



INTRODUCTION

WHY DOES THIS MATTER FOR THE CHURCH?

For as long as I can remember, I have been a big fan of *Star Wars*. I watched the original trilogy every chance I could get. On birthdays and on Christmas, the only toys I would ask for were *Star Wars* figures and, when the trailer for the first prequel came out, I watched it close to a hundred times before I actually saw the film. When I was still a kid, my oldest sister read me the first *Star Wars* novels in the “expanded universe” and, when I got older, I voraciously read book after book about *Star Wars*.

Because of that, I have a brain filled with *Star Wars* information. I can tell you that Wookiees come from the planet Kashyyyk, that the droids C-3PO and R2D2 are the only characters that appear in all nine of the main *Star Wars* films, that Grand Admiral Thrawn is the best *Star Wars* villain, that the leader of Rogue Squadron has always been

Wedge Antilles, and that an Imperial-class Star Destroyer is 1,600 meters long.

I have a lot of fun facts about *Star Wars* in my head. But it is quite useless information. And it is information that most people do not need to have in their brains. It can sometimes be interesting or entertaining, but it does absolutely nothing to change my life.

Sometimes that is exactly how people view theology: it has some interesting or entertaining information, but it will not change lives. These critics say that theology may be necessary for some Christians, but most believers don't need that information in their brains. It can be fun, but it is quite useless information. It does not have any effect on a person's life.

But that viewpoint is far from the truth. For theology is not just for *information* but for *transformation*. It is not filled with useless facts but life-changing truth. Believers need theological content in their brains, for it can have a massive effect on how they live.

Cessationism

This is a book about something called “cessationism,” which sounds like the name for an incredibly boring theological topic that may matter to some PhD eggheads in a university tower somewhere but that certainly has no application for the normal Christians sitting in the pews at church.

However, I hope to show you that a person's acceptance or rejection of cessationism will have a massive impact on

the life of a Christian and on the character of a church. In fact, your view of cessationism can radically change your view of Christianity in general as it impacts your stance on the authority and sufficiency of Scripture.

Cessationism is the belief that the Holy Spirit no longer gives believers the miraculous spiritual gifts that were associated with the apostles; in other words, miraculous spiritual gifts like apostleship, prophecy, tongues, and healing have ceased—they have ended—and they are not truly happening today.

Cessationism is a negative doctrine in that it argues that something has ceased, but it is also a positive doctrine as it says God has graciously given believers all that we need for life and godliness in the Bible. God is no longer giving us new revelation through apostleship, prophecy, and tongues and is no longer authenticating that new revelation through healing because God has given us something better: God has given to His church the Scriptures, which are fully able to transform our lives and give us God's will. Cessationism means that God has given us a book that is sufficient, complete, and lacking nothing. Cessationism argues that God is still speaking to us today, but it is through His authoritative Word that is found only in the Scriptures.

The Importance

The issues surrounding cessationism and the miraculous spiritual gifts are not agreed upon by all Christians. Bible-believing, born-again, evangelical Christians disagree on

this topic. But such disagreement should not cause us to throw up our hands in the air and give up hope of ever figuring this issue out; instead, this disagreement should push us to dive more deeply into what Scripture has to say on this doctrine.

It is good to recognize that Christians who disagree on some secondary issues can still have some fellowship and unity because of their agreement on the gospel. But it is also good to recognize that disagreements on secondary issues still matter and they make a difference in how a Christian lives and in how a church functions. Here are a few brief ways your beliefs about the miraculous spiritual gifts can radically affect things in your life:

It Affects How You Do Church Services

- Should your church services feature people speaking new prophecies from God, or should you only focus on the prophetic Word in the Scripture?
- Should you promote speaking in tongues at your church services or not?

It Affects How You Interact with Other Believers

- If someone says they have a prophecy from God and tells you to take a job opening in Nebraska, rather than Ohio or Maine, are you obligated to take that job?

- What should you do if someone tells you they had a dream from God that you are not really a Christian? Do you start doubting your salvation? How does such an occurrence affect your relationship with the person who believes God has declared that you are not a believer?

It Affects Your Personal Life

- Should you spend time praying to have the gifts of tongues, prophecy, and healing?
- If you get cancer, are infected with a dangerous disease, or become physically disabled, should you search out people at churches and ministries that claim to have the miraculous gift of healing?
- Should you begin to rely on and obey inner impressions that you believe are divine words from God?

It Affects Your Ability to Interpret Scripture

- Must everything in the Bible have direct application for you today? Does progressive revelation and context matter in regard to how you interpret and apply Scripture?
- Must your church submit to the instructions of people claiming to be modern-day apostles?

It Affects Your Witness to Unbelievers

- Do believers today need to perform miracles in order to be an effective witness to unbelievers? Are the miracles written in Scripture insufficient to authenticate the gospel today?

It Affects Your View of the Sufficiency of Scripture

- Do you only need to focus on the revelation already received in Scripture? Or do you need new revelation by those claiming to have the gift of prophecy?
- Are the words of Scripture enough for you to live a godly life? Or do you need additional words of God through new prophecies?

Conclusion

Your views on the miraculous spiritual gifts really matter. Whether you believe the miraculous gifts have ceased or are continuing in modern times makes a major difference in how you do church, how you view Scripture, and how you live your Christian life.

This short book is not meant to give you an exhaustive examination of the issue but is meant to give you a brief introduction and defense of the cessationist understanding of the miraculous spiritual gifts, and to show you why this view is important and applicable to your life.¹

¹ Check out the appendix for more resources on cessationism.

Part 1 of the book gives the big picture, laying out some concise definitions of spiritual gifts and defining what is and isn't cessationism. Part 2 argues that the modern charismatic gifts are counterfeits by showing how they do not match up with the biblical marks of prophecy, tongues, and healing. Part 3 presents the main biblical arguments for cessationism and deals with some of the main charismatic objections. And, lastly, the conclusion lays out what the believer's response should be to all of this.

The issues discussed in these pages are incredibly important. This theology is not just for *information* but for *transformation*. And this view of cessationism matters because the Bible shows that Scripture is sufficient for the church.