Review of Sam Waldron's To Be Continued?

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To Be Continued?
Are The Miraculous Gifts For Today?

Dr. Waldron is a respectful and good Christian scholar, but this work was not written for the big scholars, but was written for the lay Christian who is interested in topic of the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

I liked the book and I thought that it was a pretty good case for cessationism. He tried to interact for example with Grudem on some points.

The Argument

The argument is basically:

1. There are no apostles
2. Therefore there are no prophets
3. Therefore there are no tongue-speaks
4. Therefore there are no miracle-workers

1. Apostles

First of all, by the use of Ephesians 4:9-11 he spends a paragraph or two to say that the apostolate was a gift. The word for gift in verse 9 is not the usual χάρισμα (*charisma)*. He does not interact with those who do not accept that the apostolate was a (spiritual) gift, but rather a ministry or an office. This in my opinion is the biggest flaw in his argument.

The Cascade Argument is built around and based upon the point that the greatest "gift" – the apostolate has ceased in the first century. He in fact makes a good case on the cessation of the apostolate, but does not make a convincing case that it was a spiritual gift like those mentioned in 1Cor 12:7-10 for example. Therefore, his Cascading Argument becomes weak. This is a point that Matt Slick also brought in the back-and-forth in their debate.

The argument basically starts with, if the greatest gift has ceased, it is therefore possible that the other "miraculous" gifts have also ceased. I don't believe that the NT makes such a distinction between the gifts as the “ordinary” and

“extraordinary”, or “non-miraculous” and “miraculous.” I have not been able to find this distinction yet in the text of Scripture.

2. Prophets

He demonstrates from the OT that a prophet was simply the mouth of God to the people (Ex 4:10-17; 7:1-2). Also, what the prophets said had to be 100% accurate according to the regulations of Deuteronomy 13:1-5 and 18:15-22. Therefore he proceeds to the New Testament with the same definition of prophecy and this is understandable.

He first considers few passages used in support of continuationism including Ephesians 4:11-13; 1 Cor 13:8-13 and the case of Agabus (Acts 21:10-11).

On Ephesians 4 he says that if we maintain that everything in verse 11 is needed for our maturity and unity in the faith then we are proving too much. If we follow that, then we must also say that the apostolate must continue, but we have proven that it in fact did not continue. Therefore, he says that the apostles must refer to the writings and teaching of the apostles that we have in the New Testament and prophets or prophecy refers to the book of Revelation. He does not dispute if we have prophecy (i.e. the book of Revelation), rather if we have ongoing or new prophecy.

I don't think that the putting of Revelation under the category of "prophets" is right. John was not writing as a prophet, but was writing with the authority of an Apostle, that is the case for every NT book. It was either written by an apostle or an associate. I know of no NT book whose author was an prophet.

Therefore, I do indeed agree that we have the Apostles in their writings, but I know of nothing that we have from prophets, therefore, it would seem that they would be necessary for the building up and achieving the unity of faith. (I don't know how this practically looks, but I just want to understand what the passage is teaching)

On 1Cor 13:8-13 contrary to some cessationist Dr. Waldron does not believe that the verse is speaking about the closing of the canon, rather it refers to the state after the coming of Christ when we will have "face to face" knowledge of God. But he says that the passage does not specify the time of the cessation of prophecy and tongues. So this question is undecided by this verse. On page 64 he says "The conclusion must be that Paul is teaching the doing away of partial knowledge in favor of perfect knowledge in verse ten. He says nothing about when the gifts of prophecy and tongues pass away. He only refers to the passing of the present partial knowledge that was conveyed through those gifts. He leaves open the question of the time of the passing of the gifts of prophecy and tongues."

He tries to interact with Grudem on Agabus, but I don't believe that he sufficiently refuted Grudem. Basically, Grudem with the words of Richard Gaffin was accused of requiring "pedantic precision" on Agabus (p. 67). I've read Gaffin's and Waldron's case against Grudem on Agabus, but I don't believe that they've refuted what Grudem has argued for.

Since according to Dr. Waldron's survey of the OT prophecy is simply the forthtelling of what God has put into the prophet's mouth and this principle he says also in the par excellence the Lord Jesus, therefore, prophecy cannot at the present time exist. The canon is closed and even continuationists admit that their prophecies are not infallible.

