

# ***Knowing Our God***

Advanced Exegetical Theology

*The Knowledge of God Series*

## **Book 8**

# **God's Apostles**

*How Was NT Scripture Created?*

Kurt Jurgensmeier

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## **Dedication**

To my son Joseph, who like the Apostles written about in this book, has a heart to share the Gospel of Christ with others, that they too would find the eternal life that he has.



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The chapters below are marked with the following categories in order to help you prioritize your reading:

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## Preface

### *Helping the next generation of Bible Teachers*

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**Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth. (2 Tim 2:15)**

These words were written to a young Teacher of God's word. They are a reminder of the awesome privilege, responsibility, and accountability that comes with such a divine calling. Being a Teacher is God's gift to a man, but what kind of Teacher he becomes is his gift to God. And God tells all Teachers something of what He is expecting in the verse above.

First, the Teacher is to "**present**" himself "**to God**" when he teaches. When we teach it is not only humans that are listening, but Heaven as well, and God is our most important audience. We can be concerned with what people will think of our teaching, but we need to be much, much more concerned with what God will think.

And God's expectations can significantly differ from those of humans. People often expect eloquence and entertainment, God expects accuracy, "**correctly**" interpreting, teaching, and applying God's word for God's people. There is nothing in all the world more important than this because to do otherwise is to misunderstand, misrepresent, and eventually disobey the Author.

As in all human endeavors, not even God expects perfection, but He certainly demands that we do our "**best**." We need to remember that we do all of this under the watchful eye of the Author Himself, and will one Day be either "**approved**" or "**ashamed**" regarding how careful and diligent we were in working to understand, teach, and apply His word "**correctly**."

This book is offered as a help in obeying the Apostle's command for those who have, or desire to have, the great responsibility of teaching God's word to His people. It is part of a series of books written under the title of ***Knowing Our God: Advanced Exegetical Theology***.

These books are *advanced* in that they are an in-depth, scholarly study of very specific and often difficult theological topics.

They are uniquely *exegetical* in that there is a special emphasis on interpreting the Scriptures applicable to the topic. While many

systematic theologies would not require much of a Scripture index, a large percentage of the current 5000 pages of *Knowing Our God* is commentary on Scripture.

Finally, these books are *theology*, because it is in such an endeavor that we bring the pieces of God's word into a harmonious whole in order to produce the full truth of Scripture. We believe *Advanced Exegetical Theology* is a great need in equipping Pastors today to defend the faith for this and future generations.

Ezra the priest, of course, is our example, of whom it is written: **"the gracious hand of his God was on him. For Ezra had devoted himself to the study and observance of the Law of the LORD, and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel"** (Ezra 7:9-10). Obeying God's word was obviously important to Ezra, but so was being **"devoted . . . to the study"** of God's word, all so that he could be **"teaching"** it to God's people. It is our hope that this book will help you do just that.

Finally, a few practical points. First, while we are not aware of anything in it that would be contrary to the historical, Evangelical Christian faith, if you encounter something that differs from the beliefs of your Pastor(s), please discuss it with them if it causes serious questions for you. We desire to respect the pastoral authority God has in your life as much as possible.

Secondly, studying God's word is best pursued in community with spiritual peers, and we encourage you to read this with others and discuss the ***Gauging Your Grasp*** questions usually at the end of a chapter.

Thirdly, we make an effort to make an organized study of God's word not just theological but practical as well. So prayerfully consider the sections entitled ***Pastoral Practices*** along the way.

Fourth, as you read you will notice several references to other writings. This reflects the fact that this book is an excerpt from a larger production entitled *Knowing Our God*. The entire collection of books on systematic theology that are currently available can be found at [www.trainingtimothys.org](http://www.trainingtimothys.org).

Finally, we would appreciate the reader visiting the site and emailing us any feedback on this book, including concerns, comments, and any proposed corrections. We too wish to study God's word in community, and that community includes you.

Pastor Kurt Jurgensmeier  
New Life Community Church, Cedar Rapids, IA  
Training Timothy at [www.trainingtimothys.org](http://www.trainingtimothys.org)

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**Book 8**  
**God's Apostles**  
**Part I**  
**Apostles**

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**Chapter 8.1**  
**Defining Biblical Apostles**  
*Messengers of God*

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- C) The Apostles of Jesus Christ:** *The Twelve, Seventy, & Paul etc.*
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### **Primary Points**

- In ancient Greek an *apostolos* carried the message and authority of his sender.
- Jesus Christ was the Apostle of God the Father (cf. Heb 3:1)
- The unique requirements of being an Apostle of Jesus Christ included being: 1) personally commissioned by Christ, 2) given new extra-biblical divine revelation, and 3) given supernatural authenticating abilities.
- Apostles of Jesus Christ included "the Twelve," "The Seventy," Paul, Barnabas, James, and Ananias.
- While there were others such as Paul who could be designated Apostles of Jesus Christ, "the Twelve" are still in a position by themselves.
- Some suggest that Silas, Timothy, and Apollos should be included among the ranks of Apostles of Jesus Christ as well, but we have no biblical record of them meeting the requirements above.
- "Apostles" of churches like Epaphroditus need to be distinguished from Apostles of Jesus Christ.
- Remembering that "Apostle" often merely meant a messenger, it is not surprising that we encounter people in the NT with this designation who are simply ambassadors of a local church.

## A) Defining God's Apostles: *What & who was an Apostle?*

The greatly respected German NT scholar Rudolph Schnackenburg (1914-2002) wrote some years ago: "In spite of the strenuous efforts of scholarship during the past few decades, the origin and early history of the apostolate remain still quite obscure."

<sup>1</sup> The same would seem to reflect current scholarship as well, as there is a great deal of confusion regarding the purpose, nature, definition, and duration of Apostles in the early Church. Here we hope to glean from the Scriptures and history sufficient answers to such issues.

The word "Apostle" (*apostolos*) and related words occur in the NT over 80 times. <sup>2</sup> It literally means "sent one" and generally meant "messenger" in the time of Christ. This common usage is reflected by the Apostle John when he records Christ as saying, "**I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger [*apostolos*] greater than the one who sent him**" (John 13:16).

However, the term had a special significance, meaning more than just someone who carried a message. An *apostolos* also carried the authority of the sender as well. <sup>3</sup> Therefore, the

<sup>1</sup> Rudolph Schnackenburg, "Apostles," in *Apostolic History and the Gospel*, Ward Gasque and Ralph Martin, eds. (Eerdmans, 1970), 287.

