhere with this one, but there certainly seem to have been ebbs and flows in history, for whatever reason.

No doubt we might say that, whether good or bad, there is somewhat more of an *expectation* of all gifts of the Spirit within continuationist circles. For all practical purposes, if one is not sure if certain gifts of the Spirit exist or, even more, believe certain gifts no longer exist, there would not be much expectation in either of these groups. You might even find that those who make a profession that they are open to such gifts will still find a lack of expectation due to the uncertainty (I share more here⁷ about only being open to the gifts).

But, from my perspective, let me define this word, *normative*.

Even within the book of Acts, we easily forget that it was written over some 30 (+/-) years. Though it records quite a few prophecies, healings, miracles, and other varying acts of the Spirit, it doesn't necessarily present a case that we should expect such gifts *every single moment of every single day*. But, to be honest, to argue that something must happen 'every single moment of every single day' is a very modern way of thinking. I don't believe the ancient Hebrews and Jews thought in such detailed, 24-hour time periods. But moving on...

⁷ <http://continuationism.com/2010/02/27/more-than-openness-to-the-gifts-of-the-spirit>

Though the above paragraph possibly gives more leverage to the cessationist, let's think this through some more. One thing to recognise is that not every single healing, miracle, prophecy, etc, would have been recorded across the book of Acts (just as every preaching instance would not have been laid out in Acts). The Spirit was quite alive and well across the varying cities, towns and churches. We get glimpses of this in places like Galatians 3:5 and 1 Corinthians 12-14. So there was definitely more Spirit-activity going on than what we find recorded in Acts.

Secondly, the book of Acts contains a church that, though it was growing rapidly, was still a very small group by comparison. Maybe by the end of Acts (early 60's AD) there was a church of 100,000. Maybe more, maybe less. But that is a healthy educated guess.

But today, in 2010, estimates are that there might be some 2 billion believers across the planet. That is a lot of followers of Christ! Not to mention that there are some 500 million within Pentecostal, charismatic and neo-charismatic church circles. So, though each person might not be utilised every single day in healings or miracles or prophecies or words of knowledge, we would expect the *whole* body of Christ being utilised in all gifts of the Spirit on a very regular basis. Remember, the Spirit is at work amongst a lot of Christians. Though, even as Marv recognised, there are ebbs and flows at times within history. That is ok.

The phrase one can normally here from the cessationist (or non-continuationist) is one which Michael gives: *It is very difficult to build too much theology from narrative*. I understand the argument *somewhat*, but I really think this kind of statement fails to be faithful to Scripture.

If this statement is true, then we have to be careful not to build 'too much theology' from major portions of the Bible, including most of the Pentateuch, the historical books of the Old Testament and the Gospels. But, of course, such a notion is silly.

What we need to realise is that we can learn from narrative, especially the *didactic* narrative of Scripture (see Romans 15:4; 1 Corinthians 10:11). A story in and of itself might not be written to teach. But I am pretty certain Luke wrote to teach us something. Right?

As one author states:

'If for Paul the historical narratives of the Old Testament had didactic lessons for New Testament Christians, then it would be most surprising if Luke, who modelled his historiography after the Old Testament historiography, did not invest his own history of the origin and spread of Christianity with a didactic significance.' (Roger Stronstad, *The Charismatic Theology of St. Luke*, p7)

We have got to stop arguing that we cannot build theology from Acts. Such an argument fails and fails pretty bad. Rather, Luke will provide us with a great richness to our pneumatology, ecclesiology, Christology, and so much more, if we allow for Acts to be a

didactic narrative. Not to mention that there is a verse that goes something like this: *All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching...*

3. All of Scripture supports the idea that it is God's nature to work in supernatural ways.

I won't spend a lot of time here, since I have shared much on points 1 and 2 already. But, interestingly enough, Patton even quotes from Jack Deere's *Surprised by the Power of the Spirit* to support this point.

And, lo and behold, Deere also takes time in the same book to show how the supernatural activity of God starts in Genesis and goes right through the whole of the biblical text. This is very consistent with the nature and character of the God whom we serve. If He had been doing such for thousands upon thousands of years (rather than in just a few cycles around the times of Moses, Elijah & Elisha, and Christ & the first apostles), then we must expect that same God to continue to act in such ways consistent with who He is, what He says and what He does.

4. The New Testament never explicitly states that the supernatural sign gifts would cease.

This is true, very true. Though many passages have been used to teach that the gifts would cease – four well-known being 1 Corinthians 13:8-12; 2 Corinthians 12:12; Hebrews 1:1-2; and Hebrews 2:3-4 – these passages do not actually teach cessationism. I share more in this article⁸, and Marv specifically looks at Hebrews 2:3-4 in this article⁹.

Patton even takes time to look at 1 Corinthians 13:8-12 himself, giving his thoughts on why that verse does not support cessationism.

The thing is that, most present-day studied cessationists don't simply quote a few verses and say, '*You see, these gifts were meant to cease.*' And the same stands true for the reverse with continuationism. More than quoting a few Scriptures, it comes to dealing with a theological framework. And, for the cessationist, as Patton recognises, it comes down to 1) recognising certain gifts had a revelatory and confirmatory purpose and 2) that revelation and confirmation was connected to the message of the gospel before it was completed in the first apostolic witness now recorded in the Scriptures.

Therefore, now that we have the completed Scriptures as God's revelation and confirmation of the gospel message, these gifts are no longer needed, or they are at least not normative. But, even now, the modern-day cessationist will probably say, '*Oh these things can happen, but not normally.*' And they would probably argue that these are not normally needed any longer because we have access to the finished product of the canon of Scripture.

⁸ <http://continuationism.com/2010/03/27/four-scriptures-from-cessationists>

⁹ <http://continuationism.com/2010/05/26/what-about-hebrews-23-4>

Well, see my thoughts above on normative. But suffice it to say: Christ walked in all of these things, He sent the Spirit to continue that same exact work, and that same work was to be continued via the body of Christ (though He can do things apart from us, for He is sovereign), since we are called to be Christ in the world today. There would have been solid expectation that Christ's body would function just as Christ did Himself.

But, let me say this: If we as theologians, who centre our theology in the Scripture, cannot ultimately argue for the cessation of the gifts from the biblical standpoint, then we are ultimately building our own theological boxes that cannot hold together. To say it another way, we can espouse great theological treatises. But if we are not able to solidly back up that theological framework from Scripture, then we have a bit of a problem. And Patton has already recognised that the Bible does not explicitly say these gifts will cease. What are we to believe, then?

5. Personal Experience

For many a Christians, to announce that experience has been a reason why they believe anything, especially as one determining factor for their pneumatology, this would be deemed unhealthy. But, what we must be willing to recognise is that experience shapes our theology (I share more here¹⁰). We cannot get away from it, both cessationist and continuationist. Hence, the reason why Michael Patton ultimately says he is a *de facto* cessationist – he believes he has never truly experienced certain gifts of the Spirit like prophecy and miracles, at least in the way he understands Scripture to teach about them.

Matter of fact, I think just about every continuationist I know would say that one of the reasons they believe in the continuation of all gifts of the Spirit is because they have personally experienced them. And, even wider than that, most people who say they believe in Jesus would refer to some kind of experience(s) with the living God as to why they believe and want to follow Jesus. This is part and parcel to life and our faith, and God is quite ok with that.

So, knowing Michael's own presentation of the positive case for continuationism, I'm not sure why he would still want to lean towards being a *de facto* cessationist. But, in the end, I do understand that experiencing something is important for our theology. Very important.

Thus, there are two things I can recommend to Michael: 1) Please re-consider some of your definitions with terms like normative, sign gifts, revelatory and confirmatory gifts, etc. I think wrong definitions and expectations will be a hindrance towards moving into a biblical view of the the gifts of the Spirit. 2) Don't read more theology on the topic, as you are already quite aware of many of the continuationist arguments. Rather, build relationships with solid continuationist believers. That is one of the greatest ways to see our faith stirred in this area. At least that is my testimony.