3. Tongues

His discussion on tongues was interesting and short. Like other cessationists, he argued that tongues were always human languages. He starts with Pentecost in Acts 2 and carries that conclusion to every other text. So for example when we come to 1Cor 13:1 and read about "tongues of angels" there it means either that Paul was using a hyperbole or using the claim of his opponents (pp. 85-86).

On 1Cor 14:13, 26-28 he argues that because Paul called for the tongues-speakers to seek to interpret this meant that these were human languages. I don't find that too persuasive. Why doesn't he say pray to translate or find someone who could understand this foreign language?

He also thinks that tongues was a sign of judgment on the Jews according to 1Cor 14:21. It seems very improbable to me that the Corinthians had in their congregation unbelieving Jews for whom this would have been a sign. But rather, tongues without interpretation is a sign of judgment to the unbelieving in general as it would drive them away from the church and would give them the idea that these people are out of their minds. In this way it is a sign of judgment upon the unbelieving. It is a sign of judgment in its misuse, not in its proper use. How would tongues have functioned on the day of Pentecost? I don't find this “tongues was a judgment on Israel” line of thinking persuasive and he's not the only one who has used it.

He identifies tongues-speaking with prophecy by using two passages Acts 2:14-18 and 1Cor 14:5.

Acts 2 was interesting as the crowd is hearing the disciples speaking in foreign human languages which they understand their wondering what is happening. Then Peter says that "this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel" (v. 16). The question for me is does the "this" refer to the prophesying mentioned in verses 17-18 or does it only refer to "I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh"? If tongues was prophecy, what did they infallibly foretold? The crowd says that "we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God." (v. 11) There is here no mention of prophecy. But they were merely inspired by the speech to tell the mighty deeds of God in all kinds of languages.

As a side note, I was disappointed that this passage especially with the connection with "the last days" was not brought up in the discussion about prophecy. This is an important passage which many continuationists appeal to for the continuation of prophecy among other things in the days of the New Covenant.

The next passage he uses is 1Cor 14:5 where he claims that "1 Corinthians 14:5 asserts functional equivalence of tongues-speaking with prophecy--provided that someone interprets what is said." (p. 89)

I agree, but I don't agree with what he means by prophecy. Prophecy is specifically defined for us in verse 3. It is not about telling the future or infallibly speaking the very words of God, rather "the one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation." Therefore, if tongues is interpreted it has the same function for upbuilding and encouragement as prophecy is, but this does not mean that it is the same thing.

Since he argued in the previous part that prophecy ceased and now argued that tongues was a form of prophecy, the logical step for the waterfall is that tongues also ceased.

4. Miracle-Workers

He does not spend much time on miracles. What he is arguing against is miracle workers, not miracles per se. He tries to establish the distinction from 1 Cor 12:28-29.

Then he goes on to define miracle. Broadly speaking a miracle is "any unusual exhibition of the extraordinary providence or supernatural power of God." And he adds "In this broad sense, I am happy to affirm that God does miracles today." (p. 99) However, there is also a strict definition of miracles which he believes do not happen anymore. "A miracle is redemptive, revelatory, extraordinary, external, astonishing manifestation of the power of God." (p. 100) On the "revelatory" part he says that it is "a sign done by a prophet or apostle to attest the divine origin of his message" (p. 100) and he later gives a few reference were miracles were used for attestation. But I don't believe that miracles were restricted to attestation, though that is a major part. That I cannot deny. Rather, I believe that the stress in 1Cor 12-14 is laid upon the local church and the believers building each other up. The specific purpose given in 1Cor 12-14 is upbuilding of believers, not attestation.

Then there is the question "what about those who where neither apostles nor prophets and worked miracles?" I don't believe that the answer which usually goes along the lines of "they were associated with the Apostles" in a book called the Acts of the APOSTLES is satisfying. Everyone there is in someway associated with them. What about those in Corinth to what authority they were attesting WITHIN the congregation? What about the believers in Galatia (Gal 3:5)?

But this point among others in the strict definition of miracle becomes an occasion in which strict miracles are associated with revelation, but since infallible and biblical revelation ceased with the Apostles, therefore, these kinds of miracles and

miracle-workers also ceased.

Conclusion

I actually really enjoyed reading this book. Dr. Waldron is a great a great teacher and writer. He challenged me and I've learned a lot from him in different areas of theology. I believe that this was a gracious and good defense of cessationism.

He doesn't go into the craziness of the charismatic movement, but rather goes simply against "continuationism" and tries to make the case that the miraculous gifts ("apostles", prophecy, tongues and miracles) have ceased.