

Are Cessationists Dinitarians?

Cessationists have put out some of the thickest and richest books on the Holy Spirit

Written by Eric Davis / Tuesday, April 4, 2017

The claim is heard often these days. It usually goes something like this: “How could you cessationists believe that the miraculous spiritual gifts have ceased? You must not believe in the Holy Spirit.”

I have encountered this accusation many times from misled continuationists. It is as grievous as it is ill-informed. The implication is that charismatic views of the apostolic-age miraculous gifts are all there are to the Holy Spirit. If you reject those, then you must not believe in him. But this is a severely anemic understanding of the true Holy Spirit.

Even worse, it is an accusation of heresy. Charismatics and continuationists who make this claim are, in effect, accusing cessationists of affirming a heretical view of God. The biblical God is Trinitarian. That is, he is triune: God is one in essence and yet three distinct Persons (Father, Son, Spirit). To conclude that one disbelieves in the Spirit, therefore, is to accuse of believing in dinitarianism; that God is di-une: one God, two Persons. It is similar to the old error of socianism. But this is a view of God which differs greatly from than that of Scripture. Therefore, the dinitarian comment could not be more serious.

Traditionally and historically, however, cessationists believe in the triune God. They hold that there is one living and true God (Deut. 6:4^L, Isa. 45:5-7^L, 1 Cor. 8:4^L), an infinite, all knowing Spirit (John 4:24^L), perfect in all His attributes, one in essence, eternally existing in three Persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19^L; 2 Cor. 13:14^L)—each equally deserving worship and obedience.

So, if cessationists reject a charismatic pneumatology, is there anything remaining to believe about the Holy Spirit? If so, what *do* they believe about him? Far from being dinitarians who do not believe in the Spirit, here are 20 things cessationists affirm:

1. Cessationists believe that the Holy Spirit is God.

They affirm that he is a divine Person, eternal, underived, possessing all the attributes of personality and deity (Ps. 139:7^L; Acts 5:3^L, 5^L; Rom. 15:19^L; 1 Cor. 2:11^L; Heb. 9:14^L). Further, he is not an “It” (e.g. a power, energy, vibe, vortex), but a Person, just as the Father and Son. This is the most important thing to believe about the Spirit.

2. Cessationists believe that the Holy Spirit was involved in creation.

At the moment of creation, the Spirit was already there doing his work (Gen. 1:2^L).

3. Cessationists believe that the Holy Spirit inspired the 66 books of Scripture.

Through the various human instruments, the Holy Spirit composed and recorded God’s word to man without error in the whole or in the part. What resulted was God’s inerrant and infallible revelation in the original manuscripts (2 Tim. 3:16^L, 2 Pet. 1:20-21^L).

4. Cessationists believe that the Holy Spirit was involved in the incarnation of Christ.

In a supernatural act of the Spirit, the Son of God was incarnate in the virgin’s womb (Luke 1:35^L).

5. Cessationists believe that the Holy Spirit is the agent of conviction.

In the New Covenant age, the Spirit convicts the world of its sin, self-righteousness, and false judgment (John 16:8-11^L).

6. Cessationists believe that the Holy Spirit gives the new birth to sinners.

Becoming a Christian is more momentous and powerful an event than the conception and birth of a human being. Jesus likens it to a birth from heaven; a spiritual coming-to-life (John 3:5-8^L).

For this reason, it is called “regeneration” (Titus 3:5^L). This work of the Holy Spirit is a re-creation of the soul, otherwise impossible by a work of man (Ezek. 36:26-27^L, 2 Cor. 5:17^L). The Holy Spirit makes a person a Christian.

7. Cessationists believe the Holy Spirit fully indwells the Christian from the moment of regeneration.

At the moment of the new birth, the Holy Spirit takes up permanent residence in the soul of the believer (John 14:23^L, Rom. 8:9-11^L, 1 Cor. 6:19^L, Col. 1:27^L). This is what it means to be baptized by the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13^L). He is not coming and going, nor he is partially there. He is a Person, thus, he is all there.

8. Cessationists believe that the Holy Spirit eternally secures the Christian at the moment of salvation.

From the moment of regeneration on, the Spirit is given as God’s signet of eternal security (Eph. 1:13-14^L). His presence serves as a divine dowry from God the Father.

9. Cessationists believe that the Holy Spirit causes the regenerate to savingly comprehend and embrace the word of God.

Prior to conversion, the Spirit-given Scriptures are, at best, intriguing stories with helpful lessons, and, at worst, repulsive myths. The reason for that is because the Spirit is absent from that soul (1 Cor. 2:14^L). Upon regeneration, however, the Spirit turns on the lights, such that every Christian begins to correctly understand, love, and obey the 66 books of Scripture (1 Cor. 2:12-16^L).

