

Sermon follow-up

12/4/11

Rich Lusk

1 Cor. 12:1-31

“One Spirit, Many Gifts: What It Means to be Members of One Another”

I want follow up on three area from the sermon – weakness, the word of knowledge gift, and the faith gift. I also want to preview what I will be saying about the gifts of prophecy and tongues.

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Some follow up on last Sunday's sermon:

This post deals well with the weakness theme in 1 Cor. 12, especially as it applies to children and the disabled:

<https://colvinism.wordpress.com/2009/12/31/babies-and-i-have-no-need-of-you/>

Augustine records in his *Confessions* how Ambrose, bishop of Milan, commanded Augustine's mother Monica to desist from bringing the elements of the Lord's Supper to share with the dead at their tombs. Many have wondered whether the mysterious “baptism for the dead” in 1 Cor. 15 isn't some similar practice.

Ambrose's prohibition is a serious reminder that the dead, even those who now “live to God”, ought not to norm our practice of the church's rituals. Likewise, questions about salvation of marooned men on deserted islands are not starting points from which we can come to a proper understanding of the efficacy or power of baptism and the Supper.

But in this post, I want us to consider a much more common case: that of infants, especially those who depart this life in infancy or even *in utero*. And I want to argue that, although these little ones cannot norm our practice of the sacraments, and indeed, do not even have much of a part to play in the liturgical life of the congregation assembled for covenant-renewal worship, they are nonetheless indispensable parts of the body of Christ, and have a ministry from Him that must be respected.

I gave a speech on Reformation Day last year in which I mentioned the life and death of a little girl named Vivian, who had been born prematurely and struggled for about half a year before succumbing to pneumonia. In it, I reminded my audience that she too was a sharer in the priesthood of all believers. She did what all priests are called to do: she brought people closer to God. In this case, she brought her parents closer to God. Their lives were irrevocably changed by her brief life, and that for the better.

My wife and I lost our first 2 children in the womb. We buried the first — a tiny, 5-inch long son — with a pastor present, in a ceremony made beautiful — and bearable — by a clear understanding that we were [prohibited](#) by God's Word from doubting our child's holiness.

As Peter Leithart has so elegantly shown in his book *The Priesthood of the Plebs*, baptism is initiation to priesthood. By baptism, we are united to Christ, and share in his threefold office. Therefore, babies in union with Christ, babies in the covenant, are priests. They have an office. And they fulfill it. In the case of Vivian Gregory and of the two Colvin children whom Sora and I buried, their parents were the main beneficiaries of their priestly office.

When I asserted this to one of my baptistic colleagues at work, he replied, "It's rather hard for me to use the term 'priesthood' for anything so passive."

This remark demonstrates that my colleague is still under the stoicheia. He is still thinking in terms of the principalities and powers. He thinks that the members of Christ's body are more or less priests — and thus also more or less members of Christ's body — depending on how active or deliberate or conscious they are. He thinks God is "the God of mature, professing Christians only", to use Mark Horne's memorable phrase. This is directly contrary to the apostle Paul's teaching. He writes, in 1 Cor. 12:

"The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you'; nor again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you.' No, much rather, **those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary.** And those members of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor; and our unpresentable parts have greater modesty, but our presentable parts have no need. But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it, that there should be no

schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. **And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it;** or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.”

It may be hard to understand how someone small is acting as a priest by receiving love and care from larger, seemingly more capable persons. But this is indeed Paul’s teaching. John Barach once [blogged](#) about Jean Vanier, whom he heard being interviewed on the radio:

“In the course of the interview, Vanier made an interesting comment about vocation (though my summary here represents my own reflections on what he said). We often think of a “vocation” as a job, something that requires abilities and skills. At the least, it’s something that requires activity. But if we define “vocation” that way, Vanier said, then we are saying that only certain people have vocations.

But what about people who are severely disabled in some way? Vanier insists that such people have vocations, too. It isn’t always easy to see what their vocations are, but then it isn’t always easy to learn what anyone’s vocation is. People with great abilities may think their vocation is going to use those abilities, only to discover in retrospect that their calling from God turned out to be quite different.

The vocation of someone who is disabled may not be to preach or to run a business or whatever. It may be simply to love and be loved. And that is no insignificant vocation. In fact, it’s a vocation all of us have and one which many of us [neglect], perhaps because we’re busy carrying out (what we think are) our other vocations.”

Amen. Vanier is urging us to recognize a fuller truth about the body of Christ, and see how we may receive a ministry, perhaps especially, from those to whom we suppose ourselves to be ministering. For priesthood is not really about our doing or running, but about being tools in the hands of Christ.

On ministering to those who are weak through disablement:  
<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2011/december/perfect-child-disability.html>

<http://www.desiringgod.org/blog/posts/one-way-to-serve-families-with-disabled-children>

I quoted from Jurgen Moltman on Sunday. While there are some very significant problems with the theology of Moltmann, I have been greatly impacted by his theology of suffering over the years. He has written some beautiful and amazing words on how God shares in, and uses, our suffering, including that of the disabled and those who care for them, e.g.:

[http://books.google.com/books?id=zYa5CqgU91MC&pg=PA66&lp g=PA66&dq=moltmann+suffering+most+charismatic&source=bl&ots=o3CR3ER\\_Zq&sig=SZnEpacnAvVjJRpEhLXItazk0Ho&hl=en&ei=oATUTtzhCsWXtwey09CoDQ&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CBwQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=zYa5CqgU91MC&pg=PA66&lp g=PA66&dq=moltmann+suffering+most+charismatic&source=bl&ots=o3CR3ER_Zq&sig=SZnEpacnAvVjJRpEhLXItazk0Ho&hl=en&ei=oATUTtzhCsWXtwey09CoDQ&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CBwQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q&f=false)

Starting on page 66 of his book *The Source of Life*, there is a section called "The charisma of a handicapped life" that I have found very moving. While the American "charismatic" movement looks for charisma in "success" stories of miraculous healings and the like, Moltmann points out that cross-bearing and suffering are their own kinds of charismata. Thus Moltmann says, "No one is useless and of no value. No one can be dispensed with. So the weak, uneducated and ugly have their own special charisma in the community of Christ's people. Why? All will be made like in form to the crucified Christ, because the crucified Christ has assumed not just humanity but also the misery of humanity in order to heal it..." He goes on: "There is no good charitable ministry by the non-disabled to the disabled unless this first of all recognizes and accepts the charitable ministry of the disabled to the non-disabled. Congregations without disabled members are -- to put it bluntly -- disabled congregations." I would say the same about poverty: Congregations without any poor members are greatly impoverished. Congregations without any problems are problem congregations. Congregations without brokenness are broken. The Spirit turns every kind of weakness into a strength for the body as a whole. Elsewhere Moltmann writes, "If whatever a person is and brings with him becomes a charisma through his calling, this has to be true of his disablement too. If through the calling the splendor of God's love falls on a life, it begins to shine. There are handicapped, sick and disfigured people whose faces shine in just this way." Indeed.

Jean Vanier also has some profound thoughts on disability in the church, e.g:

<http://clericalwhispers.blogspot.com/2008/06/jean-vanier-disabled-teach-us-of.html>

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Why does Paul say the weaker parts are worthy of greater honor?

Toby Sumpter suggests an answer

(<http://havingtwolegs.blogspot.com/2010/03/sacrificial-catechism-yahwehs.html>):

Mary Douglas suggests that the bodies of sacrificial animals correspond symbolically to the tabernacle topography and layout. On her reading, the entrails and genitals correspond to the Most Holy Place, the middle section of the animal with the fat and kidneys comes next corresponding to the sanctuary, followed by the head and meat sections for food which correspond to the outer court.

One obvious question that rises from this reading, which Douglas recognizes, is whether this is not too vulgar. Specifically: why align entrails and genitals with the Most Holy Place, the place of highest esteem and honor?

Douglas has several answers of her own to this question, but off the cuff, one possible parallel to this reading would be found in 1 Corinthians 12.