¹⁰ <http://continuationism.com/2010/03/19/experience-shape-theology>

Part 3 – by Marvin Cotten
 (“Charismatics Are Wrong ‘Cuz It Never Happened to Me” ...and Other Stupid
 Statements)

First, please don't take the title too seriously. It is, as you might suspect, a *hommage* to your own provocatively titled series, last seen here¹¹. Besides, you start your part three by admitting that its argument is (a) not a very good one and yet (b) one that works for you.

I appreciate the irony though. In certain circles it is Self-Evident Truth that Continuationists (a) follow experience over Scripture, and (b) are doing that “evil and adulterous generation” sign-seeking thing (Matt. 12:39; 16:4). Yet here you tell us, first, that while the preponderance of Scriptural evidence backs Continuationism, you remain a Cessationist due to your experience. Then, second, you demand a sign, failing which, you remain a (de facto) Cessationist. It's refreshing, to say the least.

With that introduction, here are a few thoughts on your part three.

1. You are “open” Biblically and theologically to Continuationism.

The other day I heard somebody on the radio giving the usual condescending admonition to Continuationists always to give Scripture priority over experience. This same guy kept making reference to “the four sign gifts.” It was the first time I'd heard these given a definite number. (Does that mean tongues has ceased but interpretation of tongues continues?) I'd really like for him to put his money where his mouth is and show me the Bible passage teaching “the four sign gifts.”

Be that as it may, of course Scripture is the only infallible rule of faith and practice. Michael, you pointed out some strong Biblical support for Continuationism in your part two. As Scott has observed in part 2, you did seem to leave out Christ's own teaching on the eve of his crucifixion (John 14-16). This, I submit, is the place to start, and really leaves no doubt that the Father's plan, the Lord's instruction, and the believer's expectation should be:

Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father. (John 14:12)

So, Michael, if the Bible teaches something, if Christ teaches something, what kind of response is it to be “open” to it? Try saying, “I'm *open* to that salvation-by-grace-through-faith thing, but I've never had a genuine gospel experience.” The apostle Paul tells us to: “Pursue love, and *earnestly* desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy.” (1 Cor. 14:1) I mean, you don't suppose “be open to” is an adequate translation of *zeloute* here?

¹¹ <http://www.reclaimingthemind.org/blog/2010/06/christianity-is-dependant-on-your-character-witness-and-other-stupid-statements>

What I am trying to say, Michael, is that as far as you've come from your previous self-confessed bias against Continuationism, if the Bible supports it, then why not move beyond "openness"? Your lack of experience, I suggest, is in part due to lack of conviction that the Bible really teaches this. What you see depends on what you expect to see.

POLICE INSPECTOR: "By George! How ever did you see that?"

HOLMES: "Because I looked for it."

2. Your expectations.

So what are you looking for, Michael? May I suggest, based on some of your remarks, that you may have spent some time barking up the wrong proverbial tree?

First, as odd as it seems there is a whole preconceived notion about just what a "gift" is that may need rethinking. You remark: "I have never witnessed anything that would lead me to believe that someone has, as their gift to the body of Christ, any of the particular gifts..." Well, if by this you mean some kind of at-will wonder-worker, I don't think this has ever been the case.

The concept of "gifts" is a reference to the fact that the works of Jesus, done by the Body of Christ, are distributed among the members. These are first of all gifts given by the Lord to us, not our gifts to the Body. Second, I don't think the Bible teaches us it was like a team of spiritual X-men: X has the power of prophecy, Y has the power of healing, Z has the power of tongues. Based on what Paul says, on a given day any believer may give a prophecy, though not all will (1 Cor. 14:26, 31). It may have been that some people particularly excelled in a particular gift, and so may be associated with it, but I think it is fallacious to understand a rigid one-for-one correspondence.

Second, in regard to prophecy, you refer to "the surrendering of my mind." I don't think that is what New Testament prophecy calls for. Paul says prophecy gives "upbuilding and encouragement and consolation" (1 Cor. 14:3). It may instantly resonate with someone (1 Cor. 14:24-25) or else is to be weighed (v. 29).

As far as requiring a "sign" is concerned, well first, I thought you considered prophecy a "sign gift." Isn't it *already* a sign, then? "Prophecy is [a sign] not for unbelievers but for believers," Paul says (1 Cor. 14:22).

Besides, with all the New Testament teaching on prophecy, and the clear "democratization" of prophecy in Acts 2, you go to *Moses* for the example of how things are to be done? Deut. 34:10 states: "And there has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face." It might be nice if all who prophesied lived up to Moses example, but I wouldn't expect this. Is this really reasonable?

Also (and I just *love* it when Cessationists tell Continuationists how spiritual gifts ought to work) you opine:

If someone claims to speak on behalf of God—if someone claims to have a prophetic gift—you have every right and obligation to demand an attesting sign. As well, if you think you are a prophet—if you sincerely believe that God has called you to such a ministry—you need to tell God that you cannot do so without such a sign.

Okaaay, kids, always remember to talk back to God. Umm, Michael, in the first place, you draw on the example of Moses, whose demand for authenticating sign was not so much a sign of faith, as of reluctance, hesitation, doubt. God had already given him His word to proclaim, and Moses hemmed and hawed until he ran out of excuses. Go and do thou likewise? So say you, Michael?

Second, this whole thing isn't about anyone's claim to have this or that gift. It's about believers being the Body of Christ, and God giving His words and doing His works through us, as he did through Jesus (John 14:10).

Furthermore, it isn't only prophets who speak on behalf of God. Teachers, such as yourself do.

As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God. (1 Pet. 4:10-11)

Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. (2 Cor. 5:20)

Are pastors, teachers, and evangelists also to demand from God a sign, since they too speak on behalf of God? Well, the good news is, we don't need to demand, because God has always planned to co-testify as we deliver His message (Heb. 2:4).

In regard to what you say about healing, again, I think you are under a misconception to imagine a "gift of healing" as attached permanently to a particular person. This is not necessarily what we as Continuationists are saying. Moreover, your conceptually separating praying for healing from "gifts of healings" is also missing the point.

But you knew I would say this, didn't you. And you head this response off at the pass. You are told "that's not the way it works." And, of course, you, a Cessationist—never seen it—know better:

If you say, "It's not like that. God simply uses me sometimes to heal. I never know when he is going to and when he will deny such a request." I would say that we are simply talking past each other. In my estimation, you do not have the gift of healing. You, like everyone else, simply have the ability to pray for healing, leaving the answer in the hands of God.

I agree about the talking past each other here, but, Michael, let me say gently, it might behoove you back up, hold your preconceived notions loosely, and listen to that perspective—there just *might* be something to learn.

When you begin to learn, you first do not even know what you do not know. Some things need to be unlearned before learning can take place.

3. The learning curve.

I don't say that, or write these posts, claiming vast amounts of knowledge. Only, it is really is a strange thing when Cessationists are sure they know more about spiritual gifts than Continuationists. You point out how others aren't doing it right. Their prophecy is banal. Their prayer for healing and any subsequent answers to prayer is not "the gift." Well, I agree that the Continuationist side may not be doing everything quite right. Yet they are believing the Lord's instructions, and doing *something*, and mixed results are better than no results.

The church today largely has to rediscover what has been forgotten. As with any practice, there is a learning curve. At one time, these were passed on. Jesus instructed His disciples how to minister in power, and they taught others. Well, we haven't got that now, I grant you. And I am not for an instant suggesting that contemporary Continuationists are infallible guides. Still, how wise is it to completely disregard these?

So where are we to begin today? To recover what the Scripture teaches but generations have not really practiced? You begin with the Scriptures, of course. You begin by being convinced from Scripture that the works that Jesus did ought to be in evidence in the church today.

But what does this look like? Prophecy, for example. How do you do it? How do you know when it is happening? Does it feel like something? Does the prophet hear a voice? Audibly? Inaudibly? How do you really know it's God?

I submit, Michael, you won't know the answers by sitting on the sidelines. There is hit and miss here, trial and error. Does that seem little too messy? Well, what are we supposed to do? Don't like the whole glass-half-empty thing? The Cessationist answer seems to be "I don't see any New-Testament quality miracles," so out it all goes.