<sup>2</sup> "Apostles," *New Bible Dictionary (NBD)*, J. I. Packer, et al. eds., 3rd ed., (Intervarsity, 1996), 58

<sup>3</sup> E. F. Harrison notes that:

Whereas several words for *send* are used in the NT, expressing ideas as dispatch, release, or dismiss, *apostellein* [from which *apostello* is derived] emphasizes the elements of commission—authority of and responsibility to the sender. ("Apostle," *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology (EDT)*, Walter Elwell ed., [Baker, 1984], 70-1; cf. D. Müller, "Apostle" *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology (NIDNTT)* Colin Brown ed., 4 vols., [Zondervan, 1986], 1:127-8; W. E. Vine, *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* Vine's [Thomas Nelson, 1996], 560).

While there is some debate on the issue, there would seem to be good evidence that the NT writers even gained some of their understanding of *apostolos* from the Jewish rabbinical conception of the *šālīah*. Accordingly, W. C. Robinson writes in the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*:

Rabbinic Judaism used the Heb. *šālīah* to describe an agent authorized by someone else to act for the sender in personal, legal, or financial matters. In such cases a man's ambassador was as himself (cf. IS. 25:40ff.; 2 S. 10:1ff.). . . . When Paul started to

authenticated *apostolos* of a king had the authority of the king in his role as a messenger. The authority of the office depended upon the level of authority and honor of the one who appointed the Apostle to represent them. Thus, when Jesus Christ Himself is called an "Apostle" of the Father God (Heb 3:1), the term takes on special significance. This is also true when Christ "**appointed twelve--designating them Apostles**" (Mark 3:14). To be an Apostle of men was one thing (cf. Gal 1:1). To be an Apostle of Jesus Christ was quite another.

There are a myriad of men labeled as "Apostles" in the NT. As mentioned above, Christ Himself is given the title, as is the "Twelve" (cf. Matt 19:28; 26:20; Mark 4:10; Acts 1:16-26; 6:2; 1 Cor 15:5; Rev 21:14). Other examples include Paul (cf. Acts 26:15-16; Rom 11:13; Gal 2:8; 1 Tim 2:7), Barnabas (cf. Acts 14:4, 14; 1 Cor 9:6), Epaphroditus (cf. Phil 2:25), James the Lord's brother (cf. Gal.

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Damascus with letters of accreditation, he may have been *šālīah* of the Sanhedrin, as were later emissaries of Judaism who opposed the Christian message (cf. Justin Dial. 17, 108). ("Apostle," *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia (ISBE)*, Geoffrey W. Bromiley ed., 4 vols., [Eerdmans, 1988], I:192).

Robinson adds that in classical Greek the word Apostle, "is also used by Epictetus to describe Zeus's sending a teacher of philosophy as his messenger. This would make the messenger a minister of the god." (Ibid.)

1:19; 2:9; 1 Co. 15:7-9),<sup>4</sup> and Andronicus and Junias<sup>5</sup> (cf. Rom 16:7).

The early Church Fathers refer to others as Apostles as well, including such men as “the seventy” disciples (cf. Luke 10:1), Philip the Evangelist (cf. Acts 21:8), Philemon (cf. Phlm 1:1), Archippus (cf. Col 4:7; Phlm 1:2), and even Mary Magdalene (cf. Matt 27:56), and Apphia (cf. Phlm 1:2).<sup>6</sup> With so many being called “Apostles” in the early Church it becomes helpful to make some distinctions.

## **B) The Apostle of God the Father: *Jesus Christ***

The writer of Hebrews describes Jesus as, “the Apostle [*apostolon*] and high priest Whom we confess” (Heb 3:1). It is not surprising that the writer would describe Christ as a “messenger” of God as the first verse of the epistle says: “In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the Prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son” (Heb 1:1).

Jesus Christ is no doubt the preeminent messenger and Apostle of God. One of His most repeated statements concerns His being

<sup>4</sup> As Dr. Harrison notes, “The most natural explanation of Gal. 2:9 is that Paul is declaring James, the Lord’s brother, to be an Apostle” (*EDT*, 72). For further discussion on this point, see Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Zondervan, 1994), 908

<sup>5</sup> Regarding Andronicus and Junia, Paul says in Romans 16:7, “**Greet Andronicus and Junias . . . They are outstanding among the Apostles.**” The wording is admittedly ambiguous here and instead of stating clearly that they were Apostles, Paul may be simply saying that they had an extraordinary reputation in the minds of the Apostles. Still, it would seem Paul’s statement is best understood as describing them as Apostles themselves.

Some have taken this probability and tried to make Junias an example of a female Apostle who taught men and held authority over them in the Church. For an extended discussion on the probability that Junias refers to a man, see John Piper and Wayne Grudem, eds., *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* (Crossway, 1991), pp. 79-81, 214, 221-22. That this would be among the most important evidences espoused by those who argue for female pastors and teachers in the Church, reveals the weakness of their claim.

<sup>6</sup> For references to Apostles in the Early Church Fathers see “Apostle” in John McClintock and James Strong, *Cyclopaedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature (M&S)*, CD-ROM (Ages Software, 2000). Philip is called an Apostle by Eusebius (cf. *Ecclesiastical History*, G. A. Williamson trans., Andrew Louth ed., (Penguin Books, 1989), 102.

sent to represent and speak for God the Father. Accordingly, Christ said, **"I came from God and now am here. I have not come on My own; but He sent Me"** (John 8:42). In Matthew we read, **"he who receives Me receives the One Who sent Me"** (Matt 10:40; cf. Mark 9:37; Luke 9:48). The Apostle John seems especially interested in depicting Christ as the Apostle of God the Father, recording almost forty statements of Christ regarding this very thing. These include: **"My teaching is not My own. It comes from Him Who sent Me"** (John 7:16), and **"I did not speak of My own accord, but the Father Who sent Me commanded Me what to say and how to say it"** (John 12:49; cf. John 7:17-18; 8:28-29; 17:6-8).

Obviously, Christ was not only a messenger for God—He was God. He was **"in very nature God"** (Phil 2:6) and "The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His being" (Heb 1:3). This is why the Bible often describes Christ simply as **"the Word [*logos*: "expression"] of God"** (John 1:1, 14; cf. Rev. 19:13). Only this Apostle of God could say **"Anyone who has seen Me has seen the Father"** (John 14:9) and **"I and the Father are one"** (John 10:30; cf. v. 38). Likewise, in a statement that probably communicates the unique apostleship of Christ the best, Jesus said, **"When a man believes in Me, he does not believe in Me only, but in the One Who sent Me. When he looks at Me, he sees the One Who sent Me"** (John 12:44-45).

While other Apostles were granted similar revelatory and miraculous powers as Christ, they were still mere men, and the greatest of them all still had to confess that, **"sin [is] living in me"** (Rom 7:17). So indeed, we can properly refer to Christ as an Apostle of God, but He was something much more. He uniquely, directly, and personally represented God the Father and was deity Himself.