Could Paul have been working with something like this in mind when he wrote: "And those members of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor; and our unpresentable parts have greater modesty..." (1 Cor. 12:23) Maybe so.

First, on the surface, the parallel works as "unpresentable parts" and members of "less honor" seem very likely to be a polite way of referring to the genitalia of the body. And upon these, Paul insists we bestow "greater honor" and "modesty." Both of which also seem to correspond well to the Most Holy Place where the greatest honor is bestowed, and certainly it is covered by the veil/curtain with great modesty and no one ordinarily goes behind the curtain, behind the veil except for once a year on the day of Atonement.

On this reading, Paul is working with the tabernacle structure in the back of his mind. And there are a couple of clues in 1 Corinthians that confirm this suggestion.

First, early in 1 Corinthians, Paul identifies himself as a "wise master builder" (1 Cor. 3:10). The word "master builder" is the same word used in the Septuagint to describe the work of Bezalel and Aholiab in constructing the tabernacle (Ex. 31:4, 35:32, 35). Paul insinuates that he is Bezalel and Apollos is like Aholiab (cf. 1 Cor. 3:5-6). Paul goes on in 1 Cor. 3 to describe the building project.

Secondly, Paul identifies the Corinthians as in a parallel historical position to the Israelites in the wilderness in 1 Corinthians 10:1-13. The organization of right worship in the building of the tabernacle was the central building project of Moses and the Israelites during the wilderness sojourn. Paul says that the Corinthians are in a similar place in the story.

Finally, a cursory reading of the rest of the epistle reveals a number of other quotations or allusions to the same themes that make Paul's instructions about worship and the church beginning in 1 Cor. 11 fairly natural. Paul is self-consciously overseeing the construction of a new tabernacle in the wilderness. The Most Holy Place in the Church seems to be those members who are weak, poor, and otherwise unpresentable. Perhaps James has something similar in mind when he exhorts the Church to pure and undefiled religion: visiting orphans and widows (Js. 1:27). Likewise, his condemnation of the Church's preference for the rich (Js. 2:1-6). Our priestly ministry to the "least of these" is our ministry of bestowing "greater honor" and "greater modesty."

Could it be that this is "pure and undefiled religion" because it is our "day of atonement?" If the body is the temple/tabernacle and the body without the spirit is dead (Js. 2:26), then the "works" James has in view would specifically be that ministry to the poor, the weak, and the unpresentable.

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We also discussed the "word of knowledge" gift in 1 Cor. 12:8. I am not sure this gift operates the same way today that it did in the apostolic era. Whatever we want to say about this gift, it does not give an inspired, infallible form of knowledge on par with Scripture (cf. 1 Cor. 13:8-10); thus, whatever kind of knowledge someone claims to have received must be tested against the standard of Scripture and subjected to the judgment of those who have the gift of discernment (1 Cor. 12:10). But there are far too many amazing and well attested stories from church history for us to say there is no longer a "word of knowledge" gift in any sense whatsoever. For example, consider the example of Charles Spurgeon:  
<http://livingtext.wordpress.com/2007/05/19/spurgeon-and-prophecy/>

And yet Spurgeon did not equate his special intuitions with Scripture and was actually a very firm cessationist as far as special revelation is considered:  
<http://phillipjohnson.blogspot.com/2005/11/spurgeon-on-private-prophecies-and-new.html>

Or consider the example of John Knox:  
<http://churchofthekingmcallen.org/pastors-blog/prophecies-of-john-knox/>

Knox's most famous biographer, Thomas M'Crie gives a very sober-minded but honest assessment of Knox's special gift and how he used it with caution:

The canon of our faith is contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments; we must not look to impressions or new revelations as the rule of our duty; but that God may, on particular occasions, forewarn persons of some things which shall happen, to testify His approbation of them, to encourage them to confide in Him in peculiar circumstances, or for other useful purposes, is not, I think, inconsistent with the principles of either natural or revealed religion. If this is enthusiasm, it is an enthusiasm into which some of the most enlightened and sober men, in modern as well as ancient times, have fallen. Some of the Reformers were men of singular piety; they 'walked with God'; they were 'instant in prayer'; they were exposed to uncommon opposition, and had uncommon services to perform; they were endued with extraordinary

gifts, and, I am inclined to believe, were occasionally favored with extraordinary premonitions, with respect to certain events which concerned themselves, other individuals, or the Church in general. But whatever intimations of this kind they enjoyed, they did not rest the authority of their mission upon them, nor appeal to them as constituting any part of the evidence of those doctrines which they preached to the world.

Doug Wilson has a couple of pretty good posts that discuss how we should view these types of charismata:

[http://www.dougwils.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=8851:mark-driscoll-visions-teampyro-cessationism-and-me&catid=72:shameless-appeals](http://www.dougwils.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=8851:mark-driscoll-visions-teampyro-cessationism-and-me&catid=72:shameless-appeals)

[http://www.dougwils.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=8854:on-being-a-tricksy-dancer&catid=83:taking-a-stroll-on-the-links](http://www.dougwils.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=8854:on-being-a-tricksy-dancer&catid=83:taking-a-stroll-on-the-links)

As I said in the sermon, there is much here that is mysterious. When whole ministries are built around "signs and wonders," or when people start trying to base major life decisions on "impressions of the Spirit" rather than biblical teaching and wisdom, something has gone seriously awry. Furthermore, when supposed gifts of those sorts are used to bully and manipulate people (as they so often are today!), we may be sure they are not truly gifts of the Spirit. While we do not want to quench whatever gifts the Spirit wants to give us, the body certainly needs those with the gift of discernment (1 Cor. 12:10) to guard the community from abuse and spiritual exploitation (again, all too common in so-called charismatic and Pentecostal circles). Like I said in the sermon, if someone says, "I have a word from the Lord from you," your automatic response ought to be to ask them for a chapter and verse.

On the dangers of confusing intuitions with God's voice: <http://teampyro.blogspot.com/2007/03/intuition-and-superstition-admonition.html>. See also Philip Cary's fine book *Good News For Anxious Christians* and Don Matzat's *God Told Me...I Think* for a critique of the whole "Jesus told me X..." or "I know the Spirit wants us to do Y..." craze.

At the same time, we have to leave at least a crack in the door for the Spirit to work in rather unusual ways. Knox and Spurgeon were not fanatics (and of course they aren't the only example of this kind of

gift -- we could look at Augustine, Joan of Arc, Martin and Katie Luther, Samuel Rutherford, John Flavel, and countless missionaries from past and present). These were sound men, grounded in Scripture, mature in judgment, and full of wisdom. But God still gave them Spiritual intuitions that obviously went beyond ordinary human awareness on quite regular occasions.

We also talked about the gift of faith -- not the faith that is common to all Christians, but the special Spiritual gift of faith given to some, which seems to be connected to prayer. On George Mueller's special gift of faith, enabling him to pray for needs with amazing specificity and receive timely answers, see:

<http://www.christianity.com/churchhistory/11634869/>

<http://www.puritanfellowship.com/2008/02/two-amazing-accounts-of-george-mueller.html>

It's obvious that ordinary Christian simply cannot live on prayer the way Mueller did. But we should be thankful that some saints, like Mueller, have this gift, since it is a testimony to all of us. And we should certainly not confuse Mueller's practice with the "name it and claim it" approach popular in some Pentecostal circles. God is never a vending machine, dispensing anything we ask for so long as we put the right kind of prayer in the slot. James 4 says that when we do not receive what we ask for, it is often because we have asked with selfish motives in view. God does not honor self-centered, self-seeking prayers. Consider the parable Jesus told in Luke 11:5ff. The man who persisted in asking and seeking got what he desired -- but the gift he sought was wholly for the sake of another, so that he could show hospitality to his unexpected visitor. That's how you use prayer properly -- not merely for your own sake, but so that others will be blessed. It's not necessarily wrong to seek blessing for yourself in prayer, but we should especially use prayer to seek to obtain blessings for others. If the Spirit is doing spectacular things in the world today, tantamount to what he did in the apostolic era, you can bet he's doing it among those who are living most like the apostles themselves -- sacrificing everything for the good of the church and the advancement of her mission.

