

“How Do I Know the Miraculous Gifts Aren’t for Today?”

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“How Do I Know the Miraculous Gifts Aren’t for Today?”

Are the miraculous spiritual gifts still active in the church? We must ask this question because of the increasing profession of the miraculous gifts among Christians today. How should we test this claim? Frederick Bruner once said, “The test of anything calling itself Christian is not the significance of its success or its power, though these make the test more imperative. The test is truth.” I could tell you about my power of flight until I’m blue in the face, but the test is the truth. If I am accelerating toward water from a bridge above, talk is cheap. Truth is the test.

Do these gifts still exist? I don’t believe they do. How do I know this? The shortest answer is that God revealed it to me! God told me so in His Word. Except for a brief historical survey of the miraculous gifts, all the answers to this question come from the Word of God. However, there are numerous ways this question has been answered. In fact, a recent work attempted to answer this question, and boiled the positions down to four.¹ I am going to boil it down to two: “Yes,” and “No.”

Many would quarrel with this and say that there is a third answer. This answer is called ‘Open but Cautious.’ However, this position is entirely unhelpful. Quick—name one other issue pertaining to the Bible and the church where this is an accepted position. Does God get the sole credit for salvation? Are we sanctified by the means of faith? It is almost amusing to imagine the ‘Open but Cautious’ answer in these discussions. “I’m open to walking by faith, but I’m cautious...” Ironically, this position is quite popular today. I believe there are two main reasons why people are in this camp. First, some in this camp stand on the fact that they haven’t yet come to a conclusion. That is fine—there is a formative stage of thinking for every theological and practical question. If anyone among us can’t honestly answer a question, then declaring that we don’t have an answer is honorable. But please don’t write about a non-answer as though it were a legitimate position.

Second, some who are ‘Open but Cautious’ actually believe that the gifts exist, but they claim that we should use caution and perhaps avoid the use of these gifts in the corporate worship service.

Third, others who are ‘Open but Cautious’ simply want to keep the door open for the possibility that in some remote area, an unknown miracle worker actually has the power of an apostle. I must admit that I’m not concerned about this possibility. The Scriptures clearly teach that miraculous gifts are given “for the common good” of all believers (1 Cor. 12:7), and that all gifts must be done for the edification of the church (1 Cor. 14:26). If someone speaks in tongues and no one hears it, is it the gift of speaking in tongues?

For those who answer the question with “Yes” or “No,” I will use the terms ‘cessationism’ and ‘continuationism’ throughout the paper. The theological labels ‘cessationism’ and ‘continuationism’ come from convictions about the presence or absence of the gifts today. Cessationism is the conviction that the miraculous sign gifts ceased in the first generation of the church; continuationism is the conviction that the miraculous spiritual gifts (i.e., tongues, prophecy, healing, words of knowledge) continue through the church age until the return of Christ.

¹ Wayne Grudem, ed., *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996).

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Whatever cessationism may be, it is certainly not anti-supernatural or anti-spiritual. I have heard criticisms about Christians who don’t believe that miracles occur today. I have never heard any cessationist actually hold to this position. Regardless of whether they exist or not, I do not hold that position (nor does anyone in leadership at Grace Immanuel Bible Church). The question is not whether God does miracles, but whether individual Christians still possess the miraculous gifts. There is a massive difference between God performing a medical miracle, and a healer in the church who has willful, voluntary control over that power and uses it for the benefit of the church, as testimony to the truth of his message. Additionally, by using the term ‘cessationism,’ I am in no way implying that all gifts have ceased. I am arguing for the cessation of only the miraculous gifts that involve revelation and confirmation (listed in 1 Cor. 12:7-11²).

A note to the reader—I have formatted this paper in hope of providing you with a way to see the biblical answers laid out in consecutive fashion. I was hoping for a shorter end product, but I struggled with cutting out any more than I have. Instead, I have tried to write in such a way, that you can jump into any section of the paper without having read anything but the introduction. In order to shorten the paper, I encourage you to read the synthesized paragraph at the beginning of each section. Then, you can read the sections where you have questions or interests.

History Shows That Miraculous Gifts Ceased

History documents the practice of miraculous gifts in the church as a new and recent phenomenon. They weren’t practiced consistently at any point in time during the first 1900 years of the church. The rare exceptions to this rule are quite embarrassing to anyone who believes that the miraculous gifts were practiced throughout the church age. Although it is theoretically possible that all of orthodox Christianity was wrong for 1900 years, the straightforward reading of history shows that miraculous gifts ceased with the apostles at the end of the first century.

The presence of tongues as a gift practiced in the church has been extremely rare (we’ll examine a few examples) until the last century. Although charismatic practices were almost entirely absent during the first 1900 years of church history, they have become quite prevalent today. Where did this come from? Long before the Toronto blessing or the Kansas City Prophets, a few key movements spawned the rapid spread of modern-day attempts to practice the miraculous gifts in the church. Most church historians (on both sides of the issue) recognize that men like Charles Fox Parham, locations such as The Bethel Bible School in Topeka, KS, and revivals like those of Azusa Street and Wales were all major players in the modern Pentecostal, or Charismatic

² Everything in this list is called ‘spirituals’ (τῶν πνευματικῶν) in verse 1. The gift of ‘faith’ is not saving faith for salvation. If that were in view, Paul would be teaching (in 12:11) that God only gives some Christians saving faith. This grace of saving faith is universal to believers (Eph. 2:8-9). The gift of faith, on the other hand, pertains to the faith needed to act on something previously unrevealed, where God prompts a miracle-worker to do something against all odds. Examples would be circumstances like healing the man at the gate (Acts 3), like raising Eutychus from the dead (Acts 20), like believing a word of revelation (Acts 27:22-25, 34).

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movement (no offense to those who do maintain a clear distinction between those two terms). All these events took place within the first decade of the 20th century and the Christian landscape has never been the same. History demands that we examine what Christianity was like before the 20th century. Was this change of God? Were the miraculous gifts practiced before 1900?

Ironically, it would seem that ‘continuationists’ need to prove that the 1900 year lack of miraculous gifts have ceased, while the ‘cessationists’ are saying that the *status quo* of 1900 years continues today. Wayne Grudem is a notable continuationist. He acknowledges that his position is new to the theological landscape from a historical perspective:

In previous generations, systematic theologies did not have chapters on spiritual gifts, for there were few questions regarding the nature and use of spiritual gifts in the church. But the twentieth century has seen a remarkable increase in interest in spiritual gifts, primarily because of the influence of the Pentecostal and charismatic movements within the church.³

This honest admission by Grudem that the gifts were—for the intents and purposes of systematic theology—virtually non-existent, is very helpful. In fact, the rare exceptions to the rule are instructive.⁴

Montanus

The first notable claim to practice the miraculous gifts was Montanus⁵ in the middle of the 2nd century. Eminent historian Philip Schaff wrote,

Montanism, in the first place, sought a forced continuance of the MIRACULOUS GIFTS of the apostolic church, which gradually disappeared as Christianity became settled in humanity, and its supernatural principle was naturalized on earth.⁶

Montanus was a self-proclaimed prophet. He was assisted by two prophetesses, Priscilla and Maximilla, who left their husbands. He proclaimed the imminent return of

³ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1016): 1016.

⁴ I’m ignoring the exceptions to the rule within Roman Catholic sects, such as the Jansenists and Jesuits (see B.B. Warfield’s chapter “Roman Catholic Miracles” in *Counterfeit Miracles*, reprint: Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1983: 71-124, cf. pp. 67-70), and many prophetic movements that created wide social effect and impact (see Charles Mackay, *Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds* [London: Richard Bentley: 1841; reprint, New York: Farrar, Staus, and Giroux, 1932]: 257-280; his concerns are more of the effect on societies, regardless of the theological position of those making the religious predictions). My examples would claim to be within the mainstream of biblical Christianity (with the qualified exception of Montanism—they broke from the universal church due to the complaint that mainstream Christianity wasn’t ascetic enough).

⁵ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 2:417-422.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 423. Schaff’s footnote on this quote says: “In this point, as in others, Montanism bears a striking affinity to Irvingism, but differs from it by its democratic, anti-hierarchical constitution. Irvingism asserts not only the continuance of the apostolic gifts, but also of all the apostolic offices, especially the twelfold apostolate, and is highly ritualistic.”

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Christ and the millennial reign, which was supposed to happen in Pepuza, a small village of Phrygia (in modern Turkey). The meetings that took place here under his watch-care were characterized by speaking in tongues and prophecy. Tertullian, who became a Montanist, records this eyewitness account:

For, seeing that we acknowledge spiritual *charismata*, or gifts, we too have merited the attainment of the prophetic gift, although coming after John (the Baptist). We have now amongst us a sister whose lot it has been to be favored with sundry gifts of revelation, which she experiences in the Spirit by ecstatic vision amidst the sacred rites of the Lord’s day in the church: she converses with angels, and sometimes even with the Lord; she both sees and hears mysterious communications; some men’s hearts she understands, and to them who are in need she distributes remedies. Whether it be in the reading of Scriptures, or in the chanting of psalms, or in the preaching of sermons, or in the offering up of prayers, in all these religious services matter and opportunity are afforded to her of seeing visions. It may possibly have happened to us, whilst this sister of ours was rapt in the Spirit, that we had discoursed in some ineffable way about the soul. After the people are dismissed at the conclusion of the sacred services, she is in the regular habit of reporting to us whatever things she may have seen in vision (for all her communications are examined with the most scrupulous care, in order that their truth may be probed). “Amongst other things,” says she, “there has been shown to me a soul in bodily shape, and a spirit has been in the habit of appearing to me; not, however, a void and empty illusion, but such as would offer itself to be even grasped by the hand, soft and transparent and of an ethereal color, and in form resembling that of a human being in every respect.” This was her vision, and for her witness there was God...⁷

The movement was too ascetic and too fanatical to gain any traction. It soon dwindled away and aspects of the movement appeared in other heresies and sects in the following centuries.

Zwickau Prophets

Thomas Münzer was a powerful speaker and influential leader in the Peasants’ War during the 1520s in Germany. After he arrived in Zwickau, he stirred up religious excitement already begun by two other fanatics, Nicolaus Storch and Marcus Thomä Stübner. Here he appoints 12 apostles and 72 disciples. The local magistrates interfere and they were forced to leave. Philip Schaff explains,

These Zwickau Prophets, as they were called, agreed with Carlstadt in combining an inward mysticism with practical radicalism. They boasted of visions, dreams, and direct communications with God and the Angel Gabriel, disparaged the written word and regular ministry, rejected infant baptism, and predicted the

⁷ Tertullian, *The Soul’s Testimony*, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 3, edited by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Albany, Ore.: Sages Software, 1996): 349-350. The title of chapter 9 is “Particulars of the Alleged Communication to a Montanist Sister.”

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overthrow of the existing order of things, and the near approach of a democratic millennium.⁸

Whatever a democratic millennium might actually look like, the Bible doesn’t say. But that sort of heightened anticipation of the end of the age, coupled with the self-promotion of leaders who claim to have exalted spiritual experiences and/or powers is strangely reminiscent of Montanus.

Martin Luther recognized that confronting this dangerous teaching was worth risking his personal safety and protection. Luther came out of hiding at Wartburg Castle, in order to check the radical and increasingly violent reactions of these self-appointed prophets. “As to the pretended revelations of the new prophets, he despised them, and maintained that an inspired prophet must either be ordinarily called by church authority, or prove his divine commission by miracles.”⁹

Edward Irving

Edward Irving might accurately be called ‘The Morning Star of the Modern Charismatic Movement.’ Though trained and mentored briefly by the deeply spiritual and orthodox Thomas Chalmers, Irving went his own way theologically once he escaped from an assistant role in his own parish—the Caledonian Chapel in London (in 1821). He was a powerful speaker. His church grew quickly. He was a headliner. Poor and politician alike attended the chapel. The popularity and love of applause fed his innate desire for more influence and attention. In a chapter titled “Irving’s Reaction to Popularity,” Arnold Dallimore quotes B. B. Warfield:

Irving’s sudden and unexampled popular applause did not completely turn his head, but it distinctly injured him. It left him an enthusiastic, simple-minded man; but it gave him overweening confidence in himself; and it infected him with the illusion that some high and world-wide mission had been committed to him.¹⁰

In the four years before his ministry became focused on the charismatic gifts (1824-28),¹¹ Irving focused more and more on interpretation of prophecy. This certainly may have begun as a healthy focus on the reputed neglect of teaching about the second-coming of Christ, but, coupled with his penchant for the imaginative and fantastic, it was disastrous.