### **C) The Apostles of Jesus Christ:** *The Twelve, Seventy, & Paul etc.*

While Christ was uniquely the Apostle of God the Father, there were a number of men who were in turn Apostles of Jesus Christ. This was how Paul, for example, repeatedly referred to himself, often beginning his epistles with, **"Paul, an Apostle of Christ Jesus"** (2 Cor 1:1; cf. 1 Cor 1:1; Rom 1:5; Gal 1:1; Eph 1:1; Col 1:1; 1 Thess 2:6; 1 Tim 1:1; 2 Tim 1:1; Tit 1:1).

The *essence* of this apostleship is described by Paul when he writes, **"Through Him [the Lord Jesus Christ] and for His name's**

**sake we have received grace [gifting] and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith"** (Rom 1:5).

The *uniqueness* of this apostleship is reflected when Paul describes himself as, **"Paul, an Apostle—sent not from men nor by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father"** (Gal 1:1).

Of course the first Apostles of Jesus Christ were the "Twelve." Matthew records:

**<sup>1</sup>He called His twelve disciples to Him and gave them authority to drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease and sickness. <sup>2</sup>These are the names of the twelve Apostles: first, Simon (who is called Peter) and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; <sup>3</sup>Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; <sup>4</sup>Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed Him.**

**<sup>5</sup>These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: "Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. <sup>6</sup>Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. <sup>7</sup>As you go, preach this message: 'The Kingdom of Heaven is near.' <sup>8</sup>Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. (Matt 10:1-8; cf. Mark 3:13ff; Mark 6:7ff)**

Luke succinctly describes this mission of the Twelve when he writes:

**He sent them out to preach the Kingdom of God and to heal the sick. . . . So they set out and went from village to village, preaching the Gospel and healing people everywhere. (Luke 9:2, 6)**

The unique requirements of being an Apostle of Jesus Christ are all described here. They include: 1) being personally commissioned by Christ (Matt 10:1, 5), 2) being given new extra-biblical divine revelation (i.e. **"The Kingdom of Heaven is near"** v. 7) and, 3) being given supernatural authenticating abilities **"to heal every disease and sickness"** (v. 1), and even **"raise the dead"** and **"cleanse those with leprosy"** (v. 8).

It is these attributes which are unique to Apostles of Jesus Christ and which others who are called Apostles in the early Church did not possess. This is an important point, as many claim that the only distinguishing characteristic of Apostles of Jesus Christ was that they had personally seen Christ. While this was certainly one

important requirement (cf. Acts 1:21-22; 1 Cor 9:1; 15:4-8), it was not the only one, as many could claim this. However, only a very few, such as Apostles of Jesus Christ, could claim both divine supernatural revelation and accompanying authentication.

While there were others such as Paul who could be designated Apostles of Jesus Christ, "the Twelve" are still in a position by themselves. Mark tells us, "**He appointed twelve—designating them as Apostles—that they might be with Him**" (Mark 3:14), granting them the exclusive privilege of being Christ's personal companions for several years.<sup>7</sup> Their foundational role in establishing God's New Covenant people will be forever memorialized by the fact that their names are inscribed on "**twelve foundations**" (Rev 21:14) of the eternal paradise of New Jerusalem. They are the "patriarchs" of the Church, much like the sons of Jacob are the patriarchs of God's Old Covenant people.

In addition, "the Seventy" would also seem to meet the qualifications of Apostles of Jesus Christ. Luke tells us:

**Now after this the Lord appointed seventy<sup>8</sup> others, and sent them in pairs ahead of Him to every city and place where He Himself was going to come. And He was saying to them . . . . "Whatever city you enter and they**

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<sup>7</sup> This would of course exclude Matthias who was "**chosen to take over this Apostolic ministry, which Judas left to go where he belongs**" (Acts 1:24-5). While the Apostle Peter says Matthias had, "**been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus went in and out among us**" (v. 21), it would not seem he had the intimate relationship with Jesus that the others had. Nonetheless, we believe he truly did take Judas' place, being "**added to the eleven Apostles**" (v. 26), and that Matthias' name is written on the foundation of the New Jerusalem with the rest of the Twelve.

<sup>8</sup> It is perhaps impossible to be certain whether Jesus sent out 70 (NASB, RSV, NRSV, KJV, NKJV) or 72 (NIV, NLT, NCV, ESV) missionaries. The diversity in the English translations reflects the diverse textual evidence which is also practically divided between the two. Some lean toward 70 because of its symbolic emphasis in the OT including Moses' 70 elders (cf. Exod 24:1, 9; Num 11:16-17, 24-25), and the Genesis list of 70 nations on the Earth (chs. 10-11, although the LXX lists 72).

It is because of these obvious parallels that most modern Evangelical scholars think a copyist would have been likely to modify the original to fit these OT analogies (cf. Bock, 1016). If we had to choose, we would maintain that 70 is the correct number, and that there were intentional OT analogies on Christ's part. At least the early Church historian Eusebius of Caesarea (c. 315) agrees, referring to this group as the Seventy.

**receive you, eat what is set before you; and heal those in it who are sick, and say to them, 'The Kingdom of God has come near to you.' . . . The one who listens to you listens to Me, and the one who rejects you rejects Me; and he who rejects Me rejects the One Who sent Me."**  
(Luke 10:1, 8-9, 16)

What Christ tells the Seventy is identical to what He told the Twelve, so much so that some think they are identical missions. But this would make Luke's description of the sending of the Twelve in Luke 9 rather absurd when he follows it in chapter 10 with the sending of the Seventy. These are clearly two different missions, with identical instructions, including all the things required to be an Apostle of Jesus Christ. First, the Seventy are personally commissioned by Him, such that their words are to be considered His words (v. 16). Secondly, they are to preach the new, extra-biblical revelation that "**The Kingdom of God has come near to you**" (v. 9). Thirdly, they were given miraculous powers to "**heal those . . . who are sick**" (v. 8).

Additional evidence that the Seventy were Apostles of Jesus Christ is found in the early Church historian Eusebius of Caesarea (c. 260-339). First, based on Paul's reference to Christ appearing "**to all the Apostles**" (1 Cor 15:7) in addition to the Twelve, Eusebius claims that there was "a large number of Apostles."<sup>9</sup> He then proceeds to tell the story of Thaddeus, one of the Seventy, who after the Ascension of Christ, certainly had an apostolic ministry, being described as "an Apostle . . . from Jesus," "instantly" healing people on command "performing many wonders and preaching the word of God," which included the New Covenant which would not have been available in NT Scripture to the people of Edessa where Thaddeus ministered, at such an early date.<sup>10</sup>

The Apostle Paul, of course, met all of the biblical requirements for apostleship. First, it was a fact of early Christian history that the risen Jesus Christ had personally appointed him (cf. Acts 9:1-19; 26:12-20; 1 Tim 2:7; 2 Tim 1:11; Tit 1:3). Accordingly he writes the Corinthians, partially at least to defend his claim of being an Apostle of Jesus Christ:

**Am I not free? Am I not an Apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? (1 Cor 9:1)**

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<sup>9</sup> Eusebius, I:12.

