

Response to Common Pentecostal Arguments

I've been blessed to have many friends who are Pentecostal or Charismatic believers, as well as to heavily debate the issue with them. I've also participated in their congregations in the past. In writing here and elsewhere as I do I only wish the best for those people and their communities, although I believe they are terribly and foolishly wrong. In several years of studying the subject, as well as in personal experience, my assessment of the Pente movement as a whole has not changed. It seems like a collection of individuals who got bored at church, and in response, simply left church and went off the deep end. They continue to go off the deep end, often in worse and worse ways. While I sympathize with the fact that there are churches out there not living fully in the life of the *Ruach haKodesh* (Holy Spirit), and that this ought to change, it's still no good excuse for the abominations and the heresies of the Pente movement. There is no good excuse.

Since I have frequently discussed the miracle gifts with friends and acquaintances, I want to share with you my response to the more frequent arguments you will hear from Charismatic believers. And if you are Pente yourself, this includes from you. These frequent justifications of the movement, or counter-claims in defending it, all have good responses. Some of them simply make poor arguments to begin with. Please take the time to go through them one by one and digest what I am saying. In the end, I believe you can see as well as I do that the claims of the Pente movement are false and that its apologetics are largely driven by confusion and distortion of the real issues. Please set aside feelings for a moment, and simply ask if what I say is true. That is what matters.

1) There are millions of people claiming miracles. They can't all be wrong!

This is possibly the commonest argument in defense of the claims that the miracle gift of healing continues. However, it is also possibly the most clearly wrong. Millions of people certainly CAN be wrong. In fact, in an era when our culture denies God, denies morality, celebrates all forms of immorality including the most unnatural and dangerous it seems absurd to claim that millions of people couldn't ALL be deceived. Of course they could. Not only that, but considering how much unbelief and immorality exists shamelessly in the *Kahol* (Church) itself, we know that millions of believers can be deceived too.

In fact, as I mention in the introduction to this section of Kodesh Kallah, perhaps the commonest way people are deceived is a simple category error – they take good things that happen, such as feeling generally better from a condition, and place it in the miracle category. Then they say the miracle gifts have continued. This simple repeated error is probably so common that it makes up the vast majority of false claims of miracle healings in the movement. Lies and hoaxes, which are many too, easily make up the rest.

That doesn't mean that zero claims are correct. It doesn't mean that God never works a miracle today. It just means that the miracle gifts, through which early disciples did many great healings, have ended. The millions of people who claim miracles are virtually all deceived.

2)The early Christian Fathers mentioned a few miracles and tongues speakers. Therefore, they must have continued.

The claim that the early Christian Fathers documented some miracles is in no way evidence for a continuation of the gifts. Firstly, the paucity of such claims in the Fathers amounts to a handful over four hundred years. That's not much. Moreover, the Fathers are not inerrant, and there's nothing to say that a claim from them is true. This is especially so, since some of these texts merely describe what they had heard about happening somewhere down the road, not what they had witnessed happen themselves. If the miracle gifts had continued, we would expect much more than a handful of sometimes hearsay claims over centuries. We should in fact expect abundant claims, from numerous eye-witnesses from that early time to the present. Instead, we see a handful from a very early era, and then a virtual disappearance of such claims until the modern Charismatic movement. That evidence fits the model of Cessationism, not the other way around.

Moreover, and this is very important, the Fathers broadly said that miracles certainly were not occurring frequently as they were in biblical times, and various Fathers said clearly that the gifts had ended. Not only that, but the Fathers are unanimous in saying that the gift of tongues was a gift of languages. They do not make any claims that it was a gift of gibberish, which is what modern Pentecostals (as well as pagans) practice. I have several links on my Spirit and the Bride page to citations from the Fathers. I would strongly recommend you read them through.

3)The "perfect" from 1 Corinthians 13 speaks of Yeshua. Since the gifts would end when the "perfect" comes, and He hasn't returned, then the gifts could not have ended.

The idea that the perfect must necessarily be speaking of Yeshua (because who else could be perfect?) at His return is a terrible misrepresentation of the word. As I cover in my piece "No One's Perfect" the word itself – *teleios* in Greek or *tamim* in Hebrew – can mean a variety of things from our modern understanding of perfect to mature or complete. Its usage in scripture, from beginning to end, includes describing not only God, but also righteous men as well as the law of God. Therefore, regardless of the cacophony of voices today demanding it must refer to Yeshua (since who else could be perfect?) it actually has a broad range of meaning. Therefore, when taken together with the other scriptural and logical evidence for the ending of the miracle gifts, we should understand "perfect" to refer to the completing of Holy Scripture and/or the completing of the foundation of the Church. This is the time when the gifts would end.