10. Cessationists believe that the Holy Spirit causes the regenerate to confess the lordship of Christ.

This is a great “first” in being a Christian. Upon regeneration, the Christian sincerely understands, embraces, and declares that Jesus Christ is who he is; Lord (1 Cor. 12:2-3^L).

11. Cessationists believe that the Holy Spirit gives the regenerate a new, God-ward demeanor of the heart, empowering obedience to God's word.

Consequent of his regenerating word, the Spirit is now the agent of the newness of life in the Christian. He inclines the reborn soul towards the things of God according to the 66 books of Scripture (Jer. 31:31-34^L, Ezek. 36:26-27^L).

Prior to regeneration, that individual has never been able or willing to please God (Rom. 8:5-8^L). But, Christians love and obey God's word because the author of that word indwells them.

12. Cessationists believe that the Holy Spirit enables the regenerate to forever know and confess God as Father.

This is another big "first" of the Christian life. Prior to bowing the knee to Christ in faith, God is not our Father, but our Judge. However, by the Spirit, regeneration embarks us on that glorious and permanent intimacy with God as Father (Rom. 8:14-15^L). This is part of what it means to be "led by the Spirit" (Rom. 8:14-15^L).

13. Cessationists believe that the Holy Spirit causes the Christian to be progressively putting personal sin to death.

Prior to salvation, we love and pursue sin. We are full of sin. However, once the Spirit takes up residence in the soul, the glorious inevitability is that he goes to war inside of us. The result is that the Spirit both exposes and eradicates anything that is contrary to the word of God (Rom. 8:12-15^L, Gal. 5:16-17^L). This, too, is part of what it means to be "led by the Spirit" (Rom. 8:13-14^L).

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14. Cessationists believe that the Holy Spirit progressively transforms the believer into the image of Christ.

One of the glorious miracles of the Spirit is the working of progressive sanctification (2Cor.3:18). Few things are more miraculous than transforming the depraved sons of Adam into holy sons of God.

15. Cessationists believe that the Holy Spirit gifts Christians to build up the church.

In the apostolic age, he temporarily empowered various believers with revelatory gifts for the attestation of the gospel during the foundation age of the church (2Cor.12:12; Eph.2:20; Heb.2:3-4). Since then, believers are endowed with the permanent gifts (Rom.12:6-8; 1Pet.4:10-11).

16. Cessationists believe that the Holy Spirit fills the believer to live a life pleasing to God.

To be filled with the Spirit means that believers live in a manner that is pleasing to God, being controlled by the Spirit in conformity to the word of God. (Eph.5:18; Co.3:16).

17. Cessationists believe that the Holy Spirit causes the regenerate to live a godly life.

By the Spirit's indwelling power, Christians will live a life of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. (Gal.5:22-23).

18. Cessationists believe that the Holy Spirit will cause His people to love Christ.

The Spirit came to take focus off Himself and put it on Christ (Jn.16:14; 1Cor.2:3). Thus, a Spirit-filled life is one in which Christ is the center of attention far more than the Spirit.

19. Cessationists believe that the Holy Spirit enables believers to suffer joyfully.

Suffering is inevitable. But with the Spirit, so is joy. By His presence, God's people are enabled to endure the sorrows of this age with the assurance of God's care. (Rom.5:3-5).

20. Cessationists believe that the Spirit is the agent of perseverance unto glorification.

If it were possible to lose our salvation, every Christian would probably have done so about an hour (or less) after regeneration. How could we possibly persevere, both objectively as

regenerate children of God, and subjectively in affections for Christ? Answer ; a power far superior to us who dwells inside us. (2Cor.1:22; Eph.4:30).

What else do cessationists believe about the Holy Spirit? Cessationists have put out some of the thickest and richest books on the Holy Spirit. There is B.B. Warfield's 200-page classic, *The Person and Work of the Holy Spirit*. Or R.C. Sproul's more recent, *Who is the Holy Spirit?* Sinclair Ferguson's work, *The Holy Spirit* is fantastic. And, if we want to dive into the deep end of the pneumatological pool, we can turn to Puritan John Owen's 900-page tome on the Holy Spirit. Cessationist systematic theologies neither are missing chapters on pneumatology. On the contrary, systematics from individuals such as John Calvin, Charles Hodge, and John MacArthur are plump with the doctrine of the Holy Spirit.

More could be said about the cessationist view of the Spirit. Suffice it to say that cessationists are not dinitarians. Nor are they missing out or fearful of what the Spirit might do. Instead, they possess a robust pneumatology which promotes a rich relationship with, and worship of, the Holy Spirit.

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