<sup>10</sup> For the full, believable, and amazing story of Thaddeus see Eusebius, I:13.

**He [Christ] was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and . . . He appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, He appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then He appeared to James, then to all the Apostles, and last of all He appeared to me also. (1 Cor 15:4-8)**

Secondly, Paul obviously received new extra-biblical divine revelation, and accordingly claimed:

**I want you to know, brothers, that the Gospel I preached is not something that man made up. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ. (Gal 1:10-11; cf. 1 Cor 2:6-13; 2 Cor 11:6; Eph 3:2-11; Col 1:25)**

Finally, Paul's apostolic authority was supernaturally authenticated by his miracle working, and he told the Corinthians, again in the context of defending His claim to apostolic revelation:

**I ought to have been commended by you, for I am not in the least inferior to the "super-Apostles," even though I am nothing. The things that mark an Apostle—signs, wonders and miracles—were done among you with great perseverance. (2 Cor 12:11; cf. Acts 14:3)**

In addition to "the Twelve," "the Seventy," and Paul, we would include James the Lord's brother, Barnabas, and Ananias in the list of probable Apostles of Jesus Christ, as we have evidence of them having the above qualifications.

Concerning Barnabas, Luke refers to him as an Apostle in the same breath as Paul when he writes, "**the Apostles Barnabas and Paul**" (Acts 14:14, cf. v. 4; 1 Cor 9:5-6). Luke also seems to describe him as possessing both new divine revelation and the authenticating miraculous gifts of an Apostle when he records: "**Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time there [Iconium], speaking boldly for the Lord, Who confirmed the message of His grace [i.e. new divine revelation] by enabling them to do miraculous signs and wonders [i.e. supernatural authentication]" (Acts 14:3). As for the personal commission of Barnabas, Clement of Alexandria (c. 150-215), a very early historian of the Apostolic Church indicated that he was one of "the**

Seventy”<sup>11</sup> which involved the privilege of being personally commissioned by Christ (cf. Luke 10:1ff).<sup>12</sup>

While, we have no record of James the Lord’s brother authenticating himself as an Apostle of Jesus Christ with “**the signs of an Apostle**” (2 Cor 12:12), Paul seems to repeatedly rank him with other Apostles of Jesus Christ (cf. Gal 1:19; 1 Cor 15:7), as does Clement of Rome (c. 96).<sup>13</sup>

Finally, Ananias would seem to meet the qualifications of an Apostle of Jesus Christ as well, although perhaps for only a short time. “**The Lord called to him in a vision**” (Acts 9:10), personally commissioning him with a message of new extra-biblical divine revelation concerning God’s plans for the monumental and unique calling of the Apostle Paul (v. 15). And Ananias was given the miraculous authentication of commanding a miracle by restoring Paul’s eyesight (cf. vs. 12, 18). We have no knowledge of how Ananias continued to serve Christ after this incident, but in this episode he was an Apostle of Jesus Christ in every sense.

Some suggest that Silas, Timothy, and Apollos should be included among the ranks of Apostles of Jesus Christ as well, but we have no biblical record of them meeting the requirements above.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Eusebius, II.1. Although, Clement’s wording may distinguish the Apostles from “the Seventy” suggesting in his mind that Barnabas was not an Apostle.

<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, John MacArthur specifically denies that Barnabas was an Apostle of Jesus Christ, claiming that their number was “limited to thirteen and were well known.” (*MacArthur’s New Testament Commentary*, Electronic Edition STEP Files CD-ROM [Parsons Technology, 1997], 1 Cor 12:28).

<sup>13</sup> Eusebius, II.1

<sup>14</sup> The suggestion that Silas and Timothy should be included among the Apostles of Christ is derived from some statements of Paul in 1 Thessalonians. In the greeting, Paul indicates that the letter is from “**Paul, Silas, and Timothy**” (1:1), and then later in the epistle he remarks, “**As Apostles of Christ we could have been a burden to you**” (2:6), apparently including Silas and Timothy in the designation of Apostles of Christ.

However, John Stott has a particularly thorough refutation of this interpretation. After going into some detail about Paul’s varied use of “we” in his epistles, Stott turns to the following evidence as well:

Three points may be made. First, Luke in Acts is quite clear that Paul was the leader of his mission team. Silas had been chosen to replace Mark, and Mark had been only a ‘helper’ [cf. Acts 13:5; 15:37ff]. Timothy, though much loved, was clearly a junior [cf. Acts 16:1ff]. Luke does indeed couple ‘Paul and Silas’ as fellow prisoners

For example, it is clear that Apollos did not receive his knowledge of the New Covenant from divine revelation, as we read:

**Meanwhile a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures. He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervor and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John. He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately.** (Acts 18:24-26)

We need only to compare how Apollos received his knowledge of the New Covenant, with the Apostle Paul's experience (cf. Gal 1:10-11), to say confidently that the former was not an Apostle of Jesus Christ. It was the revelatory *Scripture gifts* that such Apostles of Jesus Christ possessed that perhaps distinguished them

[cf. Acts 16:19, 22, 25, 29], Roman citizens [cf. Acts 16:38], and co-labourers [cf. Acts 16:40; 17:4]. Yet he makes it clear that Paul did the preaching, in both the Thessalonian and the Berean synagogues [cf. Acts 17:2-3, 11]. If, then, he was the leading preacher, it is all but certain that he was the leading writer [of 1 Thessalonians] too.

Secondly, Paul was an Apostle, whereas Silas and Timothy were not. True, Silas was a leader in the Jerusalem church, an official delegate of the Jerusalem Council and a Prophet [cf. Acts 15:22, 27, 32], but he is never named an Apostle. Nor is Timothy. In fact, in later letters Paul deliberately distinguishes himself from Timothy in this respect by writing 'Paul, an Apostle of Christ Jesus and Timothy our brother' [cf. 2 Cor 1:1; Col. 1: 1; cf. 1 Cor 1: 1; Phm 1].

It is in the light of this that we must understand the surprising expression 'as Apostles of Christ we could have been a burden to you' (1 Thes. 2:6b). Either Paul was using the word 'Apostles' here in its broader sense of 'missionaries' [cf. Acts 14:4, 14; 2 Cor 8:23; Phil 2:25], or he was referring to himself as the Apostle but was forced by grammar to write 'Apostles' in the plural, in order to be in apposition to 'we' (rather like 'we were left alone [*monoi*, plural]' in 3:1).

Thirdly, there are many examples in Paul's other letters where he moves from "I" to "we" without appearing to change the identity of the subject. . . . his use of "we" is never incompatible with his leadership role in the mission team and never lessens his authority as an Apostle of Jesus Christ. (*The Message of 1 & 2 Thessalonians* [Intervarsity, 1994], 71-74).