4)1 Corinthians 13 speaks of “knowledge” ending. Since knowledge is still with us, the gifts could not have ended.

No offense, but this is just a sneaky argument, and I find it hard to believe scripture-knowing people actually make it. The logic goes, that since 1 Corinthians 13 says that prophesy would fail and tongues cease and ALSO that knowledge would vanish away when that which is perfect comes, the fact that we still have knowledge today can tell us that the “perfect” hasn’t come yet.

Really? Come now. If what this verse meant was any earthly knowledge (which of course we still have) you’d be telling us that when Yeshua returns ordinary knowledge will disappear. That is outrageous. That is also why we should read “knowledge” differently here, reading it as the prophetic word of knowledge, one which we see in 1 Corinthians 12:8, for example. Knowledge then, is a form of prophecy. That is why we are told it will vanish away with the other gifts when the perfect comes.

Sheesh. Earthly knowledge? You Pentecostals can do better than that.

5)The gifts have continued, they are just in lesser form.

The appeal to lessened gifts is an attractive one. It allows the Charismatic to maintain his belief and to stay in his community. It also allows the Charismatic to respect common sense and accept that things are clearly different from the goings-on of the 1st century. When I participated previously in Pente congregations, this was my default line of reasoning.

The problem however, is that there is no biblical basis for a lessened set of miracle gifts. You will not find a lower rank of gifts anywhere in the *Brit Chadasha* (New Testament). Nor is it fair to call what goes on today merely a “lessened” form of the 1st century occurrences. This is because the alleged miracles of today are so substantially different, or in the case of tongues of a totally different category, that a claim of lessened gifts is clearly false. The gifts did not lessen. Observably, they went off a cliff. That is why it is fairer and more accurate to say that the gifts have ceased. It’s not even close, people.

I encourage you to stop with this admittedly attractive way of staying the course with your doctrines. Just acknowledge that the doctrines were false to begin with. Keep what is good in the movement, and abandon what is false.

6)If you don’t believe prophecy has continued, you should never speak of God “calling” you to do something. Since most Cessationists do speak this way, they are contradicting themselves.

No, orthodox believers are not contradicting themselves if they speak of God “calling” them. Number one, they do not claim such a statement is prophecy. Number two, no orthodox believer making this claim considers their sense of God’s calling to be on par with biblical prophecy anyway, meaning they do not know it with a certainty nor are they bound by it. Both of these would be true if they treated it remotely like the gift of prophecy.

Moreover, speaking of God calling, or even of God blessing, is often a colloquialism. We apply it to many things we may receive from God indirectly, and a sense of calling in life is one of them. That sense of calling may rely on various forms of common knowledge such as education, mind and conscience rather than a special act of revelation. We just say calling, much as we often say blessing, as a colloquial way to credit God. Of course, we do not know with certainty that one pathway is His will for us. On a rare occasion we may feel confident, but even then, not close to certain.

Therefore the orthodox believer can speak of God’s calling, and in no way contradict the belief that God is no longer imparting special revelation to us. We already have that in the Bible.

7)God still does miracles! That can’t be denied.

This is one of various areas where Pentecostals totally conflate issues, and really cause confusion for themselves. The question of the gifts has nothing to do with whether God does miracles today. I have not met anyone who denies that God does miracles in the present, although we must acknowledge they are observably far less frequent than at the three periods of miracles described in the Bible. The issue has nothing to do with miracles. It has to do with whether the miracle sign gifts, or anything like them, continue today. Let’s not confuse the subject by pointing to a rare potential miracle here and there. It has nothing to do with the question of the gifts. Miracles still happen. The gifts themselves have ceased.

8)The Bible says God is the same “yesterday, today and forever.” That means the miracle gifts could not have ended, because God does not change.

Now there is a great discussion to be had about the changeless nature of God. This statement, for example, from Hebrews 13:8 speaks of the changeless nature of *Mashiach* (Christ) and other scriptures throughout the Bible speak of God being changeless. One foundational one is Micah 3:6. In fact, there is a great debate to be had between the Christian and the orthodox Jew or Muslim, for example, about whether the Incarnation amounts to a change in God, and thus a violation of known truths. The Muslim might say among other things that God becoming flesh amounts to a change in nature. The Christian, among other things, might say that God is not changing His nature, but rather taking on human nature. This taking on does not amount to a change. There is truly a fascinating discussion to be had here, which is both scripturally rich and philosophically complex.