What about half full? How about getting in there and helping? Don't quite like the way things look in the Pentecostal, Charismatic, Third-wave, whole Continuationist world? So many of the Bible-scholar, teacher types have retreated into Cessationism, and left others to fend without them. Is there a lack of balance in Continuationism? Whose fault is that? Those who are in the game or those who are not? For my money, I'd point a finger or two at the armchair quarterbacks.

4. Get in the game.

So what we're talking about here is you've never had a "genuine charismatic experience." Well, okay, you used to go to a "third-wave" college. These days, do you ever put yourself in an environment where you might just have such an experience?

I was going to point out, if you were not already aware, that you have a fabulous opportunity in Sam Storms having moved to Oklahoma City. Then of course I saw here¹² that he's now on Theology Unplugged. Okay, so you two have met.

Still, my point is Credo House is what, 3-1/2 miles from Bridgeway Church? Dr. Storms is, as you know, top notch in Bible exposition and theology. And I doubt you can find a better go-to-guy for Continuationism—in these United States, anyway. I believe Dr. Storms was not in town when you wrote this series last year. So okay. Now, however, you have no excuse.

¹² <http://www.reclaimingthemind.org/blog/2010/06/theology-unplugged-with-sam-storms-how-long-should-your-doctrinal-statement-be-part-1>

Part 4 – by Scott Lencke

If you read part 4 of Michael Patton's series, I suppose you will respond in either one or a combination of ways: 1) anger, 2) frustration, 3) brokenness, 4) embarrassment and a whole host of other possible emotions.

Patton's part 4 is a kind of side excursus where he shares of one particular person's negative experiences with prophecy. Even as a continuationist, I am quite aware of such stories and examples right throughout Pentecostal, charismatic and third-wave circles. Matter of fact, as the proverbial statement goes – *We've all been there, done that*. Even if we haven't personally been a part of negative experiences, we've at least seen such on television or heard enough stories from our friends and colleagues.

And such truly breaks my heart. But, even more, it breaks the heart of our Father.

But let me start off by giving what is probably one of the wisest nuggets I can give when it comes to the Holy Spirit and spiritual gifts: *Abuse and misuse should not lead to no use, rather it should lead to biblical and healthy use*. Or, to say it another way: *Abuse and misuse should not lead to disbelief in something, rather it should drive us to truly understand how to faithfully walk it out in accordance with the Scripture*.

Those who know me and read my stuff regularly will note that I say that statement quite a lot. And I expect a rolling of the eyes from some due to the perpetual nature of the statement from my lips (or keyboard). But I believe that is truly the biblical approach to most problems we face with the practise of our faith. And I definitely disagree with the approach of abandoning something all together because of abuse and misuse.

Again, I know that abuse takes place. I know things go wrong. At times I want to hurl at what I see on what is labelled as 'Christian television'. But I cannot allow such to push me to abandon what 1) I believe Scripture teaches and 2) what I have seen God do in mine and the lives of others.

Here is reality: There is abuse right across all aspects of the Christian life. We can name just a few. What about leaders who sexually abuse children? Should we never trust leaders? I don't believe that is the answer. Divorce rates are just as high in the church as in the world. Should we just abandon marriage? I don't believe that is the answer. I know plenty of people claiming the name Christian but don't live at all like the one we are named after, Christ. Should I abandon the faith all together? I don't believe that is the answer.

Again, I believe the answer is this: *Abuse and misuse should not lead to no use, rather it should lead to biblical and healthy use*.

Well, that is not a band-aid answer to fix all things. What might possibly be needed is deep emotional healing from abuse. What might also be needed is to find another church community to be a part of. But I believe a mature body of Christ will not ultimately allow

abuse and misuse to determine where they stand. They will rather desire to pursue God, study the Scriptures and look to see what *it* teaches outworked in their lives, which includes the workings of the Holy Spirit Himself.

Now, the person that Patton quotes in his article also observes that none of the prophecies that he has heard spoken have ever come true. None.

I don't know this person in particular and I don't know the people who he says have 'prophesied'. So I really cannot address him or them particularly. But what I can say is that I have heard plenty of prophecies in my life in Christ that have come to fulfil their purpose. I don't use the normal phrase of '*prophecies that have come true*' because, while I am ok with that wording, I do believe it can create a wrong perception about prophecy.

What does Paul say the fruit of prophecy will be?

On the other hand, the one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation. (1 Corinthians 14:3)

And to see this accomplished, one does not have to predict something. You see, we have fallen into the trap of believing prophecy is only about *predicting* things to come. Not only the hearer, but also the one speaking can easily fall into this false notion.

Now listen, I do believe prophecy can have a predictive element. But that is secondary to its primary purpose of being a specific message from God (an unveiling of God's heart and purpose) that brings about edification, exhortation and comfort to the body of Christ. And when we allow prophecy to function in the bigger framework that God Himself desires, we will realise that 1) we don't always have to announce that something is going to happen and 2) we aren't looking for it to 'take place' within our own prescribed time frame.

Again, I believe prophecy can have a 'predictive' element to it. I've seen this in my own life. Right now I'm specifically thinking about a prophecy given to me by a ministry partner a few years back as a group of leaders were gathered together. It came to fulfilment (and is still being fulfilled), but only after about a 3-year period.

And that's just it. When prophecies are given that speak of something that will take place at some point in the future, we in this microwave generation of everything-must-happen-in-3-minutes sit around expecting it to happen automatically. Or, we might give it a week or two at most. But don't we realise that even some prophecies found in Scripture took a long time to be fulfilled? There was the 25-year waiting period for Isaac to be born. There were the centuries of waiting for the Messiah to actually arrive. And we are still waiting for Christ to return to make all things new.

Not only that, but we must also realise that there is an *unfolding nature* to some prophecies. As I said, a ministry friend of mine prophesied something that took about 3

years to come to fruition. But I believe that prophecy is still being fulfilled, still unfolding with its blessing and fruit from God. Plenty of prophecies from Scripture fall in that category as we are still living in the Messianic age of the new covenant. God is still pouring out His Spirit on all flesh (Joel 2), still writing His laws on people's hearts rather than tablets of stone (Jeremiah 31).

The problem is that we build such wrong assumptions of what prophecy is. And this is not only true for the cessationist but also just as true for the continuationist. You know the silly ones:

1. You must begin a prophecy by stating, *'Thus saith the Lord...'*
2. You must use *Thee* and *Thou*.
3. You must shout.
4. You must include a few Hallelujahs.
5. You must only prophesy on Sundays and not the other days of the week.

Those are a bit silly, but we do build up wrong presuppositions of what prophecy is. Here are more likely ones:

1. Prophecy is always predictive. [I addressed this above.]
2. Prophets did not exist after the apostles came. [Plenty of prophets existed in the New Testament: Agabus, Judas and Silas, prophets in Antioch, Philip's four daughters, prophets in Corinth, etc.]
3. Prophets are specifically those who wrote the Old Testament Scriptures. [There were plenty of prophets that did not pen one word in Scripture - Elijah, Elisha, Nathan, Agabus, etc.]
4. Prophecy must be accompanied with signs. [Is that true of all prophets like Nathan, Gad, Micaiah, Agabus, Judas and Silas, etc?]
5. Prophecy must be fulfilled within our prescribed time frame. [I dealt with this above.]

And there are a host of other false assumptions of what prophecy is and what the ministry of a prophet is. It takes time to take off the wrong lenses and see them replaced with the correct lenses. But it is possible. It happened with me and it happened with my colleague here, Marv. We both were cessationists and we both had our theology radically changed via God's Word and true interaction with the Spirit's gifts.

A couple of more things.

Patton included these words from the disillusioned person who had converted from continuationism to cessationism:

If you have the gift of prophecy and it is working for you and you have evidence to back it up, please contact me. I would love to be proven wrong. I am serious as a heart attack. I'd rather prophecy be happening rather than not.

I'm not trying to give a cop-out excuse and side-step things, but this is really *not* how it works. I promise you this isn't the design of the Spirit of God Himself. Maybe I should have listed it above in the false presuppositions we have about prophecy. Prophecy isn't like an on-off light switch that you kind of control when *you* want. I'm sorry to say this, but it just does not work like that.