Many of the same arguments would lead us to deny that Apollos was an Apostle (cf. 1 Cor 4:6, 9)

more than anything else. Accordingly, it is perhaps even better to refer to them as *revelatory* Apostles, which we do throughout *Knowing Our God (KOG)*.

It is important to refer to them as such, as some in Evangelical theology make careless or intentional statements to deny this. For example, the highly regarded NT scholar C. K. Barrett has written:

An Apostle is, in Paul's understanding, one called by Christ and sent by him to preach the Gospel. . . . Perhaps their only really distinctive feature in the present list [at 1 Cor 1:28 which included "teachers"] is that they [Apostles] were itinerant.<sup>15</sup>

Such a definition makes NT revelatory Apostles little more than modern day evangelists or teachers.

NT scholar E. F. Harrison is considerably more biblical when he remarks:

In the apostolic age, one who held this rank [of Apostle] was more than a preacher (1 Tim 1:11). . . . Paul would not have needed to defend his apostleship with such vehemence if he were only defending his right to proclaim the gospel.<sup>16</sup>

Indeed, it was because such Apostles possessed new extra-biblical divine revelation that needed to be believed and obeyed by all Christians, that their ministries required the divine authentication God gave them, and which we discuss in a subsequent chapter.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> C. K. Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (BNTC) (Hendrickson, 2000), 293-4.

<sup>16</sup> Harrison, 72

<sup>17</sup> Regarding the divine authentication of Apostles see section 8.4.B.

## D) The Apostles of the Early Churches: *Epaphroditus, etc.*

Remembering that "Apostle" often merely meant a messenger, it is not surprising that we encounter people in the NT with this designation who are simply ambassadors of a local church. For example, Paul writes of Epaphroditus: "**I think it is necessary to send back to you [Philippians] Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger [apostolos], whom you sent to take care of my needs**" (Phil 2:25; cf. Gal 1:1). Epaphroditus then would seem to have been an "apostle" of the Philippian church, personally appointed by them to represent their church. Similarly, Paul refers to other men as "**representatives [apostolos] of the churches**" (2 Cor 8:23; cf. 12:17).<sup>18</sup>

Such men did not possess new divine revelation, nor miraculous gifts to authenticate such revelation. Therefore, they were not direct messengers of God the Father or God the Son, but of the leadership of local churches. They were no doubt very respected and trustworthy men, but in today's vocabulary they would be better labeled couriers or ambassadors of churches rather than Apostles.

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### ***Extras & Endnotes***

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#### ***A Devotion to Dad***

*Father, we thank You for Your Apostles. What would we know of You and Your plans and purposes without them? We look forward to meeting them one day, and pray that until then we would carry out their commandments because they represent You.*

#### ***Gauging Your Grasp***

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<sup>18</sup> D. Muller comments in the *NIDNTT*:

When Paul calls Titus, Epaphroditus and others "apostles of the churches" in 2 Cor. 8:23 (cf. Phil. 2:25), he is clearly not using *apostolos* as a technical term for a member of the Christian apostolate but rather as "messenger" (so AV, RV, RSV; NEB renders "delegates" in the former case). (Muller, I:130)

- 1) What did the Greek word *apostolos* mean in the first century?
- 2) Why do we claim that Jesus Christ was an Apostle?
- 3) What do we claim was required to be an Apostle of Jesus Christ? Do you agree or disagree and why?
- 4) Who do we include among the Apostles of Jesus Christ? Do you agree or disagree and why?
- 5) What is unique about “the Twelve”?
- 6) In what way should an “apostle” like Epaphroditus be distinguished from Apostles of Jesus Christ?

### **Publications & Particulars**

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## Chapter 8.2

# The Gifts of Apostolic Revelation

### *Divine Wisdom & Knowledge*

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#### **Table of Topics**

- A) Confusion Regarding the Apostolic Gifts of Divine Wisdom and Knowledge**
- B) Their Divine Content & Miraculous Nature**
- C) Their Uniquely Apostolic Nature**
- D) Their Abiding Nature: *Distinguished from prophecy***
- E) Their Limitations**

*Extras & Endnotes*

#### **Primary Points**

- There is a great deal of confusion regarding the gifts of divine wisdom and knowledge today.
- Contrary to many, these gifts are alluded to and described frequently in Scripture.
- The gifts of divine wisdom and knowledge consisted of new extra-biblical revelation from God which is why we refer to it as a *Scripture gift*,
- Just as the gift of prophecy is synonymous with a God-sent Prophet, the gifts of divine wisdom and knowledge are rather synonymous with a God-sent NT revelatory Apostle.
- The abiding and more general supernatural knowledge of NT



## A) The Confusion Regarding the Apostolic Gifts of Divine Wisdom and Knowledge

It could be argued that Apostles such as Paul possessed virtually every spiritual gift listed in the NT. Accordingly, John Chrysostom (c. 347–407) taught that God, “set the Apostles first who had all the gifts in themselves.”<sup>19</sup> Nonetheless, it was the miraculous gifts of divine wisdom and knowledge that we believe were particularly connected to Apostleship.

Such gifts are clearly mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12 where, in the context of miraculous spiritual gifts, Paul says: **“To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom [*logos sophias*], to another the message of knowledge [*logos gnōsiōs*] by means of the same Spirit”** (1 Cor 12:8).<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> John Chrysostom, *Homily 32*; online at [www.ccel.org](http://www.ccel.org).

<sup>20</sup> Distinguishing between the gift of “wisdom” and the gift of “knowledge” is difficult. As NT scholar Anthony Thiselton puts it, “There is no consensus whatever about any clear distinction between *logos sophias* and *logos gnōsios*” (*The First Epistle to the Corinthians (NIGTC)* [Eerdmans, 2000], 941).

Not only in Greek, but also in English, the distinction is unclear as *Webster’s* defines “wisdom” as: “accumulated philosophic or scientific learning: knowledge.” (<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/wisdom>). Accordingly, Leon Morris reports, “Some find no difference other than stylistic (Barrett, Conzelmann)” (*1 Corinthians* [Eerdmans, 1985], 167).

Nonetheless, it is obvious that the Apostle does intend to distinguish them. He did not write “to one is given the word of wisdom and knowledge” suggesting one gift, but rather, he described a **“word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge.”**

While it is not critical that we know how the Apostle distinguished these two gifts of miraculous communication, we will make our own suggestion. First, it is to be remembered that, “wisdom in the [OT Septuagint] tradition includes especially *moral* guidance for life” (Thiselton, 941). Accordingly, we discuss elsewhere the overwhelming moral nature of the idea of wisdom in the Bible (cf. section 3). This could be contrasted with amoral doctrine, or divine knowledge. This distinction between the *directional revelation* (i.e. moral commands to obey), and the *doctrinal revelation* (i.e. amoral doctrines to believe) has been demonstrated elsewhere to essentially make up the whole revelation of Scripture (cf. ). In this sense, then, a gift of moral wisdom and a gift of doctrinal knowledge would be sufficient for all the divine revelation God would desire to give through the Apostles.