However, there is no discussion to be had about whether God doing something different from before amounts to a change in His nature. Of course it does not. God is merely doing something differently from before. Where is the problem? In fact, why have a problem with the miracle gifts of the 1st century ending, when we have no problem with the manna in the desert ending. Or the pillars of smoke and fire ending. God is free to do a variety of things, as well as to cease doing one particular set of miracles.

What concerns me more than this simple mistake, is that this claim gets taken to the extent of saying that only Pentes have a truly living God. Non-Pentes, it is implied or plainly stated, must worship a god who is dead, or belong to dead congregations. This is a gross misuse of Hebrews 13:8 and like scriptures. It also ignores the work that the Holy Spirit does in the children of God such as sanctification. Non-Pentes have God in their lives every day and do not need Charismatic fakery to live in *Mashiach*.

Before I end here though, let me talk about the living God, and the living Holy Spirit in our communities. If Pentes truly believe they are fuller of life than everyone else, let's see it with the work of the *Ruach haKodesh*. How about, instead of showing it with screaming, falling on the ground and fake miracles, show it instead with the sanctifying power He provides. Let's see the *Ruach haKodesh* in Pente churches inspiring people to actually get married, to actually stay married (to the same person) to actually repent of their adulterous remarriages and maybe even to put on some clothes, instead of worshipping and going about half naked. Let's see some of those acts of repentance happening where they say the Holy Spirit is more alive and maybe I'll believe it's more alive. Maybe I'll agree with you. In fact, show me those things in your community, I might just scream too and fall flat on my back. God's doin' a new thing.

9) Well I have my experience, so it doesn't matter what you say.

This statement is more of a defense mechanism by Pentes who really don't know how to defend their beliefs. Nevertheless, it is a very common statement, and confuses some who first hear it. This is how I reply to those who ignore scriptural evidence and logic by appealing to their "experience."

First, what is your experience? Is your experience that your pastor is cleansing lepers by the laying on of hands or that he is making the blind see? Is your experience that he does these things regularly? Because if your "experience" is something substantially different, such as people feeling pain relief, or getting better over time alongside medical help, then your experience is certainly not the miracle gift we read of in scripture. Now if that is the case, if your experience is NOT the same thing, then it is truly dishonest to claim that it is. It just amounts to lying. So what really is your experience? Remember, we are responsible for every word we say and we are responsible for any intentional deception. Tell the truth. If your experience really is not what Yeshua and the apostles were doing, then cease claiming it as evidence for the miracle gifts today. It is not. It is no such thing.

I realize there are always those believers who will claim their experience really is the same, and I am open-minded enough to be prepared to believe it. However, in over one hundred years of the modern Pentecostal movement, no one has ever demonstrated that these things are occurring today. Could it be then, that you simply are recalling hearsay? Could it be that you saw one of the common hoaxes that occur at a fake miracle show? You might sincerely believe in your “experience” and it can still be wrong.

Just read up on the techniques some of these fake healers use, brothers. They go about the crowd early on and learn the names and conditions of audience members, they carefully choose people to come up front who have less serious conditions than the others, they even bring people up who claim they have a condition but do not. Moreover, there are more than a few cases of the severely disabled, people who walk with canes or need a wheelchair, feeling a burst of inspiration and managing to leap up and walk some steps. Inevitably, in either seconds or minutes, they eventually fall down, and they need those canes and wheelchairs again. These occurrences have been documented, brothers. It is not difficult to be deceived. Apply your mind to some of these alleged miracles and I think in no time you will see through many of them. Just apply your mind. Then we’ll see what your experience really is.

10) You just don’t have enough faith.

I’ve had this one told to my face. Just read what this argument says and I think you’ll see it takes God’s grace not to take it as an insult. You’re saying I don’t believe in the continued gifts because I don’t have enough faith? Really?

Rather than getting into how condescending the claim is, let me point to its central error: it’s central error is that it confuses faith in God and the Savior with faith in something else. Believe me, and I hope you’ll take me at my word, I believe in God confidently. I believe in Yeshua. I believe in His death on the cross for sin and in His bodily resurrection. Not only that, but I believe that God acts today just as He acted in history past. I believe naturally in God’s omnipotence and that He can do anything, including any miracle at any time. I believe in all those things and more. Who is to say I don’t? That is what I have faith in.