And remember also that even faith-prayers that can move mountains, and knowledge gifts that reveal all mysteries, are worthless without love (1 Cor. 13:1-2). We must use our gifts in the more excellent way.

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In the sermon, I pointed out that while some take the “word of knowledge” gift to be theological acumen and basically equate it with the gift of teaching, I tend to think something else is in view. After all, if Paul wanted to include the gift of teaching in this list, he probably would have just said “teaching.” In 1 Cor. 14:6, he distinguishes “knowledge” from teaching, as well as from revelation and prophecy. While allowing for overlap between these various categories, we must also recognize their differences.

Thus, I take the word of knowledge to be some kind of Spiritual intuition, a supernatural insight God grants to someone for the good of others. I gave several examples in the sermon. Here’s another example: Katie Luther had a dream on the night before Martin was to leave on a trip. Through her dream, she came to know that there would be enemies of Martin’s waiting to ambush and kill him if he left. She told him the dream, he did not go, and later it was revealed that Katie had been right. A “word of knowledge” given to Katie saved Martin’s life. Another example: Joan of Arc’s visions that guided her for the good of the French. Another example: Darlene Deibler Rose in WW2 believing God wanted her to leave a trench she was hiding in to go retrieve a Bible, only to find later that the trench had been bombed right where she had been. While stories like these are sometimes hard to believe, and may make us uncomfortable, there are too many well-documented cases in church history for us to be completely dismissive. The craziness of the “charismatic movement” may make us highly skeptical – and rightfully so. But the fact that some make abusive and misleading claims about their gifts should not exclude those rare cases when they are legitimately operative.

There are deep problems with what is known as the charismatic movement. Of course, those who are labeled charismatics vary widely in theology, maturity level, and how they believe the more miraculous gifts ought to function. Gordon Fee and Wayne Grudem are quite different from Kenneth Copeland and Benny Hinn. But there is no question a large swath of the charismatic movement lacks any kind of solid biblical grounding and is more concerned with sensational experiences than with obeying Christ; it lacks discernment and maturity; it is more focused on following the supposed “seat of your pants” guidance of the Holy Spirit than

listening to what the Spirit has already spoken once and for all in the Scriptures. When entire churches and ministries are built around “signs and wonders” something has gone seriously awry. Furthermore, it seems very obvious from church history that the more miraculous gifts do not show up in the worship service on a weekly basis but usually in time of personal or cultural crisis, reformation/revival, or (especially) on the frontier mission field. So what many are claiming for the charismatic movement today not only plays fast and loose with Scripture (e.g., Paul’s rules for tongues and their interpretation in 1 Cor. 14), but goes to extremes that have no precedent in church history since the close of the apostolic era. As we’ll see as we move further into this section of 1 Cor., modern charismatics do not have nearly as much in common with the apostolic church as they claim (and to the degree that they do, they are often recycling the errors of the Corinthians).

My position is basically that of a cessationist in that I believe what we “special revelation” has ceased. The canon of Scripture is closed; nothing the Spirit is doing today can be equated with the Bible, and therefore everything has to be tested by Scripture as the final and wholly sufficient authority (WCF 1). No one can say, “God told me” unless they’re citing chapter and verse. However, I do believe the Spirit works in a wide variety of ways in God’s people today, as he has over the course of church history. The Spirit’s work through the Word read and proclaimed and through the sacraments is his normal way of building our faith and giving us guidance. But sometimes the Spirit does give someone a “word of knowledge” that isn’t exactly a direct biblical application and that goes beyond what we would normally call “wisdom.” I do not think we should spend much time seeking after this kind of gift; it appears from church history that those who have exercised it on occasion (Spurgeon, Knox) have been very careful to not make their “words of knowledge” a test for anyone else. The gift is rare, but we do have to make allowance for it.

The strongest argument in favor of the cessation of the “word of knowledge” gift is probably from 1 Cor. 13:8-10. The whole passage hinges on what we take Paul to mean by the “perfect.” If it is the completed canon of Scripture (and a good case can be made for this reading despite what most modern commentators suggest), then we could argue that tongues, prophecy, and knowledge all ceased by 70 AD. The gift of knowledge would be considered a partially revelatory gift that ceased when inscripturated revelation was completed.

Others suggest the perfect is the final establishment of the new covenant, corresponding to and connected with the definitive end of the old covenant (70 AD, when the temple was destroyed), but the conclusion would be the same. Of course, if the perfect is the final coming of Jesus at the end of history, then we'd have to argue for the cessation of tongues and prophecy, and knowledge on other grounds – or be open to their continuation until the end of history.

But I'm not so sure the argument from 1 Cor. 13:8-10 is so clean cut. I tend to think the perfect in this text is the canon of Scripture. And thus, I believe special revelation has ceased. We have all we need in the pages of the OT and NT. But there are still gifts operative in the church *analogous* to tongues, prophecy, and knowledge. I did not bring this nuance into my discussion of this gift in the sermon so I'll mention it here. The kind of special knowledge that men like Knox and Spurgeon were given was not on par with biblical revelation and was not identical to the gift of knowledge given in the apostolic era. But it is very much analogous to that gift in the apostolic era. We don't know if the gift of knowledge in the apostolic era was considered infallible or not. But we do know that it must not be considered infallible in whatever way it operates today.

Is it possible that the "vanishing away" of knowledge Paul speaks of is general but not absolute, e.g., the knowledge gift could operate on rare occasions, though not nearly as frequently as it did in the pre-70 AD apostolic church where it seems (if 1 Cor. 12-14 is any indication) the gift was being constantly exercised in the life of the church? (By contrast, prophecy and tongues have not just "vanished away" but "failed and "ceased" – considerably stronger terms.) Whatever the case, the issue of cessation is complex. I think we can be firmly committed to the cessation of special revelation while allowing for extraordinary, even miraculous events to continue to happen, albeit very rarely. Just such a case is made by Vern Poythress in his intriguing work "Modern Spiritual Gifts as Analogous to Apostolic Gifts: Affirming Extraordinary Works of the Spirit within Cessationist Theology." That title more or less sums up my position.

What are we to make of a story like this one?

Charles Haddon Spurgeon...spoke of a "sermon at Exeter Hall in which he suddenly broke off from his subject, and pointing in a certain direction, said, 'Young man, those gloves you are

wearing have not been paid for: you have stolen them from your employer'. At the close of the service, a young man, looking very pale and greatly agitated, came to the room, which was used as a vestry, and begged for a private interview with Spurgeon. On being admitted, he placed a pair of gloves upon the table, and tearfully said, 'It's the first time I have robbed my master, and I will never do it again. You won't expose me, sir, will you? It would kill my mother if she heard that I had become a thief'."

Consider the case of Knox more closely. Here is a list of some "prophecies" (I would prefer to put them in the "words of knowledge" category so as not to confuse them with special revelation) (<http://churchofthekingmcallen.org/pastors-blog/prophecies-of-john-knox/>):

### The Fulfilled Prophecies Of John Knox By Ron Smith

John Knox was the great Reformer and apostle of the reformation in Scotland during the 16th century. He prayed, "God give me Scotland or I die!" God answered that prayer with the greatest reformation of any country.

Modern day Reformers, being influenced by the Enlightenment, would not be comfortable with such a charismatic prophet today. They would say that these gifts passed away when the New Testament was completed. Let us observe with an open mind what the witnesses of that day recorded. May God give us another to come in the spirit and power of Elijah before the great and terrible day of the Lord.