Now, for the one who is used regularly in this gift, I would not deny that they could 'on the spur of the moment' be used in prophecy. But it doesn't work with an, '*Oh yeah, prove it.*' You remember what happened to the Son of God right before His crucifixion. People were beating Him, taunting Him and saying, '*Prophesy to us, you Christ! Who is it that struck you?*' (Matthew 26:68). He could have. It would have caught there attention. But such did not fit into the purpose of prophecy or the plan of the Father.

What I can do is give you testimonies in my life, which I have alluded to above. And I can point you to some posts even on this blog that gives examples of faithful prophecies and hearing God's voice (see this post¹³, this post¹⁴ and this post¹⁵). But I am pretty convinced, at least from Scripture (i.e. 1 Corinthians 12:11), that this is something God is in charge of. Not to mention that it seems pretty obvious that these gifts were not accessible in an 'on-off' fashion from reading the narrative portions of Scripture where these men and women of God were used in such gifts.

Oh, we are called to pursue Him and His gifts. But this is not a water faucet that we turn on and off whenever we want. Even Jesus looked to the Father to know when to do something and what to speak:

Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise. (John 5:19)

Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works. (John 14:10)

Remember, I post this article very aware of the grave failures of prophecy and other spiritual gifts. I can probably even easily point to my own failings with prophecy: 1) speaking that which I should not have and 2) not speaking what God I should have. And maybe we are all sometimes guilty of number 2 because of number 1. So I know the pain and hurt. I have seen it and heard plenty of stories to shake my head at.

But, though experience does truly shape our theology¹⁶, and such is not evil in and of itself, I always encourage the flock that I shepherd, a flock of multi-cultural and multi-

¹³ <http://continuationism.com/2010/03/29/spirit-directed-prayer>

¹⁴ <http://continuationism.com/2010/03/13/an-everyday-example-of-prophecy>

¹⁵ <http://continuationism.com/2010/05/02/an-example-of-hearing-gods-voice>

¹⁶ <http://continuationism.com/2010/03/19/experience-shape-theology>

church backgrounds, that abuse and misuse should not steer us away from what Scripture teaches and God desires. Rather we will look to be a people that know God's heart by centering our understanding in His Word and we will look to practise such gifts with as much faithfulness as possible as we stay humbly submitted to Him. That, I am convinced, is the heart of God.

Part 5 – by Marvin Cotten
(Is That What History Really Teaches Us?)

Michael,

The unspoken premise behind your historical argument is that over the centuries the church has looked pretty much the way Jesus intended. Really? Anything that goes missing, then, is like the dog that didn't bark, *prima facie* evidence that the thing has dried up at the source. It is something that God just isn't doing any more. Once we start playing that game, however, it is difficult to know when to stop.

There are a number of ways to respond to your part five, "An Argument from History." As for your specific citations of Chrysostom and Augustine, Scott has countered these quite handily in an earlier post here¹⁷. Jesse Wisnewski makes a similar argument at *Reformed and Reforming* here¹⁸, and also makes the observation here¹⁹ that it illustrates the fallacy of an argument from ignorance. Then there's the point that you take us on a snipe hunt for the elusive "supernatural sign gifts", showing that if you set your definitions and expectations just right, you can be assured of coming up empty handed. This is your own "glaring weakness" in commenting on about Jack Deere's argument, where you say:

He equates evidence that the historic church believed in the miraculous with evidence that they were continuationists. You can't equate the two without misrepresenting what is at stake. The historic Christian church has believed in the miraculous, they have not believed in the continuation of the supernatural sign gifts, by and large.

On the contrary, Michael, I'm afraid it is you who have misrepresented the situation by insisting on your own minimalist definition. Continuationism in the first place is not about "gifts" but that Jesus Christ:

...continues His work of glorifying His Father, building His Church, and advancing His Kingdom through the ongoing, vital and dynamic interconnection He maintains with those who are in Him, accomplished through the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit...

From my earlier post, "*What Continues?*"²⁰

¹⁷ <http://continuationism.com/2010/05/16/the-charismata-in-church-history>

¹⁸ <http://reformedandreform.org/2009/10/24/holes-in-the-bucket-why-the-absence-and-disparity-in-the-quality-of-the-gifts-of-the-spirit-today-does-not-disprove-their-continuation>

¹⁹ <http://reformedandreform.org/2010/06/18/another-reason-why-the-historical-absence-of-the-spiritual-gifts-does-not-mean-they-have-ceased>

²⁰ <http://continuationism.com/2010/03/23/what-continues>

This empowering presence is referenced in a number of forms such as prayer in Jesus' name (John 14:13-14), the prayer of faith for healing (Jas. 5:15), and signs and wonders (Acts 4:30). The phenomenon that this empowerment is parceled out through the different members of the body gives rise to the concept of "gifts" (1 Cor. 12:4). Parallel terms here include "service," (v. 5), "activities" (v. 6), "manifestations" (v. 7). Elsewhere they are called "distributions" (Heb. 2:4, though typically translated "gifts").

Isolating the term "gifts" only serves to distort the issue, particularly when pared down to the scripturally dubious category "sign gifts." This category serves as a nice sharp container where the used, hazardous and unwanted bits may be safely disposed of, but it is not only absent from church history, it doesn't even appear in the Bible (more here²¹). And I'll have more to say as I respond to your part seven.

I want to take a somewhat different tack, however, in responding to your argument from history. As I suggest in my first paragraph, the same kind of disappearing act occurs with other aspects of apostolic teaching, and I don't think you, at least, would see these as evidence God is no longer doing that sort of thing.

1. Salvation by grace alone through faith alone. It is amazing how the sharp edge of this central apostolic truth goes blunt shortly after the death of the apostles. The Shepherd of Hermas, for example (ca. AD 150), which is listed among the "Apostolic Fathers" proclaims that once you are baptized, you can sin and repent only one time (Mandate 4, chapter 3). If this were true, we'd all be toast, of course. Thank God for the butter of His grace!

We again pick up a clear understanding of grace with the Protestant Reformation, but what are we to say about the intervening centuries? The truth wasn't completely absent, but unmixed expressions of it are scarce for several centuries. We now have some five centuries since the doctrine's recovery, but do we conclude that in the interval God had withdrawn *sola gratia*?

2. Believer's baptism. Speaking of baptism, I understand your ministry statement of faith is deliberately short and broad, but I think you personally hold to believer's baptism by immersion, if I am not mistaken. At any rate, I think this was the "normative" apostolic practice, but it did not fare so well in the history of the church. Even the Protestant Reformation largely did not restore this, except in what some would designate as "fringe groups and cults." Some really do argue for de facto paedobaptism from the course of history. Would you?

3. Premillennialism. Understand that I am directing this specifically to you, Michael. A number of people will not agree with this point, including Scott, but it is given as an example. I believe you hold that the apostolic hope was premillennial, but that this understanding disappeared for the most part early in church history. It had a resurgence around the nineteenth century. So in the sweep of history, it is not that different from the

²¹ <http://continuationism.com/2010/03/11/sign-gifts>

time frame you attribute to continuationism, which you say was not “in any way normative before the twentieth century.”

This historical premise is definitely used by some as an argument against premillennialism. What about you? Are you a *de facto* amillennialist?

So what do we *really* learn from history? Don't we end up proving a little too much if we take your approach?

These are just a few of examples. You could probably suggest any number of reasons why particular doctrines or practices ceased to be “normative” over the years, without suggesting that God was “no longer doing that.” Indeed, we ought to exhaust every other possibility before going with that option. Ignorance? Tradition? Clerical status? Biblical illiteracy? Misunderstanding? Distortion over time? Fear? Disbelief? Poor leadership? Politics?

The church is often likened to a ship. Over the years wooden sailing vessels require periodic maintenance. Their bottoms become fouled and their wood suffers from rot. The barnacles need to be scraped off and the original woodwork restored. Unfortunately, some of our ecclesiastical institutions of long standing over time became in many ways more barnacle than timber.