Accordingly, C. K. Barrett notes in his commentary:

There is a great deal of confusion regarding these gifts today. Even a careful NT scholar such as Leon Morris (1914-2006) writes, "It is not easy to see what they are."<sup>21</sup> The *super-supernaturalist*<sup>22</sup> theologian Wayne Grudem goes even further and claims:

[T]hese two gifts are nowhere else mentioned in Scripture, and no other early Christian literature outside the Bible has been found to use these phrases of any spiritual gift either. This means that the only information we have about these gifts is contained in this verse [1 Cor 12:8]. . . . No interpreter anywhere has any more information than this to work with.<sup>23</sup>

The Pentecostal NT scholar Gordon Fee likewise writes, "this particular 'gift' does not appear again in any further list or discussion," and suggests Paul received these labels from the Corinthians, because the concepts were otherwise unknown.<sup>24</sup>

Dr. Grudem's and Dr. Fee's assertions are simply untrue. While the exact phrases "*logos sophias*" or "*logos gnōsiōs*" may not be found elsewhere, we believe it will become clear in the discussion

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Some have noted the essentially practical character of wisdom in the Old Testament, and the fact that knowledge may be speculative. A word of wisdom would then represent a practical discourse, consisting mainly of ethical instruction and exhortation [i.e. moral commands], and a word of knowledge an exposition of Christian truth [i.e. amoral doctrine]. (*The First Epistle to the Corinthians (BNTC)* [Hendrickson, 2000], 285)

This would seem to support our suggestion.

However, Dr. Barrett goes on to write, "But in this epistle knowledge is connected with practical matters (e.g. 8:10 f.), and some kinds at least of wisdom [cf. 1 cor 2] can be speculative enough" (Ibid.). On the first objection, Paul's discussion of the nature of idols in chapter 8 is doctrinal in nature. On the second objection, while we would agree that Paul uses "wisdom" in a doctrinal sense in chapter 2, perhaps he is rather forced in this way because of the Corinthian use of wisdom in a purely pagan speculative way. Nonetheless, both are miraculous gifts of divine revelation and will be considered rather synonymously hereafter.

<sup>21</sup> Morris, 167.

<sup>22</sup> *Super-supernaturalism* is our term for those primarily in *charismaticism* who believe that the miraculous gifts are operating today and that miracles in general are to be rather abundant and necessary. Regarding this movement see chapters 10.13-16.

<sup>23</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Zondervan, 1994), 1080.

<sup>24</sup> Gordon Fee, *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Hendrickson, 1994), 167.

below that these gifts are alluded to and described frequently in Scripture, and also appear in early Christian literature.

Here we wish to demonstrate several attributes of the gifts of divine wisdom and knowledge that are commonly ignored or denied. These include:

- 1) Their divine content and miraculous nature which addresses the common notion that these gifts are simply describing really but naturally intelligent people.
- 2) Their practically exclusive relationship to revelatory Apostles of Jesus Christ in the NT which will address the

view in *charismaticism*<sup>25</sup> that those claiming clairvoyant

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<sup>25</sup> By modern *charismaticism* we are primarily referring to what is commonly labeled the “charismatic” movement that began with the Pentecostals in the early 1900’s, spread into denominational churches in the 1960’s and 70’s, and has merged with what is referred to as the Third Wave churches today. Pentecostal churches include Assembly of God, Church of God, Open Bible, Apostolic, Foursquare Gospel, and Full Gospel. Third Wave churches include Vineyard and a variety of independent congregations.

We thank God for all He has done through the “charismatic” movement, and for the dear Christian brothers and sisters who would claim membership in it. However, throughout *Knowing Our God (KOG)* we refrain from referring to this movement as “charismatic,” because this erroneously implies a uniqueness and even superiority in Christian grace (*charis*), and by further implication, a superior possession or experience of the Holy Spirit.

Surely no right-minded “charismatic” would desire to claim such a superiority over their Christian brothers and sisters, especially since they cannot demonstrate one. Biblically speaking, being “**led by the Spirit**,” experiencing His power, and living “**not under law**” but by “**grace [charis]**” is most clearly manifested in the “**fruit of the Spirit**” which the Apostle Paul describes as “**love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control**” (Gal 5:4, 18, 22-3). “Charismatic” Christians in general are not superior in these virtues of love and holiness compared to other Christians, and these virtues are the real essence of Christian *charisma*, making all obedient Christians true “charismatics,” not just a particular sect.

In fact, the greatest and most important uniqueness of *charismatic* churches over other authentic Christian churches is not their love or holiness, but rather an emphasis on, and practice of: 1) emotional worship, 2) speaking and/or praying in an incoherent tongue, 3) claims to direct divine revelation through spiritual gifts such as prophecy, and 4) claims to a greater abundance of miracles in general through the gifts of healing and miracle working.

Therefore, throughout *KOG* we use the terms *emotionalism* (see chapters 4.8-11), *glossaism* (Gr. glossa: “tongue,” see Book 12: *The Truth About Tongues*), *prophetism* (see Book 9: *God’s Prophets*), and *super-supernaturalism* (see chapters 10.14-16) to refer to these distinctives respectively, while recognizing that they may exist elsewhere as well. Accordingly, we believe this allows us to address the areas of concern we have regarding the movement, and avoid speaking critically of the movement as a whole, which has many good, although not unique, attributes as well.

Likewise, we refrain from referring to those Christians who would differ from “charismatics” as “non-charismatics,” erroneously implying again that the latter is somehow lacking in grace. Rather, those who oppose the sometimes bizarre worship of *emotionalism*, the obscure utterances of *glossaism*, the extra-biblical revelations of *prophetism*, and the

powers in the Church possess these gifts.

- 3) Their provision of a store of divine knowledge from which the Apostles wrote rather than the common notion of a continuous "inspiration."

Not surprisingly, many teachers in *charismaticism* view the gifts of divine knowledge and wisdom as supernatural in nature. Referring to the gift of wisdom, Dr. Fee writes:

In Pentecostal and charismatic circles this "gift" is often understood to be that special word of insight given by the Spirit when the community is going through a time of difficulty or decision.<sup>26</sup>

Likewise, another leader of *charismaticism*, Michael Green, writes: "If we compare the passage here with I Corinthians 13:2 and 14:6 it becomes apparent that Paul is speaking of some revelatory word from God for the benefit of others."<sup>27</sup>

Nonetheless, in other Evangelical circles it has been common to deny the miraculous and revelatory nature of the gifts of divine wisdom and knowledge. This is perhaps in response to the great deal of error and abuse that has occurred in *charismaticism* regarding these gifts. Accordingly, instead of a supernatural

miracle-a-minute mindset of *super-supernaturalism* are better labeled as *historicists*. This reflects the fact that *for at least 1600 years of Church history, the great majority belief and practice of God's people was opposed to all of the uniquenesses that the "charismatic" movement claims today.*

It is a historical fact that miraculous gifts such as healing, tongues, and prophecy ceased functioning in the church in the fourth century. Accordingly, the very few people since then who have promoted bizarre forms of worship, obscure utterances in prayer, claims to extra-biblical revelation, and miracle working abilities, were always thought to be deceived and dangerous, and not accepted as biblical Christians. What those in *charismaticism* also refuse to admit, or take seriously enough, is that the modern versions of the miraculous gifts being claimed do not match the attributes of their biblical counterparts. For a great deal of discussion on these matters see the books in this Volume II of *KOG*.