In 1572 Charles IX of France had the godly Admiral of France murdered. This was followed up with the general massacre of the Protestants throughout France. Seventy thousand were murdered. "For several days the streets of Paris literally ran with blood. The savage monarch, standing at the windows of the palace, with his courtiers, glutted his eyes with the inhuman spectacle, and amused himself with firing upon the miserable fugitives who sought shelter at his merciless gates." "Hired cut-throats, and fanatical cannibals marched from city to city, paraded the streets, and entered into the houses of those that were marked out for destruction. No reverence was shown to the hoary head, no respect to rank or

talents, no pity to tender age or sex. Aged matrons, women upon the point of their delivery, and children, were trodden under the feet of the assassins, or dragged with hooks into the rivers; others, after being thrown into prison, were instantly brought out, and butchered in cold blood."

"The intelligence of this massacre (for which a solemn thanksgiving was offered up at Rome by order of the Pope) produced the same horror and consternation in Scotland as in every other Protestant country. It inflicted a deep wound on the exhausted spirit of Knox. Besides the blow struck at the whole Reformed body, he had to lament the loss of many individuals eminent for piety, learning, and rank, whom he numbered among his acquaintances. Being conveyed to the pulpit [in his old age], and summoning up the remainder of his strength, he thundered the vengeance of Heaven against that cruel murderer and false traitor, the King of France, and desired Le Croc, the French ambassador, to tell his master, that sentence was pronounced against him in Scotland, that the divine vengeance would never depart from him, nor from his house, if repentance did not ensue; but his name would remain an execration to posterity, and none proceeding from his loins would enjoy that kingdom in peace. The ambassador complained of the indignity offered to his master, and required the Regent to silence the preacher; but this was refused, upon which he left Scotland." (THE LIFE OF JOHN KNOX, by Thomas M'Crie)

This prophecy was fulfilled less than two years later when Charles IX died at the age of 24 and left no heir to the throne.

#### The Prophecy Concerning Thomas Maitland

Shortly after a godly friend of Knox had been murdered, Knox entered the pulpit and found a note. Thinking it was probably a prayer request he silently read it. It was a slanderous note referring to the murdered friend. Not knowing who had written it, Knox said, concerning the author of the note, "That wicked man, whosoever he be, shall not go unpunished, and shall die where there shall be none to lament him." The man who had written it went home and told his sister "that the preacher was raving, when he spoke in such a manner of a person who was unknown to him; but she understanding that her brother had written the line, reproved him, saying with tears, that none of that man's denunciations were wont to prove

idle." That man (Thomas Maitland) later died in Italy, "having no known person to attend him." (THE LIFE OF JOHN KNOX, by Thomas M'Crie)

#### The Queen's Testimony

"John Knox was an eminent wrestler with God in prayer, and like a prince prevailed. The Queen Regent herself had given him this testimony, when upon a particular occasion she said that she was more afraid of his prayers than of an army of ten thousand men. He was likewise warm and pathetic in his preaching, in which such prophetic expressions as dropped from him had the most remarkable accomplishment. As an instance of this, when he was confined in the castle of St Andrews, he foretold both the manner of their surrender, and their deliverance from the French galleys; and when the Lords of the Congregation were twice discomfited by the French army, he assured them that the Lord would ultimately prosper the work of Reformation." (THE SCOTS WORTHIES, by John Howie)

When Queen Mary refused to attend Knox's preaching, he sent word that she would yet be obliged to hear the Word of God whether she like it or not. This was fulfilled when she was arraigned in England.

On another occasion, Knox told the queen's husband, "Have you, for the pleasure of that dainty dame, cast the psalm-book into the fire? The Lord shall strike both head and tail." Both King and queen died violent deaths. (THE SCOTS WORTHIES, by John Howie)

The Prophecy Concerning William Kircaldy of Grange "He likewise said, when the Castle of Edinburgh held out for the Queen against the Regent, that 'the Castle should spue out the captain (meaning Sir William Kircaldy of Grange) with shame, that he should not come out at the gate, but over the wall, and that the tower called Davis Tower, should run like a sand-glass [an hour glass]; which was fulfilled a few years after – Kircaldy being obliged to come over the wall on a ladder, with a staff in his hand, and the said fore-work [front] of the Castle running down like a sand-brae [sandy hill]." ." (THE SCOTS WORTHIES, by John Howie)

But then we get Thomas M'Crie's sober defense of all this Knoxian weirdness (emphasis added):

## Knox's Defense of His Predictions

Thomas M'Crie tells us that John Knox has been "accused of setting [himself up as] a prophet, presuming to intrude into the secret counsel of God, and of enthusiastically confounding the suggestions of his own imagination, and the effusions of his own spirit, with the dictates of inspiration, and immediate communications from heaven. Let us examine the grounds of this accusation a little. It is proper to hear his own statement of the [basis] upon which he proceeded in many of those warnings which have been [called] predictions. Having in one of his treatises, denounced the judgments to which the inhabitants of England exposed themselves, by renouncing the gospel and returning to idolatry, he gives the following explanation of the [basis] which he had for his threats. He told them if they wanted to know the grounds of his assurance, he hoped they would understand and believe. He said, 'My assurances are not the marvels of Merlin, nor yet the dark sentences of profane prophecies; but the plain truth of God's Word, the invincible justice of the everlasting God, and the ordinary course of His punishments and plagues from the beginning are my assurance and grounds. God's Word threatens destruction to all the disobedient; his immutable justice must require the same; the ordinary punishments and plagues show examples. What man then can cease to prophesy?' We find him expressing himself in a similar way in his defenses of the threats, which he uttered against those who had been guilty of the murder of King Henry, and the Regent Moray. He denies that he had spoken 'as one that entered into the secret counsel of God.' And insists that he had merely declared the judgment which was pronounced in the divine law. In so far then his threatenings, or predictions (for so he repeatedly calls them) do not stand in need of an apology." (THE LIFE OF JOHN KNOX, by Thomas M'Crie)

"There are, however, several of his sayings which cannot be vindicated upon these principles, and which he himself rested upon different grounds. Of this kind were, the assurance which he expressed, from the beginning of the Scottish troubles, that the cause of the Congregation would ultimately prevail; his confident hope of again preaching in his native country [when he was a galley slave], and at St Andrews, avowed by him during his imprisonment on board the French galleys, and frequently repeated during his exile; with the

intimations [predictions] he gave respecting the death of Thomas Maitland, and Kircaldy of Grange. It cannot be denied that his contemporaries considered these as proceeding from a prophetic spirit, and have attested that they received an exact [fulfillment]. The most easy way of getting rid of this delicate question is, by dismissing it at once, and summarily pronouncing that all pretensions to extraordinary premonitions, since the completing of the canon [the Bible], are unwarranted, that they ought, without examination, to be discarded and treated as fanciful and visionary. Nor would this fix any peculiar imputation on the character or talents of our Reformer [Knox], when it is considered that the most learned persons of that age were under the influence of a still greater weakness, and strongly addicted to the belief of judicial astrology. But I doubt much if this method of determining the question would be consistent with doing justice to the subject. I cannot propose to enter into it in this place, and must confine myself to a few general observations. On the one hand, the disposition which mankind discover to pry into the secrets of futurity, has been always accompanied with much credulity, and superstition; and it cannot be denied, that the age in which our Reformer lived was prone to credit the marvelous, especially as to the infliction of divine judgments upon individuals. On the other had, there is great danger of running into skepticism, and of laying down general principles which may lead us obstinately to contest the truth of the best authenticated facts, and even to limit the Spirit of God, and the operation of providence. This is an extreme to which the present age inclines. That there have been instances of persons having presentiments and premonitions as to events that happened to themselves and others, there is, I think, the best reason to believe. The strong spirits, who laugh at vulgar credulity, and exert their ingenuity in accounting for such phenomena upon ordinary principles, have been exceedingly puzzled with theses, a great deal more puzzled than they have confessed; and the solution which they have given are, in some instances, as mysterious as any thing included in the intervention of superior spirits, or divine intimations. The canon of our faith is contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments; we must not look to impressions or new revelations as the rule of our duty; but that God may, on

particular occasions, forewarn persons of some things which shall happen, to testify His approbation of them, to encourage them to confide in Him in peculiar circumstances, or for other useful purposes, is not, I think, inconsistent with the principles of either natural or revealed religion. If this is enthusiasm, it is an enthusiasm into which some of the most enlightened and sober men, in modern as well as ancient times, have fallen. Some of the Reformers were men of singular piety; they 'walked with God'; they were 'instant in prayer'; they were exposed to uncommon opposition, and had uncommon services to perform; they were endued with extraordinary gifts, and, I am inclined to believe, were occasionally favored with extraordinary premonitions, with respect to certain events which concerned themselves, other individuals, or the Church in general. But whatever intimations of this kind they enjoyed, they did not rest the authority of their mission upon them, nor appeal to them as constituting any part of the evidence of those doctrines which they preached to the world." (THE LIFE OF JOHN KNOX, by Thomas M'Crie)