From time to time more extensive refits have been necessary. The best known is probably the Protestant Reformation, which largely focused on soteriology. Today, I humbly suggest, it is time for recovering apostolic pneumatology.

Semper reformanda.

Part 6 – by Scott Lencke

To be honest, I believe this is the most difficult section of Patton's series with which I have had to respond. It isn't so much that the difficulty comes on biblical and theological grounds, but what has happened is that the lines have become extremely blurred. On a more positive note, this could be a good thing for the sake of seeing continuationists and cessationists come closer and closer to agreement, moving towards greater unity in this particular area of our theology (which includes practical theology or orthopraxy).

But with section 6 of "Why I'm Not a Charismatic", this becomes difficult for at least two main reasons.

1. Agreement that, because God is sovereign, He can do the miraculous.
2. Terms like *normative*, *expectations* and *sign gifts*.

Now, I am aware some of these things have already been addressed previously in some form or manner. But they keep coming up, these same underlying statements. And, so, hence why I am re-addressing them, but hopefully with some newer thoughts.

1) God Is Sovereign and Can Do Miracles

This is where the blurring of lines, or confusion, begins. For example, Patton lays out this well-known argument from more modern-day cessationism:

Folks, we all believe in miracles to varying degrees. If you don't then you have departed from the historic Christian worldview and slipped into some variation thereof (something of the deist sort).

I identify this as a more 'modern-day' argument because I am not sure you would have heard too many cessationists some 50 to 100 years ago arguing this. They would have believed that God certainly *did* (past tense) the miraculous in biblical times during the three main clusters of Moses-Joshua, Elijah-Elisha and Jesus-the first apostles. But the purpose of such had been *fully* exhausted long ago with the completion of the New Testament canon.

But, today, as Michael reminds us, *we all believe in miracles to varying degrees*.

I would identify these types of statements as a 'get out of jail free' card. I am not trying to be nasty here, but I am trying to be real. When it comes to discussion around these issues, many modern-day cessationists will slap this card on the table as if to say, '*Yeah, well we believe in those things as well. We believe God is sovereign and can do whatever He wills.*' And, thus, this should settle the matter.

Now we must respect a cessationist's acceptance that our God is truly a God of the miraculous. This is a starting point. And you even have people now, like Patton, who say

they are *open* to all the gifts of the Spirit. But there is still much confusion when you start digging deeper into their belief, especially the more practical distinctions.

But I believe the arguments like, '*Of course God is sovereign and, so, He can do miracles whenever He wants,*' can serve as a smoke screen. I suppose both Calvinists and Arminians believe in God's foreknowledge and predestination, since the words show up in Scripture. But how does this break down for both groups? A lot differently.

So, Patton even notes some differences between the continuationist and cessationist.

A **continuationist/charismatic** is one who believes that the so-called supernatural sign gifts such as tongues, prophecy, worker of miracles, etc. are normative for the church and that we should commonly expect people to be gifted with them.

A **cessationist** is one who believes that the supernatural sign gifts ceased after the death of the last Apostle or shortly thereafter due to an exhaustion in their purpose. Therefore, we should not expect such gifts in the church today.

Differences? Yes, though oddly Patton makes this statement later on:

Even most cessationists believe that God could gift anyone with the gift of tongues or prophecy at his will.

This is where some can be left with a furrowed brow of confusion. What do cessationists believe here? Can God perform and give such gifts? Does God do such? Or does He not?

So, it seems at this rate, anyone could play a 'get out of jail free' card with regards to our beliefs. '*Well, if God is really God and can do anything He wants, then He will do A or B or Y or Z.*' Or how about, '*Well if God is really God, then He could reveal Himself to me.*' Or finally, '*If God wants others to know about Him, He could tell them.*'

Goodness, this all sounds like we are moving towards Christian-agnosticism. But don't let the clay stand before the potter saying, '*Why have you made me like this?*' There is responsibility with our faith. We cannot just claim something of black ink on white paper, or black type on a blog. There is responsibility given to the believer.

Listen, I am completely convinced of the sovereignty of King Jesus and that our Father in heaven can accomplish anything He wants. Nothing can thwart *His* plans. Nothing! But that will never stand as an excuse for the saints to not pursue all that God has for us in Christ by the His Spirit.

So, with regards to miracles, healings, prophecy, etc, we can't just sit around and claim God's sovereignty and go about our business as if we have ticked (checked) all the boxes

that are required. We can't even simply tick the box that says, 'I'm open' (see more here²²). Many have been open to Christ. But following is a different matter.

2) The Confusing Terms

Ah, but here comes the clarification of the contention and difference, this from Michael's own words:

A charismatic, however, believes that these are normative and that we should expect them. Did you get those two important words? Normative. Expect.

The words *normative* and *expect* can cause the two groups to talk past one another, and even people within the same group can talk past one another due to these terms. Now, I already addressed the word *normative* in my part 2, but I thought I would reiterate some things and share some more thoughts.

I believe the use of these terms can become just another 'get out of jail free' card. Why? Because each person has a different definition of what is *normative* and what is to be *expected*. But just as I was not willing to grant the first pass, I cannot allow this one either.

Cessationist and continuationist would both agree that the fruit of the Spirit are normative and to be expected. I've yet to hear anyone claim for their ceasing and I don't expect to ever hear such. But do we always see the fruit manifested? Heck, there are even periods when we might say the fruit of the Spirit seemed quite foreign to a portion of the church. I'm thinking the period of the Crusades, I'm thinking of western expansion into places like Africa or North America (all in the name of Christ many a times).

But, guess what? These are still normative and to be expected, right?

There have been times when polygamy was acceptable, but the norm and expectation, from a biblical standpoint, was to the contrary. There was a time when indulgences and penance were acceptable, but the Christlike norm and expectation should have been different. There was a time when slavery was acceptable, but the norm and expectation was to the contrary.

Ah, but this is much different with the issue of miracles and healings. Is it? I know what Scripture teaches as the norm and expectation of the body of Christ. Christ's body is to be all of Christ in all the earth.

Michael goes on to remind us:

However, there may be times in history when miracles do happen much more regularly. God moves in time at his leisure and has complete freedom. We dare

²² <http://continuationism.com/2010/02/27/more-than-openness-to-the-gifts-of-the-spirit>

not attempt to bind his freedom with an artificial theological position of our own systematic comfort. I believe that there are times in history and places where miracles do seem to become regulars. But, generally speaking, they are extremely rare. Too much expectation can set us up for disillusionment. Most people don't get healed. Everyone stays dead. Christian's bills sometimes don't get paid.

Wow! Let's just hand out an infinite book of passes, those 'get out of jail free' cards. We need a bunch here today.

This kind of thinking, this kind of theology, this kind of practical theology leaves us with a bunch of theory and *absolutely no expectation*. In theory, we say it *could* happen. But we walk around with no expectation at all. That is not too healthy, is it? We never step out in faith to pray for the sick, we never take the time to listen to God as if He might speak, we never step out to utter that which we believe God is communicating.

Sure, we might fail or miss it at times. You know, just as those in the cloud of witnesses could have and did miss it at times, and all those since. I'm not trying to throw out my own 'get out of jail free' card. This is simply the reality that God's people can and do miss things. God speaks and we don't realise it. God doesn't speak and we think He does. I've prayed for people before with a faith that they would be healed, and they weren't. I've not prayed for people at times because I didn't want to deal with the disillusionment of another non-healed person.

But, as a friend wrote in a song – *Our disillusionment is how we grow*. But I still want to take steps of faith. And as we keep journeying in hearing God, we will become more and more sensitive to the words of the Father, looking to emulate the Son's own reliance upon the Father (John 5:19).

So, with the particular words *normative* and *expectation*, I think they become unhelpful on many counts. If a continuationist speaks of all gifts of the Spirit being normative or that we should expect them, I am pretty sure most don't believe this necessarily warrants that we *each* walk around every single day laying hands on the sick and seeing healing or receiving revelation that we stand up an prophesy publicly. I'm not sure this was the mindset of even the early church. Maybe, maybe not.