<sup>26</sup> Fee, 592. Although, he, like Dr. Grudem, rejects this interpretation: "One need not doubt that the Holy Spirit speaks so to today's church, but it is unlikely that Paul had this in mind by this 'gift'" (ibid.). Dr. Fee simply defines it as "a 'spiritual utterance' of some revelatory kind" (593). Which doesn't seem all that different from the charismatic view he rejects.

<sup>27</sup> Michael Green, *The Message of Matthew* (Intervarsity, 2000)

explanation for these gifts, there has been a multitude of different, more natural definitions of these gifts related more to teaching, counseling, or just being smart, rather than the reception of divine revelation.<sup>28</sup>

Such a perspective is certainly not new, however. The ancient and influential Church leader Origen (c. 185-c. 254) indicated that the spiritual gift of knowledge was merely a gift given in order to *understand* what the Apostles wrote:

Now it ought to be known that the holy Apostles, in preaching the faith of Christ, delivered themselves with the utmost clearness on certain points which they believed to be necessary to every one, even to those who seemed somewhat dull in the investigation of divine knowledge; leaving, however, the grounds of their statements to be examined into by those who should deserve the excellent gifts of the Spirit, and who, especially by means of the Holy Spirit Himself, should obtain the gift of [understanding various] language [e.g. Greek and Hebrew], of wisdom, and of knowledge.<sup>29</sup>

Augustine (354-430) seemed to suggest that particularly the gift of knowledge related to "human things" rather than divine things, and that it was more a gift of human rationality, rather than divine revelation.<sup>30</sup> On the other hand, Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) distinguished the gift of wisdom from mere "cognition,"<sup>31</sup> and in his commentary on 1 Corinthians described both the gifts of wisdom and knowledge as, "knowledge of divine things"<sup>32</sup> and "knowledge . . . divinely infused as in the apostles"<sup>33</sup>

Ignoring its supernatural aspects, John Calvin (1509-1564) commented on 1 Corinthians 12:8: "Let us then take *knowledge* as meaning *ordinary information*."<sup>34</sup> The very popular 19<sup>th</sup> century NT

<sup>28</sup> For a much fuller discussion of the nature of biblical wisdom see section 14?

<sup>29</sup> Origen, *De principiis*, Preface, 3; online at [www.ccel.org](http://www.ccel.org).

<sup>30</sup> Thiselton, 941-2.

<sup>31</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 23-25; online at <http://www.newadvent.org/summa>.

<sup>32</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *1 Corinthians*, para. 728; online at <http://www.aquinas.avemaria.edu/Aquinas-Corinthians.pdf>

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, para. 764.

<sup>34</sup> John Calvin, *Calvin's Bible Commentaries*, 1 Cor 12:8; online at [www.ccel.org](http://www.ccel.org).

scholar Albert Barnes (1798–1870) wrote of these gifts: “The sense is, that one man would be prominent and distinguished as a wise man—a prudent counselor, instructor, and adviser.”<sup>35</sup>

On the other hand, the great “Old Princeton” theologian Charles Hodge (1797–1878) believed that the gift of wisdom was exclusively apostolic and revelational, while the gift of knowledge, “is probably to be understood the gift which belonged to teachers . . . the gift correctly to understand and properly to exhibit the truths revealed by the Apostles and Prophets.”<sup>36</sup> More recently, the popular NT commentator William Barclay (1907–1978) also interprets the gift of knowledge in a rather ordinary, non-miraculous way as, “the knowledge which knows what to do in any given situation.”<sup>37</sup>

While both Augustine and Calvin were willing to suggest the gift of wisdom was divine and miraculous, while the gift of knowledge was not, later expositors have not seen any miraculous or divine nature in either of them. NT scholar D. A. Carson simply writes of the spiritual gifts of “**words of wisdom**” and “**words of knowledge**” (1 Cor 12:8) that: “It is not clear that the content of such messages was invariably what could not have been known any other way.”<sup>38</sup>

Likewise, the respected Bible teacher John MacArthur states that although these gifts “may have been revelatory in the first century,” they currently operate in a way that is rather synonymous with the gift of teaching the Scriptures. Therefore, the gift of wisdom is, “the ability to make skillful and practical application of the truth to life situations [including drawing] from the many insights and interpretations of commentators and other Bible scholars.” The gift of knowledge is described similarly by Dr. MacArthur as “a special ability to study His Word and discover the full meaning of the text.”<sup>39</sup> This is similar to the view expressed in two well known studies in

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<sup>35</sup> Albert Barnes, *Barnes’ Notes on the New Testament*, Electronic Edition STEP Files CD-ROM (Findex.Com, 1999), 1 Cor 12:8

<sup>36</sup> Charles Hodge, *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1 Cor 12:8; online at [www.ccel.org](http://www.ccel.org).

<sup>37</sup> William Barclay, *Daily Study Bible*, CD-ROM (Liguori Publications, 1996), *1 Corinthians*, 109.

<sup>38</sup> D. A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit: A Theological Exposition of 1 Corinthians 12-14* (Baker, 1987), 38.

<sup>39</sup> John MacArthur, *MacArthur’s New Testament Commentary*, Electronic Edition STEP Files CD-ROM (Parsons Technology, 1997), 1 Cor 12:8.

the 1970's by Arnold Bittlinger, and even the Pentecostal Donald Gee.<sup>40</sup>

Perhaps most surprising is Dr. Grudem's denial that these gifts involve miraculous and divine revelation. This foremost theologian of *charismaticism* writes:

[My own] interpretation of these gifts would see them as more "non-miraculous" or ordinary: the "word of wisdom" simply means the ability to speak a wise word in various situations, and "word of knowledge" is the ability to speak with knowledge about a situation. In both cases the wisdom and knowledge would not be based on a special revelation spontaneously given by the Holy Spirit, but would be based on wisdom acquired in the ordinary course of life, the wisdom and knowledge that would be characteristic of Bible teachers or elders and other mature Christians in a church, for example.<sup>41</sup>

## B) Their Divine Content & Miraculous Nature

What kind of "**wisdom**" and "**knowledge**" do these gifts provide then?<sup>42</sup> Despite several claims today to the contrary, there are several reasons to claim they relate to *miraculous* wisdom and knowledge through divine revelation.