Doug Wilson's position seems quite like my own , as he engages Phil Johnson and Mark Driscoll on the issue ([http://www.dougwils.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=8851:mark-driscoll-visions-teampyro-cessationism-and-me&catid=72:shameless-appeals](http://www.dougwils.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=8851:mark-driscoll-visions-teampyro-cessationism-and-me&catid=72:shameless-appeals); [http://www.dougwils.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=8854:on-being-a-tricksy-dancer&catid=83:taking-a-stroll-on-the-links](http://www.dougwils.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=8854:on-being-a-tricksy-dancer&catid=83:taking-a-stroll-on-the-links)):

I write this as a thorough-going cessationist, one who believes that the canon of Scripture is closed, and that we will never again have any revelatory gifts that would enable a man to say, "Thus saith the Lord . . ." Neither will we have miraculous sign gifts, which could plausibly authenticate a man as an apostle ([2 Cor. 12:12](#)). Jeremiah and Isaiah are in Heaven, and I don't want anything to do with their wannabees.

To use common parlance, supernatural, revelatory gifts, imparted by the Holy Spirit, and guaranteed by Him, are no more. They are done, ceased, kaput, *no mas*. If you can't find it in between Genesis and Revelation, then don't put it in the

sermon. When it comes to these revelatory gifts, the spigot has been turned all the way to the right.

But -- and here is where I believe we have not discussed this enough -- it does not follow from this truth that the realm of nature is an empty mechanical place, filled with dead stuff being pushed around by blind natural laws. In short, I understand why faithfulness requires us to believe that the canon of Scripture is closed, and that God's revelatory and authenticating activity has ceased. But why does it require me to believe that human beings cannot be connected in a true, spiritual way, within a spiritual realm, in such a way as to preserve all our fallibility, kinks, blind spots, and such? And yet, despite all that, why can't the connection still be a genuine one?

I don't want a deep chasm between natural and supernatural. They are both part of the universe that God made, and they are woven together. So the fact that something is "spiritual" doesn't make it inspired. Inspiration, of the kind described above, has ceased. But we still have spirits and souls and bodies, and the way they all are connected (within each man and between all men) is not something that we should allow materialistic atheists to define for us. The revelatory gifts have ceased. That does not mean that it is impossible for a man to be *fey*.

In revelatory times, when the Macedonian man (probably Luke himself), begged that Paul and company come over and help, this was taken (rightly) as guidance from God Himself. If I had such a dream today, I wouldn't know. I would have to think and pray about it. I would be no more bound to go than I would be bound to go if the Macedonian call had been a phone call (or an email) asking me to come.

The danger comes (and here is where Phil Johnson has a point I sympathize with) when someone in a position of spiritual authority talks about this kind of thing, and he does so in a Christian culture where lots of people think that the revelatory gifts are still operating on all eight cylinders and yet (mysteriously) without the Bible growing in size. The charismatic movement really has shaped the evangelical ethos in some problematic ways.

The danger comes from the other direction (which is where I sympathize with Mark Driscoll) when we ignore part of our nature, and a clear part of the human experience. Note that I am not saying that this experience is any more reliable than the

other things we might say and do, depending on the person. I am just saying that it ought not to be ignored. I have been part of too many (non-revelatory and yet sufficiently spooky) circumstances to say otherwise -- I am speaking of remarkable guidances, provisions, answers to prayer, striking bits of random knowledge, etc. I would like to see us work out the protocols for how to talk about such things, and think it would be good if Phil and Mark could get together to work it through. I would come too, but my presence there would be less disruptive if I just attended in my dream.

My musings on this remind me of the guy who decided to make peace at Gettysburg by walking between the armies wearing a blue coat and gray trousers. And that worked so well

...

I agree with him that historic cessationists have done a lot of good work on this subject. Where I don't think we have dug deeply enough, though, is in an area that appears to have nothing to do with whether or not the revelatory gifts have ceased. That area is the nature of the intersection between nature and supernature, and whether there even *is* something we can call supernature. We have gotten so jumbled that a claim that something comes from the spiritual realm is tantamount in the minds of many Christians to a claim that it is inspired. But that can't be true -- the devil is a spirit, and the devil is a liar.

So I don't think a strong doctrine of divine providence (by itself) is able to give an adequate cessationist account of George Wishart's prediction of Cardinal Beaton's sorry end, or of John Knox's uncanny statement, while chained to the oar of a galley ship, of the day when he would be preaching at St. Andrews. What happens is that Knox gets a pass because, well, because *he's* John Knox and he is dead now. If we talk about it, we get tangled up in whether or not Knox was being a prophet or not, and how do we *file* this? I want to deny that he was in any way inspired, and file it under him being a fey Scot -- an entirely natural thing to be.

The doctrine of providence tells me *that* God is involved in everything. It does not tell me what He *means* by it. So when a weird thing happens to Christians, they often assign divine

meaning to it, and that is why they get what they are doing muddled up with the guaranteed inspiration given to apostles and prophets by the Holy Spirit. Until we sort this out, I agree that dogmatic pronouncements can be dangerous. But until we sort it out, dismissing all of it brings in a different kind of danger...

On the dangers of confusing intuitions with God's voice:

<http://teampyro.blogspot.com/2007/03/intuition-and-superstition-admonition.html>

See also Philip Cary's fine book *Good News For Anxious Christians* Don Matzat's *God Told Me...I Think* for a critique of the whole "Jesus told me..." or "the Spirit wants you to..." craze.

And yet we cannot rule out the Spirit working in rather odd ways at times.

It's uncanny how often Spurgeon had special leadings/impressions/intuitions that turned out to be to be right – so often, indeed, that one must say Spurgeon had some kind of gift. From Spurgeon's autobiography:

While preaching in the hall, on one occasion, I deliberately pointed to a man in the midst of the crowd, and said, 'There is a man sitting there, who is a shoemaker; he keeps his shop open on Sundays, it was open last Sabbath morning, he took ninepence, and there was fourpence profit out of it; his soul is sold to Satan for fourpence!' A city missionary, when going his rounds, met with this man, and seeing that he was reading one of my sermons, he asked the question, 'Do you know Mr. Spurgeon?' 'Yes,' replied the man, 'I have every reason to know him, I have been to hear him; and, under his preaching, by God's grace I have become a new creature in Christ Jesus. Shall I tell you how it happened? I went to the Music Hall, and took my seat in the middle of the place; Mr. Spurgeon looked at me as if he knew me, and in his sermon he pointed to me, and told the congregation that I was a shoemaker, and that I kept my shop open on Sundays; and I did, sir. I should not have minded that; but he also said that I took ninepence the Sunday before, and that there was fourpence profit out of it. I did take ninepence that day, and fourpence was just the profit; but how

he should know that, I could not tell. Then it struck me that it was God who had spoken to my soul through him, so I shut up my shop the next Sunday. At first, I was afraid to go again to hear him, lest he should tell the people more about me; but afterwards I went, and the Lord met with me, and saved my soul...