But the problem begins when we take a more individualistic mindset on these things, or only viewing things from the standpoint of our own local church. We forget that Christ has a body of believers spread right across planet earth, possibly reaching the 2 billion mark now, which Patton testifies to himself on his own blog²³. Even if that number were a bit high, and even if we sliced that number to only consider those who were truly pursuing Jesus, we would be left with a large portion of people interested in pursuing the things of God. And to think that Jesus might even do something without the express permission of His people.

²³ <http://www.reclaimingthemind.org/blog/2010/06/christianity-by-the-numbers>

But in our western mindset, we only think about *our* lives or *our* local church. Yet Jesus is Lord of a body that spans across all 24 time zones. I'm thinking that, though you or I might not see a miracle today, God is quite actively at work all across the world and these things are taking place on a daily basis. Remember, 2 billion Christians today.

And please don't put this off to just third-world areas. Yes, there is a lot more regular testimonies of miraculous activity in places like Africa, India and China. I have plenty of ministry friends that can testify to such. But I almost vomit when I hear someone argue that, the reason this happens more regularly in the third-world is because the testimony of Christ has not fully spread to those areas nor are the Scriptures fully distributed in these places. Huh? What?

So if these people in the third-world spread the gospel a little more, receive more copies of Scripture and acquire more theological training, then the *norm* and *expectation* would then be to see the miraculous fade? Are we serious? This only resembles the age-old argument that these things pretty much faded sometime after John, the apostle, died and the New Testament canon was completed. It's just more suitable for the modern day. Please give me a break.

God's activity, the norm of His activity, is to do that which only He can do – to reveal Himself, to testify to Himself, to break in with the kingdom rule of God which brings salvation, righteousness, healing, revelation, faith, hope, peace, joy, etc. That is God's activity from Genesis to Revelation, which includes us since Christ has not returned to marry His bride.

As to our *expectation*, well Jesus did teach that those who believe in Him would do the works that He did (John 14:12), which is not only tied to miracles or healings or prophecy, but does include those. Luke starts off Acts by telling us that, in his first book, he wrote to tell all that Jesus *began* to do (Acts 1:1), thus expecting more to continue via His Spirit-empowered body. And Paul says to earnestly desire spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 14:1), even telling us to not despise prophecy (1 Thessalonians 5:20) and to not forbid speaking in tongues (1 Corinthians 14:39). And remember, Michael tells us that Scripture actually does not teach that these gifts will end.

So, if they are not to end, and we have so much encouragement to continue on in these things of Jesus, then let's get on with lining ourselves up with the challenge of the God-breathed Scripture. Let us take the free-pass cards back off the table.

Normative – Yes, knowing that Jesus has a people spread across planet earth.

Expectation – Yes, according to the teaching of Scripture, which Michael affirms.

As for *sign gifts*, those who frequent *To Be Continued* will note that we are not huge fans of categorising certain gifts of the Spirit as sign-gifts. It's a dubious category that cessationists have created to serve their own purpose. I am a little more benevolent than Marv in recognising that this sign-gift category *might be* semantically sustained. But, if

so, there is still nothing suggesting that this sign-gift group gets chucked out or becomes rare as the church moved into the second century AD.

Still, so we don't get too repetitive, and so I don't go on and on, I point you to this post²⁴ and this post²⁵ to read more about the sign gifts.

So, of course, it is quite easy for both cessationists and continuationists to espouse their belief in God's sovereignty and that He can perform miracles whenever He wants. That's great in one sense, but not too helpful in another. Doctrinal statements consisting of white paper and black ink don't lead to something being a reality in our lives. Rather, we are challenged to align ourselves with Scripture's teaching, this being true even if what we see around us is contrary to biblical teaching. And Michael Patton believes Scripture teaches that these gifts will not cease.

So, what is the next step? I think Marv already gave some practical points to consider in part 3.

²⁴ <http://continuationism.com/2010/03/11/sign-gifts>

²⁵ <http://continuationism.com/2010/05/26/what-about-hebrews-23-4>

Part 7 – by Marvin Cotten
(Building With a Full Deck?)

Michael,

You admit to a history of deep-seated emotional bias against Continuationism (against Charismaticism, really), but you insist you are all over that now.

You have weighed the Cessationists' Scriptural arguments in the balance and found them wanting, correctly, I'd say.

You then offer up a subjective consideration of your personal experience, informed by some dubious expectations and shaky definitions.

You top this off with an argument from ignorance, based on selective evidence, ignoring contrary data, and out of all possible explanations you opt for the one that by an odd coincidence happens to correspond to your long-abandoned bias. Go figure.

So, having laid a foundation such as this, you are now ready to build, it seems.

I don't know, though. At this point you loop back to some of the Scriptural arguments you previously said were underwhelming. What, had they been pumping iron in the meantime?

Just a few points in reaction:

1. That whole "supernatural sign gifts" thing. Not to repeat myself, but as I explain here²⁶, I really do call into question how valid that category is scripturally. You post a chart in your part one, and then proceed to assume this concept for the duration of your series, but you never really derive it from the Bible. Yet it controls your entire definition of "Cessationist."

You understand, don't you, that the fact that you choose to define Cessationism in terms of the sign gifts, doesn't mean that Continuationism does or should. I think Cessationism is wrong in part because the concept of "sign gifts" itself is spurious.

All "gifts" are empowered by the same Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:11, 28-29), but only some are "supernatural"?

Spiritual gifts *in general* are said to be God's co-testimony to the gospel (Heb. 2:4). So which ones are *not* "sign gifts"?

2. You make a statement: "Everyone would agree that the work of Christ is not repeated over and over." Well, yes, if what you mean is the finished work of Christ, His unique

²⁶ <http://continuationism.com/2010/03/11/sign-gifts>

redemptive work. However, you have here stumbled onto what I think is the main point you have missed all along. In another aspect of Christ's work, it certainly does continue—if you believe what Jesus says about it:

Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves. “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father. (John 14:10-12).

Note two things:

- a. What you say about “sign gifts” Jesus says about His works: they confirm His words and help to build faith.
- b. “Whoever believes” in Jesus will do these same works.

Jesus does not suggest that this is the only reason the believer is to do these works. In fact we would do them as He did them: because they are the Fathers' works (v. 10b). And this is the fruit that brings Him glory (14:13; 15:8). When does *that* purpose get exhausted?

3. You say you don't find compelling evidence that all this continues. Well, that “whoever” in v. 12 does seem to me to indicate continuation through this age. Does it not to you? What about when Jesus brings this subject up again, saying that the power given through the Holy Spirit was for testimony “to the end of the earth”? And if the power to do His works was because God was with Him (Acts 10:38), what could it mean for Christ to promise to be with us to the “end of the age” (Matt. 28:20). End of the earth, end of the age, does that sound like two generations?

4. You use the “no longer any need” argument. Whose “need” do you have in mind? If you are talking about God, “need” is not a relevant category. God does not act out of necessity or need, but because He has willed, and according to His plan. And if we believe Jesus' words, it is a matter of God's plan and His will that believers are to do the same works that He did.

On the other hand, if you are talking about our need, Jesus says—of this very subject—that without Him we can do nothing (John 15:5). God's need is 0%; our need for the empowerment of the Holy Spirit to do the works of Jesus is 100%.

5. Now to your specific Scriptural citations, Paul refers to the “signs” of a true apostle (2 Cor. 12:12).

“The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with utmost patience, with signs and wonders and mighty works.”

Now I think it is likely that the first use of “signs” here does not mean “miracles,” but simply “indications” (as the NIV takes it: “The things that mark an apostle...”). But no matter, because we still have clear reference to “signs and wonders and mighty works.”