In the ensuing years, the Chapel became a hot-bed for every spiritual gift. Prophecies were made for Christ to return on June 27, 1835.¹² Tongues were commonplace,¹³ as well as interpretation.¹⁴ Healings and the resurrection power were

⁸ Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 7:381.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 382.

¹⁰ Arnold Dallimore, *The Life of Edward Irving: The Fore-runner of the Charismatic Movement* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1983): 38.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 60.

¹² *Ibid.*, 132.

¹³ See the section “The Modern Gift of Tongues is Different Than the Biblical Gift,” below. There, I document how the Irvingite movement was the first to postulate a gift of tongues that was ecstatic and unintelligible. This was a necessary emendation to their practice which had been exposed in print as not being a real, human language as advertised for several years.

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practiced, or attempted, but the inevitable failure caused doubt among outsiders, and despair to those loyal to the movement.¹⁵

Beyond the dangerous practices, strange pneumatology, and aberrant eschatology, Edward Irving’s orthodoxy fell into question over the issue of whether Jesus Christ had a sinful human nature.¹⁶ To my knowledge, he never affirmed that Christ actively committed sin. He did, however, teach that Jesus shared a post-fall Adamic human nature, which was a sinful nature like ours. The emphasis on how similar Christ was to us, though always victorious, inevitably undermined the unique substitution of Christ in our place. “...we overcoming sin as Christ overcame sin, we doing the same works as Christ by the Spirit, tended to become the *all-important* element in his teaching. The Christian’s foundation, ‘Christ died for our sins’, was obscured.”¹⁷

It is a sad commentary on the fruitlessness of such ministry that he lost popularity with many who were disillusioned by the fraudulent practices. He lost power in the church due to an establishment of Apostles and Prophets. Their authority kept Irving from being “little more than a servant, subject to their utterances and therefore to their commands.”¹⁸ With sad irony, Irving died in a state of expectancy—awaiting the gift of tongues, and healing from the sickness he endured. This healing would be “a testimony to all Britain of the reality of the charismatic gifts.”¹⁹ It never came, and he died on December 4, 1834.

History of Cessationism

The history of cessationism is too large for us to even scratch the surface. In fact, cessationism has been more than the majority position throughout church history. Every faithful Christian and movement I know of before 1900 would rightly be placed in the cessationist category. Nathan Busenitz, who did doctoral research in the church fathers (orthodox preachers and bishops after the apostles through the 4th century, approximately), compiled most of the following quotes.

John Chrysostom (c. 344–407) said, “This whole place [speaking about 1 Corinthians 12] is very obscure: but the obscurity is produced by our ignorance of the facts referred to and by their cessation, being such as then used to occur but now no longer take place.”²⁰ And he also declared, “Argue not because miracles do not happen now, that they did not happen then... In those times they were profitable, and now they are not.”²¹

Augustine (354–430) said, “In the earliest times, the Holy Spirit fell upon them that believe and they spoke with tongues, which they had not learned, as the Spirit gave them utterance. These were signs adapted to the time. For there was this betokening of the Holy Spirit in all tongues [languages] to show that the gospel of God was to run

¹⁴ Dallimore, *Edward Irving*, 106-7.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 107, 138, 145, 154, 156-7.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 79-82.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 82.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 161.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 168.

²⁰ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on 1 Corinthians*, 36.7. Chrysostom is commenting on 1 Cor 12:1–2 and introducing the entire chapter. Cited from *1–2 Corinthians*, in the Ancient Christian Commentary Series, 146.

²¹ B.B. Warfield, *Counterfeit Miracles*, 46.

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through all tongues over the whole earth. That thing was done for a sign, and it passed away.”²²

Theodoret of Cyrus (c. 393–c. 466) said, “In former times those who accepted the divine preaching and who were baptized for their salvation were given visible signs of the grace of the Holy Spirit at work in them. Some spoke in tongues which they did not know and which nobody had taught them, while others performed miracles or prophesied. The Corinthians also did these things, but they did not use the gifts as they should have done. They were more interested in showing off than in using them for the edification of the church. . . . Even in our time grace is given to those who are deemed worthy of holy baptism, but it may not take the same form as it did in those days.”²³

Martin Luther (1483–1546) said, “In the early Church the Holy Spirit was sent forth in visible form. He descended upon Christ in the form of a dove (Matthew 3:16), and in the likeness of fire upon the apostles and other believers (Acts 2:3). This visible outpouring of the Holy Spirit was necessary to the establishment of the early Church, as were also the miracles that accompanied the gift of the Holy Ghost. Paul explained the purpose of these miraculous gifts of the Spirit in I Corinthians 14:22, ‘Tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not.’ Once the Church had been established and properly advertised by these miracles, the visible appearance of the Holy Ghost ceased.”²⁴

John Calvin (1509–1564) said, “Though Christ does not expressly state whether he intends this gift [of miracles] to be temporary, or to remain perpetually in the Church, yet it is more probable that miracles were promised only for a time, in order to give lustre to the gospel while it was new or in a state of obscurity.”²⁵ And again, “The gift of healing, like the rest of the miracles, which the Lord willed to be brought forth for a time, has vanished away in order to make the preaching of the Gospel marvellous for ever.”²⁶

John Owen (1616–1683) said, “Gifts which in their own nature exceed the whole power of all our faculties, that dispensation of the Spirit is long since ceased and where it is now pretended unto by any, it may justly be suspected as an enthusiastic delusion.”²⁷ And in a comment on the warning of Hebrews 6, he said, “It is true, those alone are here firstly and directly intended who in those days had received extraordinary or miraculous gifts of the Holy Ghost. But this, by just analogy, may be extended unto others, now those gifts are ceased in the church.”²⁸

Thomas Watson (1620–1686) said, “Sure, there is as much need of ordination now as in Christ’s time and in the time of the apostles, there being then extraordinary gifts in the church which are now ceased.”²⁹

²² Augustine, *Homilies on the First Epistle of John*, 6.10. Cf. Schaff, *NPNF*, First Series, 7:497–98.

²³ Theodoret of Cyrus, *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 240, 43; in reference to 1 Corinthians 12:1, 7. Cited from *1–2 Corinthians*, ACCS, 117.

²⁴ Martin Luther, *Commentary on Galatians 4*, Trans. by Theodore Graebner [Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1949], pp. 150-172. This is from Luther’s comment on Galatians 4:6.

²⁵ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels*, III:389.

²⁶ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, IV.19.18.

²⁷ John Owen, *Works*, 4:518.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 7:45-46.

²⁹ Thomas Watson, *The Beatitudes*, 140.

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Matthew Henry (1662–1714) said, “What these gifts were is at large told us in the body of the chapter [1 Corinthians 12]; namely, extraordinary offices and powers, bestowed on ministers and Christians in the first ages, for conviction of unbelievers, and propagation of the gospel.”³⁰ And in another place, “The gift of tongues was one new product of the spirit of prophecy and given for a particular reason, that, the Jewish pale being taken down, all nations might be brought into the church. These and other gifts of prophecy, being a sign, have long since ceased and been laid aside, and we have no encouragement to expect the revival of them; but, on the contrary, are directed to call the scriptures the more sure word of prophecy, more sure than voices from heaven; and to them we are directed to take heed, to search them, and to hold them fast, 2 Peter 1:19.”³¹

John Gill (1697–1771) said, “Now these gifts [in 1 Corinthians 12:9] were bestowed in common, by the Spirit, on apostles, prophets, and pastors, or elders of the church, in those early times: the Alexandrian copy, and the Vulgate Latin version, read, ‘by one Spirit’.”³² And later, “No; when these gifts [1 Corinthians 12:30] were in being, all had them not. When anointing with oil, in order to heal the sick, was in use, it was only performed by the elders of the church, not by the common members of it, who were to be sent for by the sick on this occasion.”³³

Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758) said, “In the days of his [Jesus’] flesh, his disciples had a measure of the miraculous gifts of the Spirit, being enabled thus to teach and to work miracles. But after the resurrection and ascension, was the most full and remarkable effusion of the Spirit in his miraculous gifts that ever took place, beginning with the day of Pentecost, after Christ had risen and ascended to heaven. And in consequence of this, not only here and there an extraordinary person was endowed with these extraordinary gifts, but they were common in the church, and so continued during the lifetime of the apostles, or till the death of the last of them, even the apostle John, which took place about a hundred years from the birth of Christ; so that the first hundred years of the Christian era, or the first century, was the era of miracles.

“But soon after that, the canon of Scripture being completed when the apostle John had written the book of Revelation, which he wrote not long before his death, these miraculous gifts were no longer continued in the church. For there was now completed an established written revelation of the mind and will of God, wherein God had fully recorded a standing and all-sufficient rule for his church in all ages. And the Jewish church and nation being overthrown, and the Christian church and the last dispensation of the church of God being established, the miraculous gifts of the Spirit were no longer needed, and therefore they ceased; for though they had been continued in the church for so many ages, yet then they failed, and God caused them to fail because there was no further occasion for them. And so was fulfilled the saying of the text, “Whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.” And now there seems to be an end to all such fruits of the Spirit as these, and we have no reason to expect them any more.”³⁴

³⁰ Matthew Henry, *Complete Commentary*, in reference to 1 Corinthians 12.

³¹ Matthew Henry, Preface to Vol. IV of his *Exposition of OT & NT*, vii.

³² John Gill’s commentary on 1 Corinthians 12:9.

³³ John Gill’s commentary on 1 Corinthians 12:30.

³⁴ Jonathan Edwards, Sermon entitled, “The Holy Spirit Forever To Be Communicated To The Saints, In The Grace Of Charity, Or Divine Love” on 1 Corinthians 13:8.

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Edwards also said, “Of the extraordinary gifts, they were given ‘in order to the founding and establishing of the church in the world. But since the canon of Scriptures has been completed, and the Christian church fully founded and established, these extraordinary gifts have ceased.”³⁵

Before the end of the 19th century, continuationists hardly had a list like this beyond the embarrassing exceptions mentioned earlier. We could put virtually every faithful gospel preacher from after the apostles until 1900 on this list. As impressive as this list is, however, we need to answer this question with the truth of Scripture. There is a remote possibility that everyone within Christianity was wrong on this issue for 1900 years.

The Modern Gift Of Prophecy Is Different than the Biblical Gift

For the revelatory gift of prophecy to be biblically valid today, it must be as infallible and authoritative as it was in the New Testament. The modern prophetic movement typically allows for prophecy that is less accurate and less authoritative than Scripture.³⁶ This isn’t consistent with biblical pattern.

What is the gift of prophecy? Many good men have mistaken the gift as being identical with that of preaching. They may articulate that the main function of this gift is an ability to proclaim truth. It is wrong to assume that prophecy is simply the gift of ‘forthtelling’ in a sense of a gifted preacher. The function of a prophet is distinct from the function of a herald, the typical word for preaching or a preacher. The main function of both involves proclamation, but they differ in how they received they proclaim. The

³⁵ Jonathan Edwards, *Charity and its Fruits*, 29.

³⁶ There are plenty of examples of theologians who articulate that the personal revelations and impressions that they receive as prophets are just as authoritative and accurate as Scripture. This undermining of Scripture’s sufficiency and authority is identical to that of Roman Catholicism and Mormonism. Whether a pope, council, or president speak infallibly, it inevitably undermines the sole sufficiency of the Word of God for everything we need for life and godliness (2 Pet. 1:3-4). Peter himself declares (2 Pet. 1:16-21) that greater certainty about the transfiguration comes from the Word of God than his own personal eyewitness account!

I am not taking on this extremely dangerous position. I am taking on the approach which attempts to respect the unique nature of Scripture. In their desire to honor God’s Word, those who maintain that Scripture has unique authority bring confusion by redefining a new version of prophecy that is less-authoritative and not necessarily inerrant. This undermines the sufficiency of God’s Word as a sole authority.

For example, Wayne Grudem writes very helpfully and clearly on the nature of Scripture in chapters 2-8 of his *Systematic Theology*. Nevertheless, his view of Scripture erodes with his exaltation of prophecy. Ironically, he redefines prophecy as less authoritative or even less accurate than Scripture, in order to maintain a reverence for the unique authority of Scripture. This move always undermines Scripture because there is suddenly something else that speaks with *some* authority, no matter how you qualify it. This undermines Scripture’s authority, inevitably. In Grudem’s case, we see this in his discussion about Creation. He acknowledges that Scripture seems to teach a six-day literal creation, and yet scientifically observable facts favor an old earth view (p. 308). Which is true? Rather than landing on the sole authority of God’s Word, Grudem equivocates, “...with respect to the length of days in Genesis 1, the possibility must be left open that God has chosen not to give us enough information to come to a clear decision on this question” (p. 297). Embracing an experiential personal revelation from God undermines Scripture’s authority, no matter how much *sola Scriptura* is affirmed doctrinally.

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herald simply passed on the message as he was given it. There was nothing remarkable about the herald’s access to the source of the message. If he were employed by the king, he would be handed the message as it was to be relayed to the cities or provinces under his responsibility. His qualifications had to include details like a loud, clear voice which would carry across a noisy city square. Most importantly, however, the position demanded integrity to the message. The king needed to know that his heralds wouldn’t alter, leave off, add to, or change any aspect of the message they were handed.³⁷

Prophecy, on the other hand, refers to the man who receives messages that have been given only to him. The three definitions for this word bear that out:

1. to proclaim an inspired revelation, *prophesy*
2. to tell about someth. that is hidden from view, *tell, reveal*
3. to foretell someth. that lies in the future, *foretell, prophesy*³⁸

None of these would fit the description of a herald. Even the first definition doesn’t allow for the simple reading or proclaiming of *someone else’s* inspired revelation, but all the examples refer to one’s own inspired revelation from God. Wayne Grudem describes the definition of the word for ‘to prophesy’ (profhteu/w):

Although several definitions have been given for the gift of prophecy, a fresh examination of the New Testament teaching on this gift will show that it should be defined not as ‘predicting the future,’ nor as ‘proclaiming a word from the Lord,’ nor as ‘powerful preaching’—but rather as ‘*telling something that God has spontaneously brought to mind.*’³⁹

I would tweak the definition this way: *telling something that God has revealed directly to you.* The issue isn’t necessarily the spontaneity (cf. Acts 27:23—this instance doesn’t seem spontaneous, but it shows a delay between the revelation and delivery), but the unmediated nature of the revelation. However, Grudem is right to distinguish prophecy in this way from the commonly accepted notion of ‘preaching’ or ‘heralding.’

Consider the example of the soldiers who mocked Jesus. They covered his face, and punched him brutally in the head. Their mockery included this statement—“Prophecy to us, You Christ; who is the one who hit You?” (Matt. 26:68). They were not asking for a sermon or display of speaking ability, but for proof that He was the Messiah by giving them information that He couldn’t have access to by natural resources of data gathering. To know the names of the men who punched him while wearing the blindfold would require unmediated revelation from God.

Now, let’s consider the nature of prophecy as to its accuracy and authority. A prophecy is as infallible and inerrant as God, and it holds as much authority as God does. If a messenger brings a message to a lieutenant from the general of the army, that message contains as much authority as the general himself. Now, imagine if the messenger tampers with the message and gives the lieutenant a command that didn’t come from the general. That command *in reality* will have as much authority as the

³⁷ TDNT, 3:683-87.

³⁸ Fredrick William Danker, ed., *A Greek—English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, Third Edition (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1957, 1979, 2000): 890. (Hereafter, BDAG.)

³⁹ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 1049.

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messenger (none!), but the deception will be disastrous for the task at hand. An obedient lieutenant will follow the order *as though* the command came from the general. An errant message has no more authority than the source. The examples of prophecy in both testaments were infallibly accurate in their predictive elements (Deut. 18:21-22; i.e., 1 Kg. 13:2-5 and 2 Kg. 23:15-16; Isa. 7:16 and 8:3-4; Acts 11:28), as well as the fact that they claimed divine authority. For example, an OT prophet may say, “Thus says the LORD” (among the hundreds of examples, see Ex. 5:1 or Isa. 1:11). On the other hand, a NT prophet may say, “This is what the Holy Spirit says” (Acts 21:11).

In spite of this, many Charismatics today claim that Scripture is authoritative, but prophecy still serves a non-threatening role in the church. They say that prophecy in the church age is potentially fallible, and less-authoritative than that of the OT prophet. Wayne Grudem defends this position with the great skill and clarity. My willingness to take him on in this issue should not take away from my appreciation for many areas of his writings which are very edifying and helpful. My willingness to speak out here is a testimony of two things: 1) I respect his desire to be biblical, and I find him to be the least eccentric example of an attempt to be a biblical charismatic, and 2) I find this teaching very contrary to Scripture and dangerous for Christians. I must speak out about this for the spiritual benefit that comes from teaches all the Scriptures teach. To shrink from teaching the whole counsel of God because another brother in Christ disagrees would be to incur guilt on myself and to take away benefit from all of you at Grace Immanuel Bible Church (Acts 20:20, 26-27).

According to Grudem, there are five indications that New Testament prophets did not speak with authority equal to the words of Scripture:

1. Acts 21:4
2. Acts 21:10-11
3. 1 Thess 5:19-21
4. 1 Cor 14:29-38
5. Apostolic Preparations for Their Absence

1. Acts 21:4

*This seems to be a reference to prophecy directed towards Paul, but Paul disobeyed it! He never would have done this if this prophecy contained God’s very words and had authority equal to Scripture.*⁴⁰

This explanation is more plausible in the English than the original. I was greatly helped in thinking through this issue when I preached through the book of Acts a few years ago. The original reads like this: *who [disciples, 4a] were speaking to Paul through the Spirit, to not go up to Jerusalem.* This is as literal as I can translate it. The function of the infinitive ‘to not go up’ is likely one of purpose or result—*speaking to Paul through the Spirit in order that [so that] he might not go up to Jerusalem.*

This means that the speaking was prophetic and spiritual utterance, just like what happens through Agabus in the next passage (21:11), coupled with encouragement to the effect to avoid Jerusalem like the plague (also in the next passage, 21:12-13). There is no

⁴⁰ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 1052.

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violation of the Spirit’s prophecy. The Spirit didn’t give instruction, “Persuade Paul not to go!” He gave promised prediction, “This will happen to Paul!” The disciples in Tyre (4), and the travelling companions of Paul, as well as residents of Caesarea (13) were the ones who were attempting to persuade him.

So, instead of disobedience of a prophecy, Paul merely disregards the well-intentions wishes of his friends, in order to obey the content of what was prophesied each time—arrest in Jerusalem. That is recognized even by the well-wishers in vv. 13-14.

What Grudem never mentions is the prophecy that Paul received in 20:22-24. The Spirit’s prophecy contained the revelation that Paul would be arrested or imprisoned. Paul says nothing about persuasion not to go to Jerusalem. In fact, Acts 19:21 explains that the same Spirit that gives prophecy put intentionality in Paul’s heart to go to Jerusalem: “Paul purposed in the Spirit to go to Jerusalem after he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia.” Is the Spirit now contradicting Himself? Grudem would obviously make the case that God told Paul correctly in 20:22-24 came through the disciples at Tyre incorrectly, or fallibly.

But grammatically, there are other ways that Luke could have made it clear that the persuasion not to go was part of the prophecy. He could have used direct discourse (with a ὅτι clause, virtually the same as our quotation marks), or indirect discourse with a finite verb. The infinitive (*to not set foot in Jerusalem*) could express the content of what they said through the Spirit, but it isn’t likely in light of the options. It makes much more sense for the infinitive to function as a typical purpose/result of the prophecy, so that the disciples prophesied through the Spirit, with the intended result that he not go. This is the best option grammatically, and is, in fact, what happens in 21:11-14.

2. Acts 21:10-11

Agabus prophesied that the Jews at Jerusalem would bind Paul and ‘deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles,’ a prediction that was nearly correct but not quite: the Romans, not the Jews, bound Paul, and the Jews, rather than delivering him voluntarily, tried to kill him and he had to be rescued by force. The prediction was not far off, but it had inaccuracies in detail that would have called into question the validity of any Old Testament prophet. On the other hand, this text could be perfectly well explained by supposing that Agabus had had a vision of Paul as a prisoner of the Romans in Jerusalem, surrounded by an angry mob of Jews. His own interpretation of such a ‘vision’ or ‘revelation’ from the Holy Spirit would be that the Jews had bound Paul and handed him over to the Romans, and that is what Agabus would (somewhat erroneously) prophesy. This is exactly the kind of fallible prophecy proposed above—reporting in one’s own words something that God has spontaneously brought to mind.⁴¹

There are a few significant problems with this argument:

- a. It’s an argument from silence. Acts 21:27-32 does not affirm that the Jews apprehended him *without* rope or the use of any restraint. The text never affirms that. Are we to assume that they talked Paul out of the temple so

⁴¹ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 1052.

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that they could kill him in the Court of the Gentiles? That is equally absurd and unfounded as Grudem’s explanation that they did this without binding him in any way.

- b. The idea that the Romans arrested Paul without the aid of the Jews is entirely unbiblical. Instead of reading about Roman soldiers peeling Jews off of Paul in order to arrest them against their wishes, 21:32-33 affirms exactly what Agabus said: “when [the Jews] saw the commander and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul.” The next thing that happens is a peaceable exchange where the commander arrests Paul.
- c. This agrees with what Paul himself says to the Roman Jews in Acts 28:17, “Brethren, though I had done nothing against our people or the customs of our fathers, yet I was delivered as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans.”

Samuel Waldron is right to fear “that the interpretive approach used by Continuationists with reference to Agabus, if applied to the rest of the Bible, would uncover errors in many places where conservative Continuationists would not like to find them.”⁴²

3. 1 Thess 5:19-21

If the Thessalonians had thought that prophecy equaled God’s Word in authority, he would never have had to tell the Thessalonians not to despise it—they ‘received’ and ‘accepted’ God’s Word ‘with joy from the Holy Spirit’ (1:6; 2:13). But when Paul tells them to ‘test everything’ it must include at least the prophecies he mentioned in the previous phrase. He implies that prophecies contain some things that are good and some things that are not good when he encourages them to ‘hold fast what is good.’⁴³

I found this confusing. If Paul’s exhortation to not despise prophecies but to test them means that prophecies could have flaws *and still be legitimately called a God-given gift of prophecy*, this means that we shouldn’t despise *false prophecies* but only pick from within each prophecy the bad portions from the good! The simple need to test everything—whether prophecy or written instruction—doesn’t invalidate the truthfulness of prophecy or Scripture.

For example, Paul knows that someone can write a false epistle as though it were actual Scripture (this happened in 2 Thess 2:1-2). But the fact that there are imposter apostles and imposter epistles, doesn’t mean that true epistles are full of error! In fact, the Bereans examined Paul’s teaching with Scripture and Luke commended them for it! Grudem concludes, “This is something that could never have been said of the words of an Old Testament prophet, or the authoritative teachings of a New Testament apostle.”

⁴² Samuel E. Waldron, *To Be Continued?: Are the Miraculous Gifts for Today?* (Merrick, New York: Calvary Press Publishing, 2005): 67.

⁴³ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 1054.

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Doesn’t Deuteronomy (13:1-5; 18:15-22) say exactly the opposite of what Grudem affirms? The fact that OT prophecy must be examined by previous revelation doesn’t make *any* portion of the OT fallible. When a prophet tells Israel to disobey and performs a *real, genuine, bona fide miracle or sign*, you aren’t suppose to sift through his message and keep the good, throw out the bad. You are supposed to kill the imposter! “Cling to what is good” refers to the whole content, not to the scraps of orthodoxy from the mouth of a pretender.

4. 1 Cor 14:29-38

[Paul] suggests that they should listen carefully and sift the good from the bad, accepting some and rejecting the rest... If prophecy had absolute divine authority, it would be sin to do this. But here Paul commands that it be done, suggesting that New Testament prophecy did not have the authority of God’s very words.”⁴⁴

This argument is so similar to #3, that my answer above would sufficiently answer this argument. However, in light of the 1 Corinthians context it is helpful to make one additional observation—there is no such thing as a smorgasbord approach to prophecy. It is not something that you discern what *portions* of the prophecy you want to eat from the *portions* that look like they’ve been sitting under the infrared light for six hours. No, the gift ‘discerning of spirits’ refers to the diagnosis of the source of the prophecy. The other prophets evaluated the prophecy given (14:29) by using the gift of ‘distinguishing of spirits’ (12:10). 1 Corinthians 12:3 explains that the source of the prophecy determines whether any of it or all of it is true!

5. Apostolic Preparations for Their Absence

The problem of successors to the apostles is solved not by encouraging Christians to listen to the *prophets* (even though there were prophets around) but by pointing to the *Scriptures*.⁴⁵

His parenthetical comment begs the very question we are asking. Imagine the following interaction with Dr. Grudem: “Do prophecies continue today?” Grudem: “Yes, but they’re fallible.” “How do you know?” Grudem: “Because the apostles point Christians back to the Scriptures, not to prophecies.” “Isn’t that because prophecies cease, while the Scripture continue on?” Grudem: “No, because prophecies continue today.” The argument that prophecies continue because they continue must be abandoned.

There is an easy answer to the fact that Paul didn’t point others towards prophesy in his latter letters—prophesy was terminating! The pastorals have no future reference to the miraculous gifts. The only references to prophecy (1Tim 1:18; 4:14) look back at least a decade or more. It doesn’t continue on into post-apostolic church life. Instead, Paul declares the prophetic function to be foundational, along with the gift of

⁴⁴ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 1054.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 1055.

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apostleship.⁴⁶ So, in the final analysis, the argument that modern-day prophecy is less-authoritative and fallible doesn’t agree with what God says in His word. The true gift of prophecy claimed divine authority. It’s infallibility is proven in the prophetic evaluation, and by the fulfillment of predictive elements in the future.

The Modern Gift Of Tongues Is Different than the Biblical Gift

For the miraculous gifts to be biblically valid today, they must be biblical in essence, purpose, and practice. The modern tongues-movement is not faithful to the Bible in any of those three categories.

The word ‘tongues’ as a description of the spiritual gift comes from the Greek word *glōssa* (*glōssa*), which means, in a literal sense, the organ in your mouth used for speaking, or metaphorically, a distinct spoken language. Either way, ‘tongue’ would be an acceptable translation. Through widespread practice, this gift is commonly asserted to be the ability to speak in an unknown, unintelligible language. In some charismatic contexts the ability to speak with an ecstatic utterance is a sign of the Spirit’s presence in one’s life for the purpose of living “the victorious life.”⁴⁷ In other contexts, it is simply articulated as a language useful for speaking intimately with the Lord.⁴⁸ In order to understand the gift of tongues properly, let’s ask the questions *What are they?*, *Why do they exist?*, and *How were/are they used?*

The essence of tongues—What are they? The biblical evidence clearly indicates that the gift of tongues was a supernatural gift that involved a real human language that the gifted person had never studied before. In other words, the speaker didn’t learn the language through normal study or a natural learning process. The main purpose of tongues is to bring truth to unbelievers and to serve as an indictment against Jews who reject Jesus as their Messiah. Here is a short definition: *the gift of tongues was the ability to speak a previously unknown, foreign, human language as a sign of judgment on unbelieving Jews.*

Acts 2 and 1 Corinthians 12-14 use the Greek word *glōssa* (*glōssa*) for ‘a language’ or ‘a tongue.’ In addition to this word, Acts also uses *diaklektos* (*dialectos*—Acts 2:6, 8) for a ‘language of a nation or region.’⁴⁹ The miracle of tongues was not a miracle of the ear. Acts 2:8 does say that everyone heard Christians speaking in their own language. But we know that they heard what was actually coming out of the apostles’ mouths because verse 4 says, “And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance.” So, the gift of tongues pertains to the mouth, not the ear. The audience heard *exactly what was coming out of the apostle’s mouths*. Luke explains that they heard languages, or dialects

⁴⁶ See Eph. 2:20 and the section below titled “Apostles & Prophets Were Foundational, Not Perpetual.”

⁴⁷ I.e., see Neil Babcock, *My Search for Charismatic Reality* (London: The Wakeman Trust, 1985): 20.

⁴⁸ I.e., see Douglas Oss, *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today?*, 215-18.

⁴⁹ BDAG, *A Greek—English Lexicon*, 232.

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native to Parthia, Media, Elam, Mesopotamia, etc. (see the list which covers North Africa, Europe, and Asia; Acts 2:9-11), because the apostles were speaking in these languages. The shocking aspect of the miracle wasn’t that unintelligible speech was being translated supernaturally in their ear, but that these simple Galileans were speaking languages they didn’t know and hadn’t learned naturally (2:7).

Paul’s instruction on tongues in 1 Corinthians is just as clear. 1 Cor. 14:10 literally reads this way, “If there happen to be so many types of languages (even ‘species’ of languages or speaking) in the world, not even one is without meaning.”⁵⁰ A language that doesn’t contain patterned and consistent forms of speech isn’t effective in communicating information. In the same way, indistinct noises on the bugle aren’t effective for troops to assemble, attack, or retreat (14:7-8). The bugle playing a wailing moan that never lands on a pitch may be guilty of making noise, but no one could legitimately call it a song. What is ironic about this paragraph for the continuationist who believes that tongues is an unintelligible speech is verses 10 and 11. If no language is without meaning (10), then even when someone speaks an actual human language that I don’t know, I will be like a barbarian to the speaker (11). Paul’s argument highlights the futility and worthlessness of speaking a language in a congregation where Christians don’t understand that language. In that case, it is futile because it doesn’t edify the majority, the native speaking congregation.

Both Acts and 1 Corinthians are clear—tongues are intelligible languages which obviously have meaning in and of themselves, if not to the speaker and the native speaking audience. Although the notion that ‘tongues’ consist of speaking unintelligible utterances is commonplace today, it is not old. In fact, before the modern Charismatic movement, tongues were widely regarded as the gift of speaking other known human languages that the speaker had never studied before. As Arnold Dallimore records, this idea of tongues as actual languages

...was not a new idea. Rather, for centuries it had been believed that the gift of tongues, instead of being the production of unintelligible sounds, was the ability to speak a language which had not been learned. This had been the claim of the Montanists in the second century, and of several groups which used ‘tongues’ during the Middle Ages. The biographers of such Roman Catholic missionaries as Francis Xavier and Vincent Ferrer made it appear these men spoke in unlearned languages, although such claims did not stand up under examination.⁵¹

When did this idea creep into the church, that Acts teaches a gift of tongues that is a real language as spoken by the apostles, and 1 Corinthians teaches that tongues are unintelligible utterances are spoken by those lay-people in the church? The answer goes back to Edward Irving, prior to the modern tongues movement of the 1900s.

The Irvingite movement consistently maintained that the gift of tongues was a real language throughout 1828-1831. Edward Irving had no doubts about the fact that the spiritual gift of tongues were actual, known human languages:

⁵⁰ This is my translation.

⁵¹ Dallimore, *Edward Irving*, 115.

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It is a mere abandonment of all truth to call it screaming or crying... And when the speech utters itself in the way of a psalm or spiritual song, it is the likeliest to some of the most simple and ancient chants in the cathedral service... So far from being unmeaning gibberish, as the thoughtless and heedless sons of Belial have said, it is regularly-formed[,] well-proportioned, deeply-felt discourse, which evidently wanted *only the ear of him whose native tongue it is*, to make it a very masterpiece of powerful speech.⁵²

By 1832, some of the followers were beginning to doubt the legitimacy of the movement. One young lady, Mary Campbell (Caird), claimed she could speak Pelew, Turkish and Chinese. She moved to Europe to maximize her ability of speaking in tongues for the purpose of evangelism. She and her husband “were immediately forced to recognize her gift of tongues did not enable her to speak any of the languages they came upon.”⁵³ They returned to England, and dropped all missionary ambition and charismatic practice.

George Pilkington felt similarly burned by the movement. This man was influenced mightily by the congregation and the charismatic practice. After regular exposure to the gift and conversation with those who practiced it, Pilkington saw the absurdity of what was happening. It wasn’t just that those speaking in tongues were speaking unintelligible utterances, but that they were manifestly proven as *not* being real languages as maintained for centuries of church history. Sometime before September, 1831, George left the movement. He published a pamphlet with the following title: *The Unknown Tongues Discovered to be English, Spanish, and Latin and the Reverend Edward Irving Proved Erroneous In Attributing These Utterances To the Influence Of The Holy Spirit*. The more-succinct subtitle ran as follows: *Various interesting colloquies between the writer and Mr. Irving and his followers, and observations which manifestly show they are all under a delusion*.⁵⁴

By 1832, the fraudulent claim of real languages was thoroughly exposed. There was no chance of maintaining that this was the biblical gift of tongues. Rather than acknowledge the deceit and admit the whole thing was a hoax,

The difficulty was overcome by the assertion that there were two kinds of tongues in the New Testament: (1) those of the day of Pentecost which were languages and (2) those of the Church at Corinth which it was now claimed were merely the ecstatic utterance of incoherent sounds. And since the phenomenon which appeared in Scotland and London did not prove to be this first kind there was now a general acceptance of the idea that it was the second kind which was being experienced.

The realization the tongues were not languages proved a further disappointment to Irving. But he satisfied his own mind in the matter by stating that God had as yet granted only the Corinthian type, that He had done this merely in order to

⁵² *Ibid.*, 116.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 157.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 121.

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introduce the restoration of the gifts, and that the Pentecostal type, the languages, would come later.⁵⁵

It is sad to see the defense of a fraudulent experience control the way we view Scripture. Don’t misunderstand my indictment here. I’m not saying it was fraudulent because *in my opinion* tongues is a real human language. No, it was fraudulent because it always maintained, up to 1832, that the utterances were a real human language. For the Irvingites, when they couldn’t respectably claim that their tongues-speaking was a real language, they changed their story which they had told for the past three years. Only after they were exposed did they finally discover that the Bible actually did teach two different kinds of tongues, and one of them happened to be the exact same unintelligible phenomenon that they were experiencing. This semi-plausible explanation is widely repeated today in spite of its lack of biblical merit.

The purpose of tongues—Why do they exist? Every spiritual gift is for the edification of the believers (1 Cor. 12:7; 14:5-6, 12, 17, 26). This is true of tongues and every other gift. Tongues are for the evangelism and benefit of the non-native speaker, and the only way they serve a purpose in the church is when they are translated for the benefit of the native-speaking congregation. If every gift is for the edification of others, who is benefitted by the speaking of nonsensical utterances? No one! Think about it, the translation benefits the native speaker, the speaking in tongues benefits the non-native speaker, but if people were supposedly speaking something like a divinely-coded message that meant nothing to no one until it was miraculously translated, who is benefitted by the meaningless in between stage of the tongue? It is utterly opposed to the purpose of spiritual gifts—*all must be done for edification!* In fact, since speaking in an actual foreign language doesn’t edify the church unless it is translated (14:3-6), let’s imagine the absurdity of speaking nonsense. Not only is the church not edified, but the outsider isn’t edified either. Who is edified? Again, no one, save only the tongue-speaker himself, who is arrogantly exalted as gifted. Meanwhile, the vainglorious display benefitted no one around him. This is in direct violation of the mandate that gifts must be exercised out of love for others, not self (13:1-7; especially “[love] does not seek its own” in verse 5).

But beyond the universal purpose of gifts, there is another *unique* purpose of tongues that Paul tells us about in 1 Corinthians 14:21-22—it is a *sign of condemnation on unbelieving Israel*. Here, Paul quotes Isaiah 28:11-12. Isaiah’s context affords a rich illustration for our understanding Paul’s point. Isaiah was ministering to the kingdom of Judah around the time that Assyria destroyed the northern tribes, the kingdom of Israel. After this event in 722 BC, Isaiah prophecies against those in Judah who have disregarded God’s word. This prophecy comes in six ‘Woes’ (Is. 28-33). In this first woe, Isaiah grieves that they have turned from His word, and rejected divine knowledge. God was going to conceal intelligent access to the truth (vv. 9-10, 13; compare 29:9-14 in the next woe), and their instruction would now come through foreign speech. The Assyrian conquest of Israel, the Babylonian conquest of Judah would both be signs of judgment on Israel for her unbelief. Instead of making pacts with the graves in order to avoid judgment, they should have trusted in Him (28:14-18).

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 157-58.

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The implications are significant for understanding the purpose of tongues. They aren’t just an encouragement to believers, though they can be with translation. They are primarily a sign of cursing on unbelieving Jews (“this people” in 1 Cor. 14:21). John MacArthur mentions the significance for the Jews of that first generation:

When the apostles spoke at Pentecost and were heard in their own language by Jews from many countries (Acts 2:7-11), those Jews should have known that God’s judgment was imminent. His judgment had fallen on rebellious Israel and then on rebellious Judah. How much more would it fall on those of His people who now had crucified the Son of God? In A.D. 70 that great judgment fell, when Jerusalem was utterly destroyed by the Roman general Titus (later emperor).⁵⁶

This purpose is consistent with the narratives of Acts. In the instances where you have tongues being spoken *explicitly*, there are Jews or Gentiles being saved in areas where there are Jews who are also unbelieving at the very first time the gospel would have been brought to that particular location (Acts 2 is the beginning of the beginning; Acts 10 is the beginning of Gentile conversion—if you count the Ethiopian as a proselyte minus circumcision; and Acts 19:1-7 is the inauguration of the church at Ephesus⁵⁷). It is always at a frontier conversion where this sign would indicate that a partial hardening has occurred, and the Gentiles, the nations, speaking foreign languages, are being saved into the church. This would also line up with the manifestation of tongues, if that is the implied way that the Spirit’s presence was seen in the Samaritan converts in Acts 8:17. Though we don’t know what the manifestation was, in all the previous examples it was either tongues, or tongues and prophecies (Acts 19:6).

The practice of tongues—How were they to be used? If Paul knew that tongues were used to benefit non-native speakers with the gospel, and they functioned a sign of condemnation on unbelieving Jews, then they were primarily practices in frontier conversions as the true gospel was manifested in an area that had no previous exposure to the apostolic gospel (i.e., Acts 2:4; 8:17—I am assuming that the manifestation of the Spirit was speaking in tongues, like the following examples—10:44-45; 19:6). Since this is the case, how would they be used in an organized church service so that everyone would be edified? Well, certainly without translation into the native tongue, the entire native-speaking congregation would not benefit. With translation, however, tongues would be similar to prophecy in that the congregation at large would be edified (1 Cor. 14:5). So, Paul gave the Corinthians a list of rules that would guarantee that tongues wouldn’t be abused for the selfish ends up self-promotion, but would build up one another the same way prophecy does (which is why 14:4 serves as an admonishment against tongues in a church setting without translation and a promotion of the use of prophecy). Seven rules protect tongues from abuse in 14:26-33:

1. It must be for edification (26).
2. There must not be more than two or three in any service (27).

⁵⁶ John MacArthur, *1 Corinthians* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1984): 382.

⁵⁷ Though Paul had been there previously, Acts 18:19-21 doesn’t seem to leave room for any conversions.

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3. One must interpret (27).
4. The speaker must keep silent in the absence of an interpreter (28).
5. Others must judge the content (29).
6. The speaker must sit down and remain silent if another receives a fresh revelation while he is speaking (30).
7. Each must speak one at a time (31).

This list is enough to indict every attempt to speak in tongues I have observed personally. Even the desire to pray in a tongue is condemned by rule #1. No one else is edified by praying in a tongue. As I mentioned above, when Paul says, “One who speaks in a tongue edifies himself,” he is indicting the self-promotion of such an act in a church service. In fact he contrasts that abuse with the following reason that prophecy is greater than tongues in church: “But one who prophesies edifies the church.” But beyond that, the practice of praying in a tongue was something that Paul never did. He actually declares that he spoke in tongues more than the Corinthians in 14:18 (after all, he was constantly on the frontier of gospel progress *and* experienced rejection by unbelieving Jews). But when it comes to praying in a tongue, Paul declares that this hypothetical practice would produce a situation where he would be praying in his spirit, but not with his mind (v. 14). So, what is Paul’s instruction on this practice? Verse 15 answers, “What is *the outcome* then? I will pray with the spirit and I will pray with the mind also.” Paul actually says that praying in a tongue is pointless because the mind is unfruitful. So, the biblical conclusion is this, *pray in your native tongue so that your mind and spirit are engaged.*

The Modern Gift Of Healing Is Different than the Biblical Gift

The biblical gift of healing didn’t refer to medical miracles sovereignly orchestrated by God. It refers to the gift given to an individual who would use that gift for the benefit of the church and confirmation of the apostolic message. In other words, the gift consisted in divine power healing the infirmed through the gifted individual; whereas, the unmediated miracle of healing happens perpetually according to God’s sovereign will. The only examples of individuals using the gift of healing in action are apostles and their ministry associates (i.e., the seventy—Luke 10:9, and possibly two of the seven deacons: Stephen—Acts 6:8, and Philip—Acts 8:6, 13). Healing was performed by virtue of the spiritual gift’s power, regardless of the faith of the person healed.

Healing ministries today are difficult to evaluate because they often have large differences among them. In spite of the differences, I have found some similarities. Healing ministries often believe one or both of the following:

1. Healing equals forgiveness.
2. Healing comes by faith.

Healing does not equal forgiveness. Modern day healers may appeal to passages like the paralytic who is lowered through the roof to Jesus, in order to be healed (see Mk. 2:1-12 and parallels). They imagine that because the man’s friends brought him for healing, and

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because Jesus’ response to him was, “Son, your sins are forgiven,” that forgiveness equals healing. This is a *very* obvious misreading of the text. Mark 2:5 says clearly, “And Jesus seeing their faith said to the paralytic, ‘Son, your sins are forgiven.’” The forgiveness of sins was a gift of God through the paralytic’s faith. This group of friends clearly believed Jesus was who He claimed to be, and embraced His preaching of repentance and the coming of His own kingdom. In fact, Jesus distinguishes healing from forgiveness when he says, “‘But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins’ — He said to the paralytic, ‘I say to you, get up, pick up your pallet and go home’” (Mk. 2:10-11).

Isaiah 53:4 (and Matthew 8:17) suffer the same abuse. Here, Isaiah records that the Messiah is a suffering for others. Specifically, His suffering is for “griefs... sorrows... transgressions... iniquities” (Is. 53:4-5). Healers try and point out that these must all be the same thing. This is inaccurate. The fact is that God promised to answer the sin problem, including the reversal of the effects of the fall of mankind. As far back as Genesis 3:15, God promised that it would be through a human. In the Abrahamic covenant it was narrowed to a specific seed of Abraham through whom blessing would come to the nations (Gen. 12:1-3; 17: 1-8). God then promised David a Son who would reign on his throne forever (2 Sam. 7:1-17). It is through Christ that the curse would be reversed, and the fact that He fulfilled all the promises about the sufferings and resurrection proves that He is the One who is coming again to judge, rule, and restore the created order back to a reign of righteousness. Peter words it this way:

But the things which God announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled. Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord; and that He may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you, whom heaven must receive until the period of restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time.
(Acts 3:18-21)

So, if the promise of the suffering servant fulfills the promise to undo the curse of this life, what more would we expect of Christ’s earthly ministry except a foretaste of what life will be like when He returns to reign over the promised land? Healings and forgiveness of sin are both wrapped up in Jesus’ fulfillment of the promises to reverse the curse and bring blessing. This is exactly the answer Jesus gives to John the Baptist in Matthew 11:2-6. The fact that both healings and forgiveness prove Christ’s identity doesn’t require them to equal each other any more than the fact my wife and kids proving that I have a family would require that both my children and my wife be one and the same.

Healing doesn’t occur because of the faith of the sick person. Typically, those who teach that the gift of healing is for today will point out stories like Paul and the crippled man in Lystra. Luke tells us that “This man was listening to Paul as he spoke, who, when he had fixed his gaze on him and had seen that he had faith to be made well, said with a loud voice, “Stand upright on your feet.” And he leaped up and *began* to walk” (Acts 14:9-10). The translation doesn’t help us out much here, but the margin is

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most insightful. The ESV margin says, “Or, *be saved.*” NAS notes say, “Lit., *saved.*” The question about the Greek word *swzw*, is does it mean ‘to deliver’ in the sense of delivered from sin, “saved,” or does it mean delivered from sickness, “healed, made well”? Context must determine this, and when this phrase is used in the gospels or Acts, it is used quite often in a context that requires the meaning of “spiritual salvation” but never in a context that requires a meaning of “physical healing” where there is no spiritual salvation. Since countless hundreds (even thousands) of unbelievers were healed by Jesus and the apostles (Acts 5:12-16, for example) we must beware of imagining that this formula refers to healing that was effective because of faith. Instead, let’s look at the evidence and let Scripture answer the question about the significance of this formula, “Your faith has saved you.”

There are examples where Christ heals those who believed that He could heal them. What is telling is that Scripture seems to only use the phrase, “Your faith has saved you/made you well,” of those who were trusting in Christ for salvation as their Savior. Jesus healed a man who believed He could heal his leprosy, but this phrase is lacking (read Mk. 1:40-45). Instead, Jesus rebukes Him with a righteous indignation (v. 43), because this man’s rebellious arrogance disregards Christ’s command to be silent (v. 44), and thwarted Jesus’ teaching ministry (v. 45). In a section of Mark’s gospel where demons remain silent, this man’s arrogant unbelief is manifested by his disobedience. Yet, Christ healed him!

Let’s contrast this with the story of the woman with a 12-year hemorrhage. She says to herself, “If I just touch His garments, I will get well” (Mk. 5:28). After being called out by Jesus, she came reverently before him, “fearing and trembling” (v. 33). Instead of receiving a rebuke full of indignation, like the leper of Mark 1, this faithful woman is called, “Daughter.” Jesus declares, “Your faith has made you well; go in peace and be healed of your affliction” (v. 34). Now, no doubt she was believing that Jesus could heal her. But unlike the leper, she believed that because she believed in Jesus. This consistent use of the phrase “your faith has made you well,” is proven in the next few examples.

Luke tells the story of ten lepers who were miraculously healed by Jesus (17:11-19). After Jesus dismisses them and tells them to show themselves to the priests for their ceremonial purification, one of the former lepers is overwhelmed with the reality that he was healed from a disease for which there was no cure. He knew this was a work of God (v. 15), and turned back to worship Jesus (v. 16). Jesus was impressed that this one, exclusive from the other nine, returned to worship and express adoration and gratitude. He said, “Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?... Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well” (vv. 18-19). Did his faith save him or heal him? It certainly *isn’t* the point of the story that Jesus heals on the basis of faith, because he just got through marveling that 90% of those lepers who were just healed *didn’t believe and give praise to God!* So, those lepers who didn’t believe were healed, but not saved. This leper was healed, he believed, and was saved.

Once a notoriously sinful woman barged into a formal dinner party thrown by the Pharisees (Lk. 7:36-50). Jesus was at the dinner, and the woman shamelessly expressed faith, adoration, and worship towards Jesus. Afterwards, Jesus said those famous words, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.” Don’t be confused by the NAS translation here. It is the identical phrase in the original Greek as in Luke 17:19 and uses the same words

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as Acts 14:9. This woman wasn’t sick, but a sinner. She was delivered from her guilt and condemnation, not illness and disease.

The overwhelming reality is that this phrase “your faith has saved you,” is used of believers being healed of sickness, and believers being saved from sins. Never is it used for unbelievers who are being healed of sickness. On the other hand, we find too many unbelievers who actually are healed of their illness to believe the lie that healing is made effective by the power of the sick person’s faith.⁵⁸

Paul Taught That The Gifts End During The Church Age (1 Cor. 13:8-13)

Paul actually teaches about the termination of the miraculous gifts in 1 Corinthians 13:8-13. The three gifts listed here are contrasted with the abiding realities of faith, hope and love in verse 13. In fact, this contrast frames up the entire paragraph (vv. 8, 13 bookend the argument). If faith becomes sight, and hope is realized when He returns, then the things that are terminating must end before Christ’s return. Otherwise, the contrast is meaningless and the whole paragraph falls apart.

Here is the passage from the NAS translation:

1 Corinthians 13:8 Love never fails; but if *there are gifts of prophecy*, they will be done away; if *there are tongues*, they will cease; if *there is knowledge*, it will be done away. 9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part; 10 but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away. 11 When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things. 12 For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known. 13 But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love.

This passage rebukes any and every use of giftedness not motivated by love for the brethren. Without the ambition of building up the church in love and truth, giftedness fails in its purpose. On the other hand, love never fails and faith, hope, and love abide beyond the miraculous gifts which are ceasing, or being abolished (verse 8). In spite of its significance, the mere mention of this passage breaks a rule that has been established in the discussion about the miraculous spiritual gifts—whatever you do, whatever you believe, don’t appeal to 1 Corinthians 13:8-13! It seems that Anthony Thiselton’s dictum, which prevents anyone from being able to allude to this passage, has been embraced by many: “*These verses should not be used as a polemic for either side in this*

⁵⁸ I.e., Mk. 1:40-45; Lk. 17:11-19 are addressed above. But see also Mk. 1:32-39; 8:14-29 (This reference includes the indictment of Christ against unbelief in verse 19. I believe it is a rebuke against the disciples because of vv. 28-29. Either way, if it refers to the disciples or the father and those in the crowd, the demon is cast out, and it isn’t because of the faith of the boy—he was demon-possessed!); Acts 5:12-16; 19:12; 28:8-9 (This reference isn’t explicit; however, it would be difficult to imagine that the entire island of Malta was converted. Almost certainly among those who had diseases, some were unbelievers).

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debate.”⁵⁹ I find this problematic. I don’t want to read any theology into a text any more than the next guy, but *the text means something*. It is almost as though one has to act like 1 Corinthians 13 can’t be touched—it is the honest interpreter’s kryptonite. Although this is a difficult passage, I disagree that it shouldn’t speak to the issue *when the passage is about the passing of three miraculous/revelatory gifts and their contrast with the abiding of three virtues*.

Notice three observations that have direct relevance for the cessation of the miraculous gifts. First, I’ll explain why I believe ‘the perfect/complete’ refers to the completion of divine revelation. Second, I’ll explain the relationship between verses 10, 11 and 12. Third, I’ll show why ‘the perfect/mature’ *cannot* happen at Christ’s return, regardless of how you interpret the ‘perfect/complete.’ Although Paul is not specific on the time of the cessation (other than *completion* of revelation that renders the partial revelation given through the revelatory gifts listed in verse 8), the cessation of the miraculous gifts must happen before the cessation of faith and hope at the dawn of the eternity.

What is the ‘perfect’ in verse 10?

The wording of this question is unfortunate. The Corinthians wouldn’t have asked this question. They would have asked, what does “*toW te/leion*” mean? The English word ‘perfect’ is simply the way most English interpreters have answered the question. We cut ourselves off from understanding Paul if we answer the question by assuming that ‘perfect’ is the answer. The term ‘the perfect’ (*toW te/leion*) can be used several ways. Two definitions of the word are hotly debated in the context of our verse: “**1.** pertaining to meeting the highest standard... *perfect, complete, expert*... **2.** pertaining to being mature, *full-grown, mature, adult*...”⁶⁰ The meaning of a word must be determined by its context.

Let me give you two examples. Ephesians 4:13 uses the word *te/leion* (*teleion*) and the NASB and ESV translate it “mature.” This is clearly Paul’s meaning because in the next verse he contrasts the ‘maturity’ with the picture of immaturity in the reference to a child. The contrast between a child and adult isn’t one of imperfection and perfection. Children may be flawed, but this doesn’t go away at manhood! The contrast is in the spectrum of maturity. Additionally, consider 2 Corinthians 1:13-14. Paul contrasts the Corinthians’ partial understanding of a previous letter with the full understanding that he wants them to enjoy. The terms he uses are “partially understand” and “fully understand” (ESV). The terms “partially” and “fully” are the same Greek root words Paul uses in 1 Corinthians 13:9-10. The ESV translators nailed the meaning in 2 Corinthians 1:13. They know that *te/loß* (*telos*) should be translated “fully” and not “until the end” or any other potential meaning, because the word is contrasted with “partial” in verse 14.

Every interpreter I’ve read lands in the first two meanings. The question is this, “Does our context contrast something flawed with something perfect? Or, does it contrast

⁵⁹ Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000): 1064.

⁶⁰ BDAG, 995.

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something immature with something mature?” Notice again that the discussion on all sides has to do with revelation and communication. In 1 Cor. 13:8, Paul refers to gifts that God gives by which He reveals Himself partially. In verse 11, Paul contrasts his speech and knowledge as a child with his speech and knowledge as an adult. This contrast with childishness shows us that the issue isn’t imperfect or flawed revelation, but rather incomplete or partial revelation. That is because a physical child isn’t contrasted with an adult because of flaw or deformity, but rather the distinction is maturity, growth, and completion. So the illustration Paul gives for expression and revelation contrasts immaturity with maturity. The reality contrasts partiality with completion (verse 11). The question is what is the partial and what is the complete? Notice that Paul singles out the two gifts which will be abolished in verse 8, prophecies and the word of knowledge. What is unique about these gifts? They are revelatory. These gifts are distinct from the sign of tongues (and healings, miracles, etc.) in that they reveal, or deliver previously unrevealed truths or messages. This revelation of God is partial. If the reality being discussed here is revelation, then the revelatory gifts are on a spectrum of partial revelation to complete revelation. If words of knowledge and prophecies are partial, then what could be the revelation of God that would be complete, mature, and sufficient? Hmm... At this point, for Paul to contrast the partiality of the revelation we receive from prophecy and words of knowledge with perfection that will come at Christ’s return seems strange indeed. It seems to demand that the prophecy God gave to the NT church was erroneous!⁶¹

Paul has already paved the way for us to elevate Scripture over prophecy as a superior gift to the church. In 12:28 Paul begins a list of gifts, ranked in order of importance. The latter gifts are unranked. He simply says, “then miracles, then gifts of healings, then...” But notice that the beginning of the list does rank the gifts. The first three in the list are also of preeminent importance—“first apostles, second prophets, third teachers.” This helps us understand what he means when later he says, “Be intensely interested⁶² in the greater gifts” (1 Cor. 12:31; cf. 14:1, 12, 39). Although you are individually given gifts according to the sovereign distribution of the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:11), as a church we are to be earnestly and intensely interested in promoting the greater gifts because they edify and equip those around us (all of chapters 12-14 bears this out). So, what is the contribution of the first gift? The apostles gave us the New Testament scriptures. This is the complete revelation that not only out-ranks prophecy (12:28), but also terminates its necessity upon its completion (13:10).

What is the relationship between verses 10, 11 and 12?

Simply put, verse 10 is the reality, 11 is the illustration, and 12 is the reason. In verse 10, Paul explains that when the complete revelation of God arrives for the church, the partial revelation of prophecy and words of knowledge will be abolished. Then, he illustrates the difference between the two by picturing the speaking, thinking and reasoning of child (perhaps paralleling tongues, prophecy, and wisdom) as the partial revelation. The arrival of adulthood means the doing away with childish things. This adulthood pictures the arrival of complete revelation. It would be inaccurate to say that

⁶¹ But this certainly is not the case. See the section above, titled “The Modern Gift Of Prophecy Is Different than the Biblical Gift,” where I dealt with the view that NT prophecy was fallible.

⁶² BDAG, *A Greek—English Lexicon*, 427.

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Paul is calling prophetic revelation childish and apostolic revelation adult-like. Nevertheless, it is a helpful illustration of what Paul does say—prophetic revelation is partial and Scripture is complete. Once we have Scripture, we put away partial things like prophecy and words of knowledge.

Although most interpreters take verse 12 to be referring to the future eternal state, I don’t find that an adequate explanation of the paragraph as a whole. Verse 12, is the reason why we would put off childish ways when we become a man. The view of God we have through completed revelation is described as ‘face to face’ while the view of God through partial revelation is like a murky reflection. While I pause to say this, knowing that I go against the massive majority of interpreters here, I do so because of the reasons spelled out in this section and the next one on verse 13.

It is undeniable that the phrase ‘face to face’ is used in the OT of theophanies. Jacob and Gideon used the phrase to describe their encounters with God (Gen. 32:30; Judg. 6:22). However, Moses also uses the phrase in an interesting way. He certainly saw God face to face (Dt. 34:10), but so did the Israelites! In Deuteronomy 5, Moses prefaces the Ten Commandments by saying, “The LORD spoke to you face to face at the mountain from the midst of the fire, while I was standing between the LORD and you at that time, to declare to you the word of the LORD; for you were afraid because of the fire and did not go up the mountain” (vv. 4-5). Notice that the Israelites didn’t even see God. They saw fire, and their fear prevented them from wanting to hear directly from God. Instead, God graciously condescended and communicated to the people through Moses. God gave Moses verbal revelation (the first written revelation from God to man). So, this scenario of the Israelites seeing God ‘face to face’ consisted of them receiving inspired written revelation of God’s character through the intermediary of the prophet Moses. He was standing between God and Israel, brought the revelation down to them, and this receiving of written revelation is seeing God face to face.

In the NT, the phrase ‘face to face’ isn’t used of God to man, except here in 1 Cor. 13:12. Face is often used to refer to a physical face (“they spit in his face,” Mt. 26:67); often as personal presence (“I will send my messenger before you [your face]” Mk. 1:2; also see Lk. 2:31); its used figuratively for direction (Lk. 9:51), figuratively for appearance (Lk. 12:56), figuratively for personal attention and focus (1 Pet. 3:12; Rev. 6:16). Of course, it is also used for personal heavenly presence: Mt. 18:10. However Paul also uses “face” to refer to the saving knowledge of God this side of heaven. In 2 Corinthians 4:4, Paul explains why many don’t believe. “In the case [of those who are perishing] the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.” This knowledge of God is described as spiritually seeing “the glory of God in the face of Christ” (v. 6). Compared to the obscurity of partial revelation in words of knowledge, seeing God in the completed revelation of His Word is seeing face to face. In this way, this passage is parallel to Deuteronomy 5:4-5.

In 1 Corinthians 13:12b, Paul writes “now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known.” The verb ‘know’ is from *ejpiginw/skw* (*epiginōskō*), which means among other things “to come to an understanding of, know exactly, or completely.”⁶³ *ejpi/gnwsib* (*epignōsis*), is a word that I will translate as ‘true

⁶³ BDAG, *A Greek—English Lexicon*, 369.

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knowledge.’ Usually, commentators take this as a reference to the knowledge we will have of God in heaven. Interestingly enough, it is never actually used that way in the Greek New Testament. Neither the noun or the verb is used of our relationship with God or Christ in heaven. Instead, the consistent usage of these words are to refer to a true knowledge of something in this life. They are used of a true knowledge of God the Father⁶⁴, God the Son⁶⁵, God’s will or command⁶⁶, the guiltiness of sin⁶⁷, true understanding of a message or letter⁶⁸, and a saving knowledge of the truth⁶⁹. The word group occurs 64 times in the New Testament. Yet, remarkably, it is never used in Revelation, nor in the epistles to refer to our heavenly knowledge of God (of course, many would say that Paul uses it here in 1Cor 13:12 of heaven, but that is the very point we are examining).

It would be legitimate at this point to wonder, “How well will we know God in the Scripture?” For many, this phrase demands that we see the eternal state as the reference here in verse 12. That is usually because we will have perfected minds. But that really isn’t the issue because in heaven, though our minds are perfect, they are still finite. In that sense, we will never know God like He knows us. However, in Scripture, we can know God in the sense of *epignōsis*. Not only is that what Paul refers to in the passages listed in footnotes 35 and 36, but he also boldly declares that through the Scripture, he has the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2:16). This isn’t in the context of revelations and heavenly visions, but in the Spirit’s work of illuminating the Christian to the implications of the inspired truths (2:11-15).

So, verse 12 explains the reason why we would put off childish expression and thinking once we become a man. To go back to the partial revelation of prophecy and words of knowledge after we have Scripture is as crazy as going back to looking at the hazy reflection when you can see Him face to face. For the future post-apostolic generation to cling to partial knowledge of God makes no sense, because they can have the mind of Christ through the Scriptures.

Why must the miraculous gifts end before Christ’s return?

The main point of 1 Cor. 13:8-13 is readily apparent to anyone who simply reads the paragraph straight through. What do you see surrounding this whole discussion like bookends? Notice that Paul is making this simple contrast—*three things are terminating and three things are abiding*. Verse 8b says, “but if *there are gifts of prophecy*, they will be done away; if *there are tongues*, they will cease; if *there is knowledge*, it will be done away.” This is surrounded by 8a and 13a: “Love never fails,” and “But now faith, hope, love, abide these three.”

Prophecy will be shut down, or abolished, as will the word of knowledge. Tongues will cease and pass away. On the other hand faith, hope and love all abide and remain. When do faith and hope end? When faith becomes sight (2 Cor. 5:7) and when hope is realized (Rom. 8:24-25).

⁶⁴ Mt. 11:27; Rom. 1:28; 10:2; Eph. 1:17; Col. 1:10; 3:10; 2 Pet. 1:3.

⁶⁵ Mt. 11:27; Eph. 4:13; 2 Pet. 1:2, 8.

⁶⁶ Rom. 1:32.

⁶⁷ Rom. 3:20.

⁶⁸ 2 Cor. 1:13-14.

⁶⁹ Lk. 1:4; Col. 1:6; 1 Tim. 2:4; 4:3; 2 Tim. 2:25; 3:7; Tit. 1:1.

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Here is the impossible question for the continuationist: “According to your view of the ‘perfect/mature,’ these gifts will end at the return of Christ or the death of the saint. *If that is true, then how can the three things that are terminating end at the exact same time as faith and hope, which abide and continue?*” This impossible question shows how the continuationist position destroys the entire point of the paragraph. You can’t have the miraculous gifts terminating at Christ’s return when they are contrasted with things abiding or continuing, that also happen to end at Christ’s return.

In all my reading, I’ve only encountered one bold scholar who dared to answer this question. His answer? There must be a sense where faith and hope continue on into eternity. I’ll let him explain this answer in his own words: “Presumably in one sense Paul expects hope to continue beyond this life in the continued enjoyment of that for which we hoped... Put psychologically, we may ask: Will we stop looking forward in anticipation to what is ahead once we begin to enjoy the new heaven and the new earth?”⁷⁰ He fails to mention any passages that would teach this truth regarding faith. Regarding this aspect of hope, however, he believes that 1 Corinthians 15:19 teaches that our “hope is not merely the anticipation of the blessings to come, an anticipation no longer needed once those blessings have arrived, but a firm anchor in Christ himself.” Although I agree this statement is true, it doesn’t explain the passage. I don’t see how the passage says that our hope in Christ Himself won’t be realized in heaven. Otherwise, what do we make of the constant contrast between faith and sight, or hope and things already realized?⁷¹ His dichotomy between hoping for blessings and hoping for Christ is foreign to the question whether hope in Christ is realized at the beginning of the eternal state.

I think it will be helpful to put ourselves in the shoes of the charismatic interpreter. Let’s assume that verse 12 was talking about eternity. If Paul was looking forward to heaven, and realizing that there were no miraculous gifts being used in heaven, what is the point of the exhortation? “Corinthians, watch out! You are so passionate about using the miraculous gifts, but don’t you realize that we won’t be using them in heaven? All you’ll have in heaven is love!” Of course that’s true. But that’s also true of preaching, hospitality, administration, showing mercy, and leadership. The saints of heaven will be no more edified by healings in heaven than hospitality. No one would waste their time listening to a prophet or a preacher when the Lamb is standing as though slain in front of them. There is a reason why Paul selected these gifts: prophecy, tongues, and a word of knowledge. Yet continuationists have no explanation for the question “Why these three?” In their view, all the gifts end at Christ’s return.

The better explanation is found in the fact that this warning is full of the awareness that these gifts were passing away and were about to be abolished after the apostolic circle died and the canon is completed. In that not-too-distant future, picture the churches that were focused on gifts that were dead and gone. Imagine Corinth. Here they are neglecting apostolic revelation and the gift of teaching the truth (ranking #1 and #3 in the list of 1 Cor. 12:28). The only other ranked gift, prophecy, is abolished to their surprise after John dies. This church will have no ability to equip itself for any good

⁷⁰ D.A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit: A Theological Exposition of 1 Corinthians 12-14* (Carlisle, United Kingdom: Paternoster Press, 1987): 74.

⁷¹ For example, see Acts 23:6; 24:15; 26:6-7; Rom. 4:18; 5:5; 8:20-25; Gal. 5:5; Eph. 1:18; Col. 1:5, 27; 2 Cor. 5:7; Heb. 6:11-12; 11:1; 1 Pet 1:8, 21.

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work! At this point, they should have been focusing on the things that will abide: faith, hope, and love. We know that these things only come from the ministry of the word, but Corinth has neglected that long ago, to their demise. Without heeding this exhortation of Paul, the lampstand in Corinth may well be removed.

The continuationists have no satisfactory explanation about why these three gifts receive instruction about their termination when, according to their view, all the gifts end at the same time. Verse 13 proves that Paul has good reason to warn them that the termination of these gifts precedes Christ’s return. This paragraph (1 Cor. 13:8-13) teaches that the miraculous gifts end before the return of Christ, when faith becomes sight and hope is realized.

Apostles & Prophets Were Foundational, Not Perpetual

The role of apostle and prophet were foundational to the church, in that their revelation of truth grounded the church for all ages. The truth of the gospel revealed through them was handed down once for all to the saints (Jude 3). Requirements of being an apostle are: 1) being an eyewitness to the resurrected Christ, 2) being personally commissioned by Christ, and 3) being able to perform signs, wonders and miracles as evidence of your apostleship. By their very nature, apostles cannot exist beyond the first generation of the church. Since signs, wonders, and miracles attest to their message and ministry (next section), they have passed away with the apostles.

Ephesians 2:19-20 states the issue quite clearly: “You are... of God’s household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone.” The church is a living edifice composed of saints who are being built up into a house. This house is built on one foundation. Christ is the cornerstone, and His person, work, and teaching determine location and angle of this building. The foundation itself is made of up the apostles and prophets. They are foundational, because their gifts were revelatory. God’s revealed truth came through them, and every other Christian is being equipped by the gifted individuals who reveal that truth (apostles and prophets) or proclaim that truth (evangelists, pastors and teachers), according to Ephesians 4:11.

The apostles’ teaching governed and guided the church in everything. The first description of a Christian church starts with this phrase: “They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching” (Acts 2:42). Jude, clearly towards the end of the New Testament timeline, describes the faith which is the body of sound doctrine that God has given as that “which was once for all handed down to the saints” (verse 3). Their message was foundational in time and importance.

Apostles, by their very definition must have died off after the first generation of the church. A man had to be an eyewitness of Christ’s resurrection in order to be an apostle. When Jesus chose the apostles, he called them with a purpose: “And He appointed twelve, so that they would be with Him and that He could send them out to preach” (Mk. 3:14; Lk. 6:13 declares that He named them ‘apostles’). When the apostles had to replace Judas, there were criteria for making their selection:

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Therefore it is necessary that of the men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us — beginning with the baptism of John until the day that He was taken up from us — one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection. (Acts 1:21-22)

This personal presence with Jesus, and eyewitness account of the resurrection are crucial. Peter and Paul refer to this reality as a basis for their own apostleship and others:

Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord? (1 Cor. 9:1)

We are witnesses of all the things He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They also put Him to death by hanging Him on a cross. God raised Him up on the third day and granted that He become visible, not to all the people, but to witnesses who were chosen beforehand by God, that is, to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead. (Acts 10:39-41)

He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also. For I am the least of the apostles... (1 Cor. 15:4-9a)

In this passage, Paul includes himself in the category of apostle (as he always does), but here he says that he is an apostle by virtue of seeing the physical, resurrected Christ with his own eyes “last of all.” In inspired Scripture, Paul calls himself the last official apostle,⁷² serving as a legal delegate for Christ Himself.

Paul also implies that there were not going to be any more apostles in chapters 12-14. In 1 Corinthians 12:28, Paul lists out some gifts (not all are miraculous; this list includes teaching, helps, administration, etc.) and he ranks the first three: “first apostles, second prophets, third teachers.” He also exhorts the Corinthians to be corporately zealous and devoted to the *greater* gifts.⁷³ However, in exhorting them to highlight and focus their attention on the greater gifts, he never mentions the gift of apostle again. Instead, the majority of chapter 14 explains that the gift prophecy holds more importance than the gift of tongues. Paul doesn’t point them to apostles, because there weren’t any

⁷² I am speaking of the big-A “Apostle,” not the lower-case apostle. It is helpful to notice that the word ‘apostle’ is used of others like Epaphroditus (Phil. 2:25). But he is an apostle for the Philippians “your [plural] apostle,” and not an Apostle of Jesus Christ. Here, Paul is declaring himself to be the last of this elite group. There is a big difference between being an apostle, or delegate for Christ, and serving in that capacity for a friend or a church.

⁷³ 1 Cor. 12:31; 14:1. These commands are plural. As a church, they must be “be positively and intensely interested in someth., *strive, desire, exert oneself earnestly, be dedicated*” (BDAG, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 427; see page 27 of this article). This certainly doesn’t mean that individuals should seek to attain gifts they don’t have, because God’s Spirit gives gifts sovereignly, as He desires (1 Cor. 12:11), and individuals never have all the gifts (12:29-30).

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more being given to the church. However, at this point in history, there were still prophets ministering faithfully in Corinth.

Since the apostles were foundational, and not perpetual, the signs that confirm an apostle are also not perpetual. Since the miraculous gifts (signs, wonders, and miracles) attested to the divine origin of apostolic ministry and message, they serve no purpose now that all the eyewitnesses of the resurrection have died. The church has been founded. All that is left is the ongoing edification on that foundation. At this point in the church age, to resurrect miraculous sign gifts is to resurrect apostles. To resurrect the role of apostle is to return to laying foundation all over again. To lay the foundation all over again is an arrogant rejection of the foundation already laid.

Signs, Wonders, And Miracles Confirm Divine Revelation

There is one final problem that continuationists can't avoid in Scripture—the purpose of the miraculous gifts. Scripture consistently records that the purpose of the miraculous gifts (signs, wonders, and miracles) are for the proof that prophets and apostles are sent by God. Their message, by default, is also proven to be the message given them by God. God doesn't intervene in His created order by giving men supernatural abilities to perform signs, wonders and miracles for no good reason.⁷⁴ It is always to affirm His revelation of truth.

If you made a chart of the performance of miraculous signs and wonders—and remember that we are talking of the personal authority to accomplish these miracles, not the fact that God does them whenever He wants to—you would notice a few erratic peaks separated by lengthy lows. There would certainly be high points at the times of Moses, Elijah & Elisha and those prophets who followed in their footsteps. The same would be true of Christ, His apostles, and at the end of time. The chart would flat line from Adam to Moses (the patriarchs experienced miracles, but didn't perform many). From Moses until Elijah, you would see plenty of divine intervention for the sake of His people, but not one judge calls down hail or pestilence on the pagan nations of the promised land.

The notable exceptions prove the rule. Consider when Joshua asks the Lord to cause the sun to stand still (Josh. 10:12-13). Not only is it clear that this was accomplished by divine power (like miracles performed to confirm revelation), but Scripture remarks that this day was one-of-a-kind: “There was no day like that before it or after it, when the LORD listened to the voice of a man; for the LORD fought for Israel” (verse 14).

On the other hand, the consistent explanation for the miraculous being performed by the hands of men, is to accomplish a function of signifying or confirming the man and the message as being from God.

Moses

⁷⁴ Please don't misunderstand this to be referring to God's providential working of miracles, but only the gift of signs, wonders and miracles to a man. See the section “What Cessationism is NOT,” earlier in this paper.

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Moses had the privilege of giving the people of God the very first written revelation from God. Why did the nation believe him? How did they know that he was God’s man to reveal the truth of God’s character and set the charter for an Israelite theocracy that would be a kingdom of priests and a holy people set apart for God Himself? After all, Moses wrote about things he never witnessed (like the entire book of Genesis).

This is such a legitimate question that Moses asked it of God before we ever did. In Exodus 4:1-5, we find Moses asking God, “What if they will not believe me or listen to what I say? For they may say, ‘The LORD has not appeared to you.’” Interestingly, God doesn’t answer by giving Moses some complex, yet intellectually compelling explanation. Instead, God answers Moses with miracles. God tells Moses to throw his staff on the ground. Moses obeys, it becomes a snake, Moses counts the cost of losing his staff and runs away (v. 3). Yet God tells him to go and pick up the snake by the tail. Moses grabs the snake and finds it to be a staff again (v. 4). This miracle *is* the content of God’s answer to Moses. God hardly spoke but a few commands and the miracle answered the question. But God does speak in verse 5 and he begins with a conjunction in the Hebrew that sounds as though He had been speaking the whole time. Visualize Moses grasping the snake and flinching (possibly) at the possibly fatal reaction, only to open his eyes in amazement and hear, “. . .that they may believe that the LORD, the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has appeared to you” (v. 5). The personal authority granted to Moses and Aaron is the effective proof that they are God’s chosen leaders and prophets of God’s revelation (cf. Ex. 4:21, 30-31).

This was not a one-time event. Moses’ whole life was uniquely full of the miraculous. Scripture repeatedly declares that this is to show that Moses’ calling and message were from God Himself (Deut. 4:32-36). At the end of Moses’ life, after the inspired Torah had been written, Deuteronomy ends with these words:

Since that time no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face, for all the signs and wonders which the LORD sent him to perform in the land of Egypt against Pharaoh, all his servants, and all his land, and for all the mighty power and for all the great terror which Moses performed in the sight of all Israel. (Deuteronomy 34:10-12)

At this point, Moses is dead, and revelation comes to an end. In fact, only fools would dare try and add something to what God had given through Moses because the revelation was hard-wired with built-in warnings (Deut. 4:2; 12:32). Yet, we all know that the Hebrew Scriptures include the Law and the Prophets. For God to affirm the prophetic writings which followed Deuteronomy, He would also confirm the future revelation of prophets with miraculous signs and wonders.

Prophets

The next peak on our graph of human ability to perform the miraculous would peak at the onset of Elijah’s ministry. He was a foundational prophetic figure. His protégé, Elisha, took the mantle (literally and figuratively) and continued in the prophetic position. His school of the prophets produced many more. In fact, the OT prophets

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consider themselves to follow in the wake of Elijah. Even John the Baptist wore the prophetic garment like Elijah (cp. Mk. 1:6 and 2 Kgs. 1:8). This was the tradition attire of a true prophet in Israel. In fact, false prophets would dress the part in order to deceive, a practice which would certainly be abolished in the future reign of the Messiah (Zech. 13:4-5).

Why did God give Elijah the power to raise the widow’s son from the dead? 1 Kings 17:24 answers, “Then the woman said to Elijah, ‘Now I know that you are a man of God and that the word of the LORD in your mouth is truth.’”

Why did God give Elijah the ability to perform a miracle on Mt. Carmel? 1 Kings 18:36 answers, “At the time of the offering of the *evening* sacrifice, Elijah the prophet came near and said, ‘O LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, today let it be known that You are God in Israel and that I am Your servant and I have done all these things at Your word.’”

Isaiah’s prophetic ministry was proven by the miraculous fulfillment of predictive prophecy. This immediate fulfillment validated the divine source of his messages that were predictive of future events relating to Christ and of the current exhortations to Israel. The fact that Isaiah gave predictive prophecy (Is. 7:1-8:2) which was fulfilled two years later (8:3-4) proved that predictive prophecy pertaining to Christ and His kingdom (i.e., chs. 9, 11-12, 49, 53) were true and divine. This is the test of prophet’s divine ordination according to Deut. 18:21-22.

Jeremiah’s ministry was confirmed by the miraculous performance of signs and wonders. He prays to the Lord, describing Him as the One “who has set signs and wonders in the land of Egypt, *and* even to this day both in Israel and among mankind; and You have made a name for Yourself, as at this day” (Jer. 32:20).

Jesus

Men should have believed Jesus because of His word. However, Jesus Himself said that if people didn’t believe His words, at least believe His miracles so that they might understand that He was in His Father and His Father was in Him (Jn. 10:25, 37-38; 14:10-11).

Jesus’ miracles weren’t random. Jesus didn’t dazzle audiences by levitating boats or causing mountains to melt, though He could have. His miracles were ‘signs.’ They pointed to something. They proved His identity as Messiah and the divine nature of His message (Matt. 11:2-6). They revealed His compassion. They demonstrated authority. They fulfilled the OT prophecies. They proved His power to reverse the curse of the created order as seen in the stopping of storms, healing of disease, casting out of demons. But interestingly enough, Jesus’ ministry wasn’t characterized by miracles nearly as much as it was characterized by teaching and preaching the kingdom.

For example, Mark 1:14-15 summarizes Jesus’ Galilean ministry as a preaching ministry. Nothing else even makes honorable mention. Mark 1:21-28 records a powerful incident in the synagogue. After He casts out a demon from a man who was a regular at the Capernaum synagogue, the first thing out of the witnesses’ mouths was, “What is this? A new teaching with authority!” Later that night, Jesus healed virtually every illness in Capernaum (1:33-34). Word spread overnight, and the sick from surrounding areas sought Jesus in the morning (1:35-37). When the disciples told Him about this, His response is not unloving, but reflective of the primary purpose of His ministry: “Let us go

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somewhere else to the towns nearby, so that I may preach there also; for that is what I came for” (v. 38). Finally, in the last narrative of the chapter, Mark records an incident where a man wants to be healed. Jesus heals out of his compassion (v. 41), but warns him with righteous indignation to tell no one. The indignation is righteous because He knows that this man will disregard Him and bring unwanted attention to His ministry. This attention will thwart Jesus’ primary aspect of ministry—preaching (v. 45). The miracles are secondary in importance to the preaching of the gospel, and their purpose was to validate the preaching and revelation God was giving through Jesus.

Peter and even the unbelieving Jews at Pentecost knew that this was the purpose of miracles. He told them that Jesus was the Messiah. He said that they should have already known that because He was “a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know” (Acts 2:22). They had the proof, the ‘signs’ were clear. They were without excuse to reject the revelation of Christ and His salvific work.

Apostles

The church is built on apostles and prophets. Peter is Christ’s unique spokesman at the birth of the church. When saints are saved, they commit themselves to the apostles’ teaching (Acts 2:42). In the same way as Jesus, the apostles performed amazing miracles. What is more amazing is the consistent amazement *at the Word of God* when miracles were performed. Also like Christ, they weren’t focused on miracles, but the truth of the gospel they proclaimed. They were so faithful in this priority that the people who experienced their ministry knew that the truth was the issue.

For example, Sergius Paulus was the proconsul of the island of Cyprus (Acts 13:7). When Paul and Barnabas had nearly finished proclaiming the gospel throughout the island, Sergius summoned them to teach him the Word of God. There was a magician named Bar-Jesus, or Elymas, who was dissuading Sergius from believing the gospel. Paul looked straight at him and declared, “You who are full of all deceit and fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease to make crooked the straight ways of the Lord? Now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you will be blind and not see the sun for a time” (vv. 10-11). This happened exactly as Paul said. What is amazing here is that Sergius Paulus didn’t share the conclusion my boys came to after hearing this account: “That was an amazing miracle!” Instead, Scripture concludes the narrative with this explanation: “Then the proconsul believed when he saw what had happened, *being amazed at the teaching of the Lord*” (v. 12). The last participle, ‘being amazed,’ is so important. What was the source of his amazement? The teaching of our Lord! Miracles are signs, not ends. Everytime they are used, they point towards truth which is the true consuming focus of the apostles’ ministry.

Perhaps the greatest example of this reality might be found in Paul’s ministry at Ephesus. In Acts 19, Luke records that Paul doing many ‘extraordinary’ miracles (v. 11). This word ‘extraordinary’ is a Greek idiom that would mean roughly, “not the first one you would meet.” The idea is that the sort of miracles that Paul was performing weren’t just your average, ordinary, supernaturally mind-blowing phenomena. In the museum of miracles performed, these wouldn’t be the first few displays. You would have to build up to the sort of stuff Paul was doing. However, the miracles are so profound that some imposters attempt to perform them as well. In vv. 13-16, Luke describes some men who

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attempt to cast out a demon. They even use the name of Jesus and Paul—very authoritative indeed! The demon acknowledges these names as authoritative, but tells the sons of Sceva, “...but who are you?” In light of the fact that these non-apostles have no authority over the demon, the demon gives them a lesson in folly of acting on authority one doesn’t actually have. After they are thoroughly beaten, the story spreads. What is important about this narrative is that Luke records the response of the Ephesians. I would expect people would say, “You better believe that Paul has better miracles! I always found them more entertaining.” Or, “I knew Paul’s miracles were the real deal.” Instead, the response was one of exalting the Christ whom Paul preached. “Fear fell upon them all and the name of the Lord Jesus was being magnified” (v. 17). They responded to the incident not by exalting Paul or his miracles, but by responded to his message and teaching in repentance for their former life (vv. 18-19). In fact, though verse 20 summarized this whole section of Paul’s ministry, it also expresses no less of a summary of the Ephesian narrative. It says, “So the word of the Lord was growing mightily and prevailing.” The Bible consistently records that the miracles performed by Christ and the apostles confirmed the message. The light of truth they proclaimed shone brighter than the most brilliant miracles ever performed.

The apostles were designated as such by the miracles they performed. This is attested to in Acts several times (cf. Acts 2:43; 4:33; 5:12; 8:14). In Acts 14:3, Luke ascribes the work of the apostles’ evangelism and preaching to the Lord directly. “Therefore they spent a long time there speaking boldly with reliance upon the Lord, who was testifying to the word of His grace...” The question is “How does God testifies to the word of His grace?” The last phrase of the verse answers: By “granting that signs and wonders be done by their hands.” These signs and wonders (and miracles) were done to testify that their message was God’s message.

Nothing changes in the epistles either. Paul writes of himself, “The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles” (2 Cor. 12:12). The author of Hebrews agrees:

*For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it. For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty, how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? **After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will.** (2:1-4)*

The apostles were obviously giving instruction for the church so that they would be able to remember the truth they need once the apostles were dead and gone. Peter says this explicitly in 1 Peter 1:12-15. Shockingly, the latter apostolic writings say nothing by way of instruction about the use of the miraculous gifts. These latter writings include the Pastoral Epistles. These instruct Timothy and Titus how to conduct life in the church (1 Tim. 3:15), and include no prescriptions for use of the sign gifts. This is obviously different than 1 Corinthians, written in the previous decade. The silence is deafening!

From cover to cover, the Scriptures teach that signs, wonders and miracles confirm divine revelation spoken by apostles who were eyewitnesses of Christ’s

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resurrection. Due to the definition of an apostle, and the purpose of signs, wonders, and miracles, there can be no miraculous gifts today. No eyewitnesses are alive, and the body of sound doctrine, called “the faith,” has been “once for all handed down to the saints” (Jude 3) through them. Therefore, miraculous gifts aren’t for today, because their existence today would contradict their purpose.

The problem with the contemporary charismatic movement is that it isn’t known for *its message*. What truth am I rejecting by rejecting the current practice of miraculous gifts? The miraculous attests to the message, as Numbers 14:22⁷⁵ says: “Surely all the men who have seen My glory and My signs which I performed in Egypt and in the wilderness, yet have put Me to the test these ten times and have not listened to My voice...” The rejection of God’s revelation (which was attested by the signs and miracles) is the problem. So, with regard to the modern practice of the miraculous gifts, I am forced to ask the question, “What new revelation am I in danger of rejecting? What is your new message?” When the first century audiences were exposed to the apostles, no one doubted that the Christ they preached was the Messiah, that His resurrection had happened, and that the apostles were founding God’s church. There is no correlating reality for the Charismatics. If the miracles are real, their message must be more visible than the miracles themselves. And that message, which will never violate previously revealed truths, must be new as well. The content preached in the Charismatic movement ranges from new and heretical to old and faithful, but it is never both faithful and new.

A Pastoral Plea

If the New Testament consistently ascribes this function to the eyewitness testimony and authoritative revelation of the apostles and prophets, what purpose does it serve now? The miraculous gifts serve no function today. I would be so bold to say that if anyone promotes the practice of the miraculous gifts, unless they are more known for being the bearer of revelation (which is previously unrevealed, consistent with Scripture, and is 100% accurate in its predictive elements), their miraculous performances are fraudulent. God recognizes no other purpose for these gifts than to confirm the revelation and message that comes through the messenger.

In the few years I have served as a pastor, I have been burdened by the impact of charismatic movement on genuine believers. Certainly, the movement has produced many false converts. Any ministry, no matter how faithful has produced false converts. The question is, however, to what degree are the leaders responsible for aiding in the confusion and false assurance? It is my conviction that promoting the ongoing miraculous experiences of tongues, prophecy, and receiving words from the Lord undermine the sufficiency of Scripture and give assurance of salvation where the Bible does not.

It is also my conviction that this movement has undermined the sufficiency of the Word for life and godliness. Why is it that so many of those from the charismatic movement who are genuine believers come to my office with little ability to walk through

⁷⁵ Compare this with the warnings that allude to this narrative and the danger of rejecting of God’s voice/word: Ps. 95:7-11 and Heb. 3:7-4:13.

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the Scriptures for the purpose of clothing themselves with Christ, mortifying the flesh, seeing sinful habits destroyed by the superior power of the gospel? I wouldn’t want to fault anyone for the fruit of any individual’s disbelief and sin, but where the theology of a movement is to blame, I can’t remain silent. Don’t get me wrong here, I don’t believe for a second that every continuationist is ungodly. I know several that I look up to and respect. My only contention is that the fruit of the continuationist theology will produce greater biblical illiteracy and less gospel fidelity where it is followed to its logical end. Before you open yourself up to the enticing prospect of spiritual experiences never before enjoyed, ask yourself, “Is this enticing because I’m discontent with the Word, or my relationship with Christ?” Paul warns us that Christ is sufficient, and to find contentment in the spiritual experience is arrogance that comes from a puffed up mind.⁷⁶ Don’t forsake your grip on Christ and lose the prize in exchange for spiritual experience and revelation. God has spoken once for all.⁷⁷ Trust Him.

⁷⁶ Col. 2:18-19.

⁷⁷ Jude 3.