I could tell as many as a *dozen* similar cases in which I pointed at somebody in the hall without having the slightest knowledge of the person, or any idea that what I said was right, except that I believed I was moved by the Spirit to say it; and so striking has been my description, that the persons have gone away, and said to their friends, 'Come, see a man that told me all things that ever I did; beyond a doubt, he must have been sent of God to my soul, or else he could not have described me so exactly.' And not only so, but I have known many instances in which the thoughts of men have been revealed from the pulpit. I have sometimes seen persons nudge their neighbours with their elbow, because they had got a smart hit, and they have been heard to say, when they were going out, 'The preacher told us just what we said to one another when we went in at the door' (*The Autobiography of Charles H. Spurgeon*, [Curts & Jennings, 1899], Vol. II, pp. 226-227).

But Spurgeon himself was a cessationist and even warned about basing one's life course on following impressions (<http://phillipjohnson.blogspot.com/2005/11/spurgeon-on-private-prophecies-and-new.html>):

***Charles Spurgeon was a cessationist.*** He regarded the *charismata* as apostolic signs—unique gifts for a unique era. He taught (as did virtually every evangelical preacher of his era) that the miraculous gifts described in Acts and 1 Corinthians (including the ability to command physical healing or speak in tongues) ceased before the end of the apostolic era.

Nonetheless, Spurgeon is sometimes cited by contemporary charismatics as someone who would be sympathetic with the idea of modern supernatural prophetic utterances, because he himself occasionally acted upon strong subjective impressions as if they were special revelatory messages from the Holy Spirit. Here are a couple of examples from his sermons:

"Looking for One Thing and Finding Another" (sermon 3075): Many old stories are current which we do not doubt are true. There is one of a man who never would attend a place of worship until he was induced to go to hear the singing. He would listen to the tunes, he said, but he would have "none of your canting preaching," he would put his fingers in his ears. He takes that wicked precaution, and effectually blocks up Ear-gate for a while, but the gate is stormed by a little adversary, for a fly settles on his nose; he must brush it off, and, as he takes out his finger to do so, the preacher says, "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear." The man listens, the Word pierces his soul, and he is converted.

I remember quite well, and the subject of the story is most probably present in this congregation, that a very singular conversion was wrought at New Park Street Chapel. A man, who had been accustomed to go to a gin-palace to fetch in gin for his Sunday evening's drinking, saw a crowd round the door of the chapel, he looked in, and forced his way to the top of the gallery stairs. Just then, I looked in the direction in which he stood,—I do not know why I did so, but I remarked that there might be a man in the gallery who had come in there with no very good motive, for even then he had a gin-bottle in his pocket. The singularity of the expression struck the man, and being startled because the preacher so exactly described him, he listened attentively to the warnings which followed; the Word reached his heart, the grace of God met with him, he became converted, and he is walking humbly in the fear of God.

"The Call of 'To-Day'" (sermon 3160):

An incident occurred this afternoon. An aged minister, an excellent man, came into my vestry, and shook my hand and said, "I have got this letter which I should like you to see."

Well, I had many things to attend to, but he was so anxious and said, "I know you will like to hear it," that I took the letter.

Before I read it he explained to me that he had a son who had made a profession of religion, but had gone aside from it, and it had pretty well broken his heart. At last, he was to go to America, and the father sent him away with a very heavy heart. The old man took off his spectacles.

The letter was from his son and it said, "I went to hear Mr. Spurgeon, and I have not the slightest doubt that it has had an

influence on my whole life. The text was, 'He is as a root out of a dry ground.' The sermon was divided into four parts."

I can recollect the sermon well enough. I was suffering from great pain at the time.

"The point which lasted longest was that in which he said that God had made Christ to grow up like a root, like a root out of a dry ground. He went on for twenty-five minutes,"—[*then he gave an opinion of my style which I won't read to you*]—"but what surprised me most was that out of five or six thousand, he fastened his eyes on me though I was in the farthest gallery"—[*the young man's name was Thomas So-and-so—the son of the Baptist minister*]—"and suddenly he shouted out these words, 'There's that wild, dare-devil Tom. God means to save him: and he will be a comfort to his father in his old age.'"

The old gentleman took off his spectacles again when he got to that and said, "And so he is."

It went on, "I thought he was going to say my name." He trembled lest the people should think his name was Tom.

Well, that cheered my heart to think of that young fellow, and I thought I would have a shot at some of you to-night, and I pray that it may go right straight through your hearts.

**On the other hand**, whenever Spurgeon discussed such things, he nearly always warned of the dangers of such mysticism. Here are a few of his famous comments on the subject:

["Our Manifesto" \(sermon 2185\):](#)

I hope that none of us will ever fall into the snare of following the guidance of impressions made upon us by texts which happen to come prominently before our minds. You have judgements, and you must not lay them aside to be guided by accidental impressions.

["A Well-Ordered Life" \(sermon #878\):](#)

Some, I know, fall into a very vicious habit, which habit they excuse themselves—namely, that of ordering their footsteps according to *impressions*.

Every now and then I meet with people whom I think to be rather weak in the head, who will journey from place to place and will perform follies by the gross under the belief that they are doing the will of God because some silly whim of their diseased brains is imagined to be an inspiration from above.

There are occasionally impressions of the Holy Spirit which guide men where no other guidance could have answered the end. I do not doubt the old story of the Quaker who was disturbed at night and could not sleep and was led to go to a person's house miles away and knock at the door just at the time when the inhabitant was about to commit suicide—just in time to prevent the act.

I have been the subject of such impressions, myself, and have seen very singular results. But to *live* by impressions is oftentimes to live the life of a fool and even to fall into downright rebellion against the revealed Word of God. Not your impressions, but that which is in this Bible must always guide you. "To the Law and to the Testimony." If it is not according to this Word, the impression comes not from God—it may proceed from Satan, or from your own distempered brain! Our prayer must be, "Order my steps in Your Word.

Now, that rule of life, the written Word of God, we ought to study and obey. The text proves that the Psalmist desired to know what was in God's Word—he would be a reader and a searcher. O Christian, how can you know what God would have you to do if your Bible is unthumbed and covered over with dust? The prayer implies, too, that when David once knew God's Word, he wished to fulfill it all. Some are pickers and choosers. One of God's commands they will obey—another they are conveniently blind to—even directly *disobedient* to it. O that it were not so with God's people, that they had a balanced mind in their obedience and would take God's Word without making exceptions, following the Lamb where ever He goes!

"Order my steps," Lord, not in a *part* of Your Word, but in *all* of it. Let me not omit any known duty, nor plunge into any known sin. There was, in David's mind, according to this prayer, a real love for holiness. He was not holy because he felt he ought to be and yet would gladly be otherwise. If there were anything good and lovely, he desired to have it. If there were anywhere in God's garden—a rare fruit or flower of purity and excellence—he longed to have it transplanted into his soul, that in all things his life might be the perfect transcript of the Word of God. Stick, then, to God's Word. There is a perfect rule in the Divine statutes. May the Holy Spirit cast us in the mold of His Word.

"Two Episodes in My Life," from "The Sword and the Trowel,"  
October 1865:

SUPERSTITION is to religion what fiction is to history. Not content with the marvels of providence and grace which truly exist around us, fanaticism invents wonders and constructs for itself prodigies. Besides being wickedly mischievous, this fabrication is altogether unnecessary and superfluous, for as veritable history is often more romantic than romance, so certified divine interpositions are frequently far more extraordinary than those extravaganzas which claim fancy and frenzy as their parents. Every believing man into whose inner life we have been permitted to gaze without reserve, has made a revelation to us more or less partaking of the marvelous, but has generally done so under protest, as though we were to hold it for ever under the seal of secrecy. Had we not very distinctly been assured of their trustworthiness, we should have been visited with incredulity, or have suspected the sanity of our informants, and such unbelief would by no means have irritated them, for they themselves expected no one to believe in their remarkable experiences, and would not have unveiled their secret to us if they had not hoped against hope that our eye would view it from a sympathizing point of view. Our personal pathway has been so frequently directed contrary to our own design and beyond our own conception by singularly powerful impulses, and irresistibly suggestive providences, that it were wanton wickedness for us to deride the doctrine that God occasionally grants to his servants a special and perceptible manifestation of his will for their guidance, over and above the strengthening energies of the Holy Spirit, and the sacred teaching of the inspired Word. We are not likely to adopt the peculiarities of the Quakers, but in this respect we are heartily agreed with them.