It is not surprising that apostles would be marked out by, among other qualities, their wonder-working power. I think they probably performed the works of Christ in fullness, that in others we would think of as individual gifts. We know it was not only the apostles through whom these acts of power were manifested (Acts 6:8). At any rate, however, Jesus’ words are pretty clear: “**whoever believes in me** will also do the works that I do.” Limit this “whoever” as much as you like, considering the way Jesus uses the phrase (ὁ πιστεύων εἰς ἐμὲ) throughout the Gospel of John, and these are not including the variations on the wording:

Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and **whoever believes in me** shall never thirst. (John 6:35)

Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water. (John 7:38)

Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. **Whoever believes in me**, though he die, yet shall he live. (John 11:25)

And Jesus cried out and said, “**Whoever believes in me**, believes not in me but in him who sent me. (John 12:44)

6. Draw what implications you will from Eph. 2:19-22: “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets” (v. 20), but the whole building, not just the foundation is the “into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit” (v. 22). This takes us right back to one of the major themes of John 14-16, God dwells in the believer through the Spirit in order to bring forth His works:

Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who **dwells in me** does **his works**. (14:10).

In that day you will know that **I am in my Father**, and **you in me**, and **I in you**. (14:20).

Jesus answered him, “If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and **make our home with him**.” (14:23)

I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever **abides in me** and **I in him**, he it is that **bears much fruit**, for apart from me you can do nothing. (15:5)

If you **abide in me**, and my words **abide in you**, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you **bear much fruit** and so prove to be my disciples. (15:7-8).

7. Finally, you resort to Heb. 2:3-4. Again, I have dealt with this passage at some length (here²⁷), but there are a few remarks that need to be made about your citation:

- c. You make a point of saying the gospel was confirmed “to them,” but not “by them.” Apart from the fact that the author asserts the former, though not the latter, he is talking to people who **are unconvinced of the gospel**, those in danger of “drifting away” (v. 1), of “neglecting so great a salvation” (v. 3). Jesus said those with faith in Him would do His works. Are we somehow surprised if those lacking faith do not?
- d. Recall that what is being said here is in regard to “gifts of the Holy Spirit” (v. 4) in general, not some subcategory of “supernatural sign gifts.”
- e. I have to question your use of “seems,” which apparently serves in lieu of actual logic:

“This *seems* to indicate once again that the supernatural gifts primarily served a confirmatory purpose, not simply a benevolent purpose. (emphasis mine)

“It also... *seems* to suggest that these confirmatory gifts were already beginning to exhaust their purpose.”

“The writer of Hebrews and his audience (the “us who heard”), it would *seem*, did not possess these gifts themselves, but relied upon the witness and testimony of those who did possess these gifts.”

None of these statements are at all indicated by the passage. As Jesus Himself said, the works He did back up His words, but these were not their main purpose, which was to glorify His Father. The author here makes the same point: believe the words, or at least believe because of the works. There is no indication whatever in the author’s words that the works Jesus prophesied and promised were not continuing and were not to continue.

²⁷ <http://continuationism.com/2010/05/26/what-about-hebrews-23-4>

Part 8 – by Scott Lencke

Michael Patton's final section in his series, section 8, is his concluding explanation as to why he is a '*de facto* cessationist', meaning, he is a cessationist because there is not enough compelling evidence in his personal life as to persuade him otherwise. He still maintains God's sovereignty as to overstep the experiential boundaries of his life. But, in all, this is simply where Patton finds himself.

I do not despise one's experience shaping their theology. Though some might disregard experience altogether, I believe it is part and parcel to our faith, as I have shared here²⁸. But what I would challenge any cessationist, *de facto* or whatever, is that we acknowledge and allow for experience to shape our theology right across the *whole* body of Christ (I am not saying Patton would not allow this).

It doesn't mean we should not judge our experience by Scripture, as well as those we are connected to who are responsible members of the body of Christ. But our experience many times helps us understand God's revelation in Scripture. That's how it was in biblical times and that's how it has always been right down unto today. All Christian, cessationist or continuationist, need to allow for such.

There are a few things Marv and I have already dealt with that come up in Patton's final section of the series. And, so as not to repeat ourselves, I only bullet point them and point to other articles for consideration (or re-consideration).

- On God's sovereignty and our responsibility with the gifts of the Spirit – read part 6 (point #1)
- On the terminology of *normative* and *expectation* – read part 1 (point #2) and part 6 (point #2)
- On the gifts ceasing in church history – read part 5, as well as this other article²⁹ on the charismata in church history

But let me pick up two more comments of Michael's and then I shall finish with some closing thoughts.

1) Healings and miracles as gifts and via prayer

Just as there can be so much confusion over such terms as *sign-gifts*, *normative* and *expectation*, here is another case where confusion can easily come about – the *means* by which healings and miracles are outworked in our human world. So I want to break down some things *practically* as I see them from Scripture and I hope they are helpful in giving us a more *holistic* practical theology in regards to things like healings and miracles.

²⁸ <http://continuationism.com/2010/03/19/experience-shape-theology>

²⁹ <http://continuationism.com/2010/05/16/the-charismata-in-church-history>

Specifically, many cessationists like to hold to what I would say is a more *dualistic view* with regards to healings and miracles. They would typically argue something like what Patton has stated in his article:

Most healings and miracles I have seen come *through prayer*, not *through a divine conduit with this particular gift*. (italics mine)

Do you see the *two varying means* put forth in this statement?

I believe such a person would further argue that the first apostles, and some of the other early church leaders, were able to see healings and miracles through *both* of these means: 1) commanding the healing and 2) prayer. But, following the exhaustion of their purpose in confirming the gospel message in the first century, a healing could take place through the channel of prayer and seeing someone get well, even get well rather quickly. But to walk up to someone and make an authoritative command such as, '*In the name of Jesus, be well and receive healing from the Lord of heaven of earth,*' well, that really does not happen much any more.

You see the difference being pointed out? 1) Prayer and 2) Authoritative command because one has the gift.

Thus, I think we can easily fall into the trap of viewing prayer in somewhat of an unhelpful way, something like *that set aside time, with our eyes closed, whether privately or publicly, to ask God to intervene on our behalf*. Something like that. So, by praying to God in this kind of way for a healing or miracle, it becomes distinguished from the more instantaneous command that we might read about in places like Acts (or hear of others sharing such stories today). A case and example is here:

6 But Peter said, "I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!" 7 And he took him by the right hand and raised him up, and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong. (Acts 3:6-7)

Now, I know that my above description of prayer is a very basic and naive concept, one that Patton and many cessationists would typically deny as their specific definition of prayer. But my challenge is that, some kind of *dualistic* thinking has developed amongst many Christians with regards to healings and miracles and how they are exhibited within our human world.

Of course, healing can come through prayer, as we read in these well-known words of James:

14 Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. 15 And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. (James 5:14-15)

And I suppose such statements below by Jesus will also cover the areas of healings and miracles:

13 Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. 14 If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it. (John 14:13-14)

But I believe we confuse the situation when we don't recognise *all things* as flowing out of prayer with God, or the relational communication we have with Him. For didn't James also remind us:

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. (James 1:17)

Whether healing comes as a process (yes, it can be a process) or instantaneous, Jesus is still Lord of heaven and earth, and He is still the one we ask and rely on for healing. No matter if that is a set aside time of prayer with a gathered group or if it is out on the street as we interact with a broken (both physically and internally) world. We are in a place of desperate reliance upon God Himself.

Even if we want to divide healings and miracles into the two categories of *instantaneous* and *non-instantaneous*, both still ultimately come as a product of prayer communication and reliance upon God. And I suppose that anything we, then, command by the authority of Jesus would flow from the relationship we have with the Father as we listen to what He is saying (like Jesus in John 5:19).

I believe this prayerful focus and reliance upon God is going on 'behind the scenes' in places like this:

6 But Peter said, "I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you. **In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth**, rise up and walk!" 7 And he took him by the right hand and raised him up, and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong. (Acts 3:6-7; the healing of the lame beggar at the Beautiful Gate)

And **when they had prayed**, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness. (Acts 4:31; this is not a healing but still quite miraculous)

But Peter put them all outside, and **knelt down and prayed**; and turning to the body he said, "Tabitha, arise." And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter she sat up. (Acts 9:40; prayer and instantaneous healing, and here is an example of Peter's command for a miracle following his prayer)

9 The next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour **to pray**. 10 And he became hungry and wanted something to eat, but while they were preparing it, he fell into a trance 11 and saw the heavens opened and something like a great sheet descending, being let down by its four corners upon the earth. (Acts 10:9-11; Peter went up to pray and had quite a miraculous vision and revelation)

5 So Peter was kept in prison, **but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church**. 6 Now when Herod was about to bring him out, on that very night, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries before the door were guarding the prison. 7 And behold, an angel of the Lord stood next to him, and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him, saying, "Get up quickly." And the chains fell off his hands. 8 And the angel said to him, "Dress yourself and put on your sandals." And he did so. And he said to him, "Wrap your cloak around you and follow me." 9 And he went out and followed him. He did not know that what was being done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision. (Acts 12:5-9; a miraculous deliverance in response to earnest prayer)

Shall I keep going?