What I do NOT have faith in, are the baseless claims of believers. Nor do I have faith in the power of mere human belief, that if we just believe enough then miracles will happen. There is nothing biblically to tell me that, and I do not believe it. In fact I would say that these two things – faith in mere claims and faith in belief causing miraculous healings – are things no one should have faith in. They simply aren’t true.

Lastly, let me remind you, the people who claim that they have faith, or even more faith than their non-Pente brethren, they get sick and die of illnesses as well. In fact, even the fake healing ministers have illnesses and debilities of all kinds. Whether it is the simple need for glasses or the heart conditions and

terminal cancers which slay them, fake Pente healers aren't saved by their faith in fake miracles. A faith in miracles simply does not produce them.

To repeat, the real issue here is what we have faith in. The faith the Bible calls us to have is faith in God and His Son. The faith Pentes want us to have is faith in them, or faith in our own power of faith. If they want anyone to believe in the latter kind, they need to heal themselves first.

11)The miracles haven't ceased, people just don't have enough faith to receive them.

This might be called a variant on the above argument, or it might be called a separate argument itself. It speaks broadly about the general faith of believers, instead of just one. While I've said much of what I have to say on the subject above, let me add this.

If the amount of miracles really is contingent on the amount of faith people have, and if the miracles we see are enormously fewer than in the 1st century, then this argument merely invents another form of Cessationism; I call it Faith Cessationism. It says that the miracles didn't cease; faith did. And really we're not talking about a mild decline here. I'd be open-minded toward accepting the Pente claims if it were merely talking about a decline. We're talking about a cliff. Now I am prepared to accept that in the 1st century there may have been a higher percentage of super-saints, those very righteous apostles and their personal disciples. Sure. I can accept that as an hypothesis. But why should I accept that the difference between faith then and faith only years afterward is the difference between night and day?

People still had faith after the first century, brothers. There were even very great men of faith. More importantly, there are scriptural and logical bases to believe that the miracles gifts have ended. There are not scriptural and logical reasons to believe that faith has ended. In fact, it comes across as absurd. As you can see then, this line of argument creates problems for the Pentecostal case, and it doesn't solve any. It merely replaces one form of ceasing with another. The gifts have ended brethren. Faith has not.

12)The apostles failed at miracles sometimes too! [I once even had a good Pente friend tell me that Yeshua had failed at doing miracles in His hometown, which I kind of viewed as him stooping real low in trying to defend error, and which of course has no scriptural backing.]

The fact that there is a reference to the apostles failing in miracles really makes little difference to whether the miracle gifts have continued. No one is faulting Pentes because they sometimes fail at miracles. People are faulting them, and calling them deceivers, because they cannot document any miracle healing ability whatsoever. If Pente preachers cleansed a few lepers here and there and made a few men born blind see again every year, I for one would be prepared to overlook any number of failed

miracles. I would accept their claims. Therefore, this argument is irrelevant to the question of the continued miracle healing gift, which would not demand perfection anyway.

13) This one I must repeat word for word because I wouldn't believe anyone would say it if I hadn't heard it myself: **"It doesn't matter if it's back pain or a resurrection. A healing is a healing!"**

You heard correctly. This is one sadly common attempt to conflate all kinds of healing under the banner of miracle gift. Yet it is erroneous and dishonest. That's because when we look at scripture, the 1st century healings were clearly miraculous healings and complete healings. They were not pain relief or improved conditions. One cannot make the glaringly obvious truth of the miracle gifts ending by calling everything good a miracle. It changes nothing.

Conclusion

As I've once heard it said regarding the Pentecostal claims: There is nothing miraculous about healings that don't heal, prophecies that don't predict anything and tongues that don't make any sense. They're just not miracles by any reasonable definition of the word. I think a lot of Pentecostals privately understand that. I think that's also why many congregations will take the line that the gifts aren't the same as before, while avoiding actually saying they've ended. And that's better than nothing. But it's still dishonest and it's still in error. If Pentes agree that the core components of the gifts have clearly changed, they are in essence admitting to the core of the Cessationist argument as well -- the gifts as the early Church knew them are no more.

The movement as a whole still has plenty to offer souls in *Mashiach*, and could do so very well if it abandoned its doctrines which instead mislead them. For example, many sincere and strong believers have entered the movement from churches which deny core biblical truths or deny common morality. In that sense, they often took a step up. It is also true that some Pente worship, such as praying with hands raised is biblical, and so is worship which is more joyous than stoic. In these things and more Pente congregations can add to and sustain the faith. They should simply do this in the abandonment of the absurd falsehood they are also teaching. Its error is transparent.