It needs a deliberate and judicious reflection to distinguish between the actual and apparent in professedly preternatural intimations, and if opposed to Scripture and common sense, we must neither believe in them nor obey them. The precious gift of reason is not to be ignored; we are not to be drifted hither and thither by every wayward impulse of a fickle mind, nor are we to be led into evil by suppositious impressions; these are misuses of a great truth, a murderous use of most useful edged tools. But notwithstanding all the folly of hair-brained rant, we

believe that the unseen hand may be at times assuredly felt by gracious souls, and the mysterious power which guided the minds of the seers of old may, even to this day, sensibly overshadow reverent spirits. We would speak discreetly, but we dare say no less.

"The Holy Spirit in Connection with Our Ministry" from  
*Lectures to My Students, Vol. 3:*

I need scarcely warn any brother here against falling into the delusion that we may have the Spirit so as to become inspired. Yet the members of a certain litigious modern sect need to be warned against this folly. They hold that their meetings are under "the presidency of the Holy Spirit:" concerning which notion I can only say that I have been unable to discover in holy Scripture either the term or the idea. I do find in the New Testament a body of Corinthians eminently gifted, fond of speaking; and given to party strifes—true representatives of those to whom I allude, but as Paul said of them, "I thank God I baptized *none of you,*" so also do I thank the Lord that few of that school have ever been found in our midst.

It would seem that their assemblies possess a peculiar gift of inspiration, not quite perhaps amounting to infallibility, but nearly approximating thereto. If you have mingled in their gatherings, I greatly question whether you have been more edified by the prelections produced under celestial presidency, than you have been by those of ordinary preachers of the Word, who only consider themselves to be under the influence of the Holy Spirit, as one spirit is under the influence of another spirit, or one mind under the influence of another mind.. We are not the passive communicators of infallibility, but the honest teachers of such things as we have learned, so far as we have been able to grasp them. As our minds are active, and have a personal existence while the mind of the Spirit is acting upon them, *our* infirmities are apparent as well as *his* wisdom; and while we reveal what he has made us to know, we are greatly abased by the fear that our own ignorance and error are in a measure manifested at the same time, because we have not been more perfectly subject to the divine power.

I do not suspect that you will go astray in the direction I have hinted at: certainly the results of previous experiments are not likely to tempt; wise men to that folly.

"Enquiring of God" (sermon 2996)

Sometime, too, but rarely, *God guides us by very vivid impressions.*

I have seen so much of people who have been impressed this way, and that way, and the other way, that I do not believe in impressions except in certain cases. I was once in conversation with two friends, one of whom was guided by his judgment, while the other was swayed by impressions, and I could not help noting that the man who was guided by impressions was, as such people always will be, "unstable as water." If I am impressed in one way one day, I may be impressed in another way the next day, so impressions are unreliable guides. There was a young man, who was impressed with the idea that he ought to preach for me one Lord's day; but as I was not impressed to let him do so, it stood over, and probably will continue to stand over for some little time. He had no gifts of speech, but he thought his impression was quite sufficient. When I receive a similar impression, the revelation will be a proper one, and you will have the pleasure of listening to his voice, but certainly not before that.

Occasionally, impressions do guide a man right. A Quaker, one night, could not sleep; and he had a very strong impression that he must get up and saddle and mount his horse. He did so, and rode along the streets, his horse's hoofs noisily clattering in the silence of the night. He did not know where he was to go, but there was a light in one house, and something seemed to say to him, "This is the house to which you are to go." He dismounted, and knocked at the door, and a man came down, and asked why he was there at that time of night. "Perhaps, friend," answered the Quaker, "thou canst tell me, for I do not know, but I have been moved to come here." "I can tell you indeed," said the man, with much emotion; and he took him upstairs, and showed him a short halter with which he was about to hang himself when the Quaker came to his door. Such strong impressions are not to be despised, and I have no doubt that highly spiritual minds do become like the photographer's sensitive plate, and do receive impressions. What another man may be a fool for talking of, such men may truly speak of, for God does sometimes reveal his will in that way.

Intelligent Obedience (sermon 3263)

Others, too, judge of their duty by impressions. "If I feel it impressed upon my mind," says one, "I shall do, it." Does God command you to do it? This is the proper question. If he does, you should make haste, whether it is impressed upon your mind or not; but if there be no command to that effect, or rather, if it diverges from the line of God's statutes, and needs apology or explanation, hold your hand, for though you have ten thousand impressions, yet must you never dare to go by them. It is a dangerous thing for us to make the whims of our brain instead of the clear precepts of God, the guide of our moral actions. "To the law and to the testimony,"—this is the lamp that shows the Christian true light; be this your chart, be this your compass; but as to impressions, and whims, and fancies, and I know not what beside which some have taken,—these are more wreckers lights that will entice you on the rocks. Hold fast to the Word of God, and nothing else; whoever he shall be that shall guide you otherwise, close your ears to him. If at any time, through infirmity or weakness, I should teach you anything which is contrary to this Book, cast it from you, hurl it away as chaff is driven from the wheat; if it be mine and not my Master's, cast it away. Though you love me, though I may have been the means of your conversion to God, think no more of what I say than of the very strangers in the street, if it be not consistent with the teachings of the Most High. Our guide is his written Word, let us keep to this.

Toby Sumpter describes his "soft cessationism" in a helpful way, much like my own position (<http://www.tobyjsumpter.com/teampyro-on-driscoll-moscow/>):

the Bible is the final authority on everything, the canon is closed, and... these [more spectacular, extraordinary] gifts should be exercised within and under the accountability of godly elders and friends.

When I was ordained and when I was interviewed for pastoral ministry at Trinity, I registered my stance on "cessationism" as strongly qualified. While I recognized that certain manifestations of miraculous gifts were unique to the first generation of apostles (writing the New Testament, for example, and perhaps some of the healing and prophetic gifts

to confirm their authority to do so), I nevertheless was and continue to be uncomfortable insisting that all miraculous gifts have ceased from the Church. Church history is just too plum full of odd stories and miraculous interventions. Just read a missionary biography for instance....

The error of the “pentecostals” is to make these sign gifts the center of Christian life and experience, but the error of cessationists is to reject them entirely and pretend they don’t exist. We need a biblical balance between these two extremes. People have and do abuse and misuse the gifts of the Spirit, and others lie and oppress and divide the body through gimmicks and shows. But this doesn’t mean that God isn’t free to do what He wants. He isn’t bound by our tidy little theological boxes. But the standard is always love, and this means that love sees the dangers and potential challenges of strange and miraculous interventions and love sees how and when to receive the gifts of God for the blessing of His Church. And because the love of Christ is always manifested in love for His Bride, authentic spiritual gifts will always delight in real accountability and submission to pastors and elders and the communion of the saints. People who view miraculous gifts as a license to disregard godly elders have already proven their gifts to be a sham.

So, for example, when someone claims to have a Spiritual gift (a word of knowledge, or prophecy) that they use to manipulate or bully or falsely accuse or pressure others, we may be sure, it isn’t from God’s Spirit. When someone says, “God told me we’re supposed to get married” or “God told me you’re supposed to take that job” we may be sure these things are not from the Spirit. The Spirit’s gifts are to be used in love; when they are used to push others around, we may be sure another sort of spirit is at work. If one person says, “God told me you are supposed to do X,” (where is not something found in the Bible) the other person has every right to, “God has not told me X. So we’re just going to have to discuss whether or not X is a good idea, like two mature human beings.”

This is also why the Spirit gives to the body not just word of knowledge gifts but also gifts of discernment. Those with discernment can tell those claiming to have a word of knowledge that *they’re full of it* – in love, of course. Attempts to exercise knowledge (and so-called prophetic) gifts without the requisite discernment at

work in the body (as often happens in 'charismaniac' churches) is a recipe for disaster.