My point is that I think it unhelpful to put some healings and miracles over in one category called *prayer* and the rest in another category called *instantaneous via authoritative command*. Whether such is instantaneous or not, whether it happens at the command of a human vehicle in Jesus' name or not, it all comes via prayer communication in the name of the Lord of heaven and earth, Jesus Christ.

While I understand the desire to designate healings and miracles in these two ways, these categories do get easily broken down at times, overlapping together, and all sorts of intertwining. And if we hold to these kinds of categories, as it seems Michael Patton and others do, I think we will 1) not be as prone to recognise the *power* of healings and miracles as God's response to specific prayer times and 2) believe that healings and miracles no longer happen via an authoritative command in Jesus' name.

The first instance is just as beautiful and powerful as the second, and the second instance still occurs today.

2) Relating to the closing of the canon

After hinting at this in part 7 of his series, Michael Patton revisits what he believes is a good analogy in explaining why he is a *de facto* cessationist. It has to do with how we, as evangelicals, believe in a *de facto closed canon*.

We believe the canon of Scripture is closed and should not be added to. This does not come about by really quoting any one particular verse or plethora of verses, but rather considering the *theological ramifications* with regards to the canon of Scripture (for

evangelicals, the 66 books of the OT and NT) and its overall purpose. Christ is the full and final word of God's redemptive and covenant revelation for humanity. Thus, our fathers long ago recognised that there is no need to add to such and, therefore, 'closed' the canon. To this, we would agree. Not to mention that this also allowed for greater protection against heresy.

Therefore, Patton believes this analogy is very helpful in considering the purpose of the 'sign gifts' (prophecy, tongues, healings, etc). Patton remarks:

I don't think that one can make a solid case for the ceasing of the gifts from Scripture. However, I don't think that one can make a solid case from Scripture for the closing of the canon. I believe that both of these issues are very similar. Could God add books to the Bible if it were his purpose? Of course. Could we cry "foul" and say "You cannot do that because our traditions and councils have said you cannot? No. We (Protestants) believe in the de facto closing of the canon. What does that mean? We believe in the closing of the canon because it, indeed, closed. It is a historical and experiential reality. God just quit adding books to the canon. Only after this does our theology step in and attempt to explain this by saying it closed because soteriological history was completed.

Yet, as you could imagine, I cannot agree with this kind of thinking with regards to the gifts of the Spirit (or one wants to call them 'sign gifts').

Though I am sure some will disagree, I think we can recognise that God's revelation can be identified in varying categories. Interesting I say this, right? Because I just noted the insufficiency of the two categories many cessationists create with regards to the means by which healings and miracles are outworked in our human world. But I think identifying two categories or purposes of God's revelation can be established.

I might identify God's revelation in these categories: 1) redemptive and 2) non-redemptive. Or, those two categories might be too dubious for some, so maybe we should prefer these two classifications: 1) canonical and 2) non-canonical.

But what I am getting at is that every single bit of God's revelation that has been given since the beginning of time has not always found its way into the canon of Scripture. It's really that simple.

Now, we are assured of the God-breathed nature of the 66-book canon of Scripture. It comes to us as the word of God testifying to *the* Word of God, Jesus. But by no means does it contain all that God has revealed, communicated, spoken and done since the creation. If we think it does, we are simply misled.

God's revelation has always continued on even outside the formation of the canon of Scripture, both when it was being written and since it was finished and closed. Not just in the 'general revelation' sense that we all agree with, like in physical creation or in the conscience of humanity (typically pointed out from Romans 1 and 2). But also in the

specific sense of God's purposes and what He is doing in the earth via His people. None of this would contradict the full summary of God's revelation that we have in the Scripture. But, nevertheless, His revelation and deeds were not confined within the formation of our canon.

I will give you a couple of examples:

30 Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. (John 20:30-31)

In his Gospel, John specifically took the time to record specific signs to help us believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing in Him we may have life. But he also tells us there were many other things, significant things, Jesus did. Those many other things were not any less a revelation as to who Christ is and God's purpose through the gospel. But John specifically gave testimony to certain acts of Jesus and left out others. Think about some of those other acts Jesus did, which John did not record, that brought people to believe He was who He said He was. But thankfully we have a continuing testimony of what Jesus did, in John's Gospel, the other three Gospels, and the rest of the New Testament.

Now, some will say – *That's the point!* We have in Scripture what was necessary and sufficient, but we need no more.

No, that's not the point. The point is that the Scripture gives *what is sufficient*. But, by no means, does this rule out any less that God was actively revealing and doing things to attest to who Christ was. That's what John said. And that is how it was prior to the arrival of the Messiah and that is how it has been with the sending out of His body. I can almost bank on it that plenty of people came to know who Jesus was via things He taught and did that were not recorded in the Gospels, but nevertheless were extremely important.

Another favourite example of mine is found in 1 Timothy 1:18-19:

18 This charge I entrust to you, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies previously made about you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, 19 holding faith and a good conscience...

These words, these prophecies, were never penned in any part of Scripture, that we know of. Yet Paul makes it clear that these prophecies could be utilised in *waging good warfare, as well as holding to the faith and a good conscience*. Must have been pretty powerful prophecies!

And I don't even think all of the words came from Paul. In 1 Timothy 4:14, we read that a gift was imparted to Timothy through prophecy and that this was done by the '*council of elders*'. Paul was probably there as well (see 2 Timothy 1:6), but it was highly

probable that a few different people spoke forth the prophecies (notice the plural in prophecies).

Again, these prophecies were never recorded in Scripture, but they were worth holding onto. Timothy could actually live out the faith with greater strength by remembering these words of revelation.

And, if we are honest, we will truly recognise that every revelatory word spoken by a prophet, apostle, or any man or woman of God, did not find its way into Scripture. I don't believe God ever planned it that way. Well, actually, I'm certain He didn't plan it that way, even if I only had the two examples above.

Not to mention the plethora of prophets in the Old Testament that never penned a word, but were still actively speaking on behalf of God. Nor would Acts have recorded every single thing that the church participated in during the first century, especially noting that it mainly followed the activity of three apostles – Peter, John and Paul – and a few handful of others.

So, how does this relate into Michael's analogy?

A closed canon of Scripture, as our measuring stick for our faith, does not point to the ending of God's revelatory words and deeds. This is because the greater purpose of God's revelation was not a canon of Scripture, though that was extremely important. The purpose of God's revelation is to reveal who He is, His character, His purposes, and His plan to see His rule and glory expand across planet earth.

God's revelation and God's miraculous activity was never confined to our canon. So the analogy does not quite hold up. Instead, God has not only been desirous, but *has actually continued* to unveil Himself in accordance with the pattern that He has always revealed Himself. This is our constant and consistent God.

Closing Thoughts

Both Marv and I are extremely grateful for Michael Patton. We constantly interact with his blog, Parchment & Pen³⁰, as well as on the theological discussion network, Theologica³¹, that he began just over two years ago. We have a deep respect for Michael and none of our interaction with his series should be seen as 'cheap-shots', but rather as a desire to interact with and challenge a man we do respect.

I personally appreciate Michael's *openness* to all the gifts of the Spirit. I believe his interaction with the wider body of Christ has allowed for such, and this will allow for continued healthy discussion on the topic. I can only hope that one day soon we shall also

³⁰ <http://www.reclaimingthemind.org/blog>

³¹ <http://theologica.ning.com>

see Michael encouraging and exhorting the body of Christ about the continued activity of the Holy Spirit in *all* the gifts of the Spirit. Until then.....