First, we notice that the gifts are described as a "**message**" given "**through the Spirit,**" or "**by means of the same Spirit.**" In other words, these gifts produced messages directly from the Spirit. This is not the case of Teachers who get their messages from Scripture. Indeed, the Spirit gifts them with a special desire and ability to interpret, apply, and communicate Scripture, but Scripture is the source of their message, not the Spirit directly. Accordingly, these gifts do not refer to teaching as many above claim.

Secondly, these gifts are found in a list of exclusively miraculous gifts:

**To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit,<sup>9</sup> to another [miracle] faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one**

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<sup>40</sup> Donald Gee, *Concerning Spiritual Gifts*, (Gospel Publishing House, 1972; Arnold Bittlinger, *Gifts and Ministries* (Eerdmans, 1973).

<sup>41</sup> Grudem, 1080. See his support of this view at 1080-82.

<sup>42</sup> For a discussion of the distinction between these gifts see endnote above.

**Spirit,<sup>10</sup> to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues.** (1 Cor 12:8-10)

We have argued elsewhere that the Apostle is not speaking here of a merely human faith, but a *miracle faith*,<sup>43</sup> nor would we think is the “**distinguishing of** [invisible, demonic or angelic] **spirits**” merely a human ability as well. Likewise, “**tongues**” and their “**interpretation**” is clearly meant to require miraculous abilities from God.<sup>44</sup> Most definitely this is the case with “**healing . . . effecting of miracles . . . [and] prophecy.**” Therefore, when we find in the same list, “**the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and . . . the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit,**” it is best to conclude that these too are miraculous gifts producing something that merely human wisdom, knowledge, effort, study, and experience cannot—namely divine revelation.

Accordingly, Charles Hodge wrote in his commentary on 1 Corinthians:

There are gifts of the Spirit which are ordinary and permanent, such as those of teaching and ruling, but they are not included in this enumeration, which embraces nothing which was not miraculous, or at least supernatural.<sup>45</sup>

Contrary to Drs. Grudem and Fee quoted above, 1 Corinthians 12:8 is not the only reference to the gifts of divine wisdom and knowledge. Just a few verses later the Apostle is clearly referring to the spiritual gifts he has just mentioned when he writes: “**Love never fails. But where there are** [the gift of] **prophecies, they will cease; where there are** [the gift of] **tongues, they will be stilled; where there is** [the gift of] **knowledge, it will pass away**” (1 Cor 13:8; cf. 13:2). Even if one interprets Paul as saying that these gifts pass away at the Second Coming of Christ, the natural definition of the gift of knowledge espoused by some above does not fit.

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<sup>43</sup> For a discussion of *miracle faith* see chapter 6.8

<sup>44</sup> For further discussion of the gift of tongues see Book 12: *The Truth About Tongues*.

<sup>45</sup> Hodge, 1 Cor 12:7. However, we are not sure how Dr. Hodge reconciled this observation with his earlier one that the gift of knowledge, “is probably to be understood the gift which belonged to teachers.” (Ibid.)

For example, Dr. Grudem wrote above: “the “word of wisdom” simply means the ability to speak a wise word in various situations, and “word of knowledge” is the ability to speak with knowledge about a situation.” Will these abilities cease in the eternal Kingdom Age on the New Earth. We do not believe so. Even more so, taking our view that Paul expected these gifts to cease with the completion of the NT revelation, gives us even more reason to understand them in a more supernatural way.

Other references to these gifts reflect their supernatural nature as well. Accordingly, the Apostle is no doubt referring to these very gifts earlier in 1 Corinthians when he writes:

**We [Apostles of Jesus Christ <sup>46</sup>] . . . speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. No, we speak of God's secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden. . . .**

**None of the rulers of this age understood it. . . . [A]s it is written: ‘No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love Him’-- but God has revealed it to us [the Apostles] by His Spirit [through the miraculous gifts of supernatural wisdom and knowledge]. . . .**

**[N]o one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit Who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words. . . . we [Apostles of Jesus Christ] have the mind of Christ. (1 Cor 2:6-13, 16)**

What the Apostle describes here in chapter 2 of this epistle as the supernatural ability to “**speak a message of wisdom . . . by the Spirit . . . in words taught by the Spirit**” (vs. 6, 10, 13) is, no doubt, the same thing as a miraculous gift of being “**given through the Spirit the message of wisdom**” in chapter 12 (v. 8).

And there is also no doubt that this gift, as described in 1 Corinthians 2, involves divine revelation, as it is contrasted with, “**the wisdom of this age**” (v. 6) and “**words taught . . . by**

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<sup>46</sup> Our claim that this whole section in 1 Corinthians regarding divine revelation applies only to the revelatory Apostles is further defended against *mega mystical* claims in section 14.13.E.

**human wisdom**" (v. 13). The result of these gifts is that the Apostles had **"the mind of Christ"** (v. 16) such that they possessed a store of supernatural knowledge from which they spoke and wrote. And would we not expect biblical references to special revelatory gifts for the Apostles who had the responsibility to communicate the very words of God (cf. 1 Thess 2:13; 1 Jn.4:6)?

Accordingly, when the Apostle Paul defends the authenticity and uniqueness as a revelatory Apostle to the Corinthians he writes:

**I do not think I am in the least inferior to those [false] "super-apostles." I may not be a trained speaker, but I do have [divine, supernatural] knowledge. We have made this perfectly clear to you in every way.** (2 Cor 11:5-6)

The Apostle is obviously not talking about mere human knowledge such as algebra or science. Nor is he speaking of his great knowledge of the OT as a member of the Sanhedrin. He is speaking of a superior knowledge of God's New Covenant revelation that sets him apart from the false apostles. He is speaking of a divine endowment that authenticated him as an Apostle of Jesus Christ.<sup>47</sup> It is suggested here that he is speaking specifically about the gift of divine wisdom and knowledge that Apostles like him possessed enabling them to communicate new extra-biblical revelation from God.

Again, the Apostle would seem to clearly describe these gifts when he writes the Ephesians:

**Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace [charitos: a spiritual gift] that was given to me for you, that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my [supernatural] insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy Apostles and Prophets.**

**This mystery is that through the Gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus. I became a servant of this Gospel by the gift of God's grace [chariots: not salvation- but spiritual gifts of**

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<sup>47</sup> Accordingly, Dr. Fee writes, "Indeed, Paul twice appeals to his own gift of "knowledge" in this letter as evidence that God is at work in his ministry (6:6; 11:6) (Presence, 339).

apostleship and divine wisdom and knowledge] **given me through the working of His power.**

**Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace [i.e. gift of supernatural wisdom and knowledge] was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. His intent was that now, through the church, [and the gifts of divine wisdom and knowledge] the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms. (