All in all, my assessment of the modern day charismatic movement is negative. While there is much we can learn from charismatics, and much we should appreciate about the movement, the hazards of the movement far outweigh it's strong points. The charismatic movement has opened our eyes to many important truths, but its abuses are rampant in the church today. I appreciate the more sober minded charismatic theologians like Gordon Fee, Sam Storms, and but it seems quacks like Benny Hinn tend to have more influence on the movement as a whole.

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Consider the gift of faith. Obviously, the Spirit gives all Christians the gift of faith in Christ. This is what makes us Christians in the first place. But when Paul speaks of a gift of faith given to a smaller group of Christians, he has something different in mind. Elsewhere Paul speaks of faith to move mountains (1 Cor. 13:2) and this would seem to connect back to Matt. 21:18-22, where Jesus is talking to his disciples beside the temple mountain and seems to be suggesting that prayers for judgment on apostate Israel will be answered (as they were in 70 AD when the Roman "sea" swallowed up the temple and destroyed Jerusalem in the Jewish War). The next gift in Paul's list is miracle working, so this faith does not work miracles directly as the apostles did, but works them through prayer.

Let me return to the example I used in the sermon, George Mueller. Heres a fuller account of the story I told in the sermon (<http://www.christianity.com/churchhistory/11634869/>):

"The children are dressed and ready for school. But there is no food for them to eat," the housemother of the orphanage informed George Mueller. George asked her to take the 300 children into the dining room and have them sit at the tables. He thanked God for the food and waited. George knew God would provide food for the children as he always did. Within minutes, a baker knocked on the door. "Mr. Mueller," he said, "last night I could not sleep. Somehow I knew that you would need bread this morning. I got up and baked three batches for you. I will bring it in."

Soon, there was another knock at the door. It was the milkman. His cart had broken down in front of the orphanage. The milk would spoil by the time the wheel was fixed. He asked George if he could use some free milk. George smiled as the milkman brought in ten large cans of milk. It was just enough for the 300 thirsty children.

Obviously the prayer life of the “ordinary” Christian doesn’t look like that!

Here’s another (<http://www.puritanfellowship.com/2008/02/two-amazing-accounts-of-george-mueller.html>):

### **Feeding An Orphanage**

Dr. a. T. Pierson was the guest of George Mueller at his orphanage. He says: “One night when all the household had retired he [Mueller] asked Pierson to join him in prayer. He told him that there was absolutely nothing in the house for next morning’s breakfast. My friend tried to remonstrate with him and to remind him that all the stores were closed. Mueller knew all that. He had prayed as he always prayed, and he never told anyone of his needs but God. They prayed—at least Mueller did—and Pierson tried to. They went to bed and slept, and breakfast *for two thousand children was there in abundance at the usual breakfast hour.* Neither Mueller nor Pierson ever knew how the answer came. The story was told next morning to Simon Short of Bristol, under pledge of secrecy until the benefactor died. The details of it are thrilling, but all that need be told here is that the Lord called him out of bed in the middle of the night to send breakfast to Mueller’s orphanage, and knowing nothing of the need, or of the two men at prayer, he sent provisions that would feed them a month.

### **Clearing the Fog.**

Charles Inglis, the well-known evangelist, relates the following remarkable incident:

“When I first came to America thirty-one years ago, I crossed the Atlantic with the captain of a steamer who was one of the most devoted men I ever knew; and when we were off the banks of Newfoundland he said to me: ‘Mr. Inglis, the last time

I crossed here, five weeks ago, one of the most extraordinary things happened that has completely revolutionized the whole of my Christian life. Up to that time I was one of your ordinary Christians. We had a man of God on board, George Mueller, of Bristol. I had been on that bridge for twenty-two hours and never left it. I was startled by someone tapping me on the shoulder. It was George Mueller.

“‘Captain,’ said he, ‘I have come to tell you that I must be in Quebec on Saturday afternoon.’ This was Wednesday.

“‘It is impossible,’ I said.

“‘Very well, if your ship can’t take me God will find some other means of locomotion to take me. I have never broken an engagement in fifty-seven years.’

“‘I would willingly help you, but how can I? I am helpless.’

“‘Let us go down to the chart room and pray,’ he said.

“‘I looked at this man and I thought to myself, ‘What lunatic asylum could the man have come from? I never heard of such a thing.’

“‘Mr. Mueller,’ I said, ‘do you know how dense this fog is?’

“‘No,’ he replied, ‘my eye is not on the density of the fog, but on the living God, who controls every circumstance of my life.’

“‘He went down on his knees, and he prayed one of the most simple prayers. I thought to myself, ‘That would suit a children’s class, where the children were not more than eight or nine years of age.’ The burden of his prayer was something like this: ‘O Lord, if it is consistent with Thy will, please remove this fog in five minutes. You know the engagement You made for me in Quebec for Saturday. I believe it is Your will.’

“‘When he had finished, I was going to pray, but he put his hand on my shoulder and told me not to pray.

“‘First,’ he said, ‘you do not believe God will do it; and, second, I believe He has done it. And there is no need whatever for you to pray about it.’

“‘I looked at him, and George Mueller said this: ‘Captain, I have known my Lord for fifty-seven years and there has never been a single day that I have failed to gain an audience with the King. Get up, Captain and open the door, and you will find the fog is gone.’ I got up, and the fog was gone. On Saturday afternoon George Mueller was in Quebec.”

### **Praying Without Ceasing.**

Pastor Charles R. Parsons in an hour's interview with George Mueller towards the close of his life asked him if he spent much time on his knees.

"Hours every day. But I live in the spirit of prayer; I pray as I walk, when I lie down, and when I rise. And the answers are always coming. Tens of thousands of times my prayers have been answered. When once I am persuaded a thing is right, I go on praying for it until the end comes. I never give up!"

"In answer to my prayers, thousands of souls have been saved," he went on. "I shall meet tens of thousands of them in Heaven."

There was another pause. I made no remark and he continued: "The great point is to never give up until the answer comes. I have been praying every day for fifty-two years for two men, sons of a friend of my youth. They are not converted yet, but they will be! How can it be otherwise? There is the unchanging promise of Jehovah, and on that I rest. The great fault of the children of God is that they do not continue in prayer; they do not go on praying; they do not persevere. If they desire anything of God's glory, they should pray until they get it.

"Oh, how good, kind, gracious, and condescending is the One with whom we have to do! He has given me, unworthy as I am, immeasurably above all I have asked or thought! I am only a poor, frail, sinful man, but He has heard my prayers tens of thousands of times and used me as the means of bringing tens of thousands of souls into the way of truth in this and other lands. These unworthy lips have proclaimed salvation to great multitudes, and very many people have believed unto eternal life."

"Seek to depend entirely on God for everything," he answered. "Put yourself and your work into His hands. When thinking of any new undertaking, ask, Is this agreeable to the mind of God? Is it for His glory? If it is not for His glory, it is not for your good, and you must have nothing to do with it. Mind that! Having settled that a certain course is for the glory of God, begin it in His name and continue in it to the end. Undertake it in prayer and faith, and never give up!"

"And do not regard iniquity in your heart. If you do, the Lord will not hear you. Keep that before you always. Then trust in God. Depend only on Him. Wait on Him. Believe on Him. Expect great things from Him. Faint not if the blessing tarries. And above all, rely only on the merits of our adorable Lord and Saviour, so that according to them and to nothing of your own, the prayers you offer and the work you do be accepted.

Obviously, Muller was not practicing a "name it and claim it" kind of prayer. "Name it and claim it" prayer is blasphemous and makes a mockery of the way we are supposed to use the gift of prayer and the gift of faith-prayer. James 4 says "you ask and do not receive because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on yourselves." God does not honor selfish, self-seeking prayers. Prayer is properly used when we ask for blessing we can *share* with others (cf. the man who knocks at his neighbor's door so that he can obtain a needed good for the sake of showing hospitality to his visitor in the parable in Luke 11: 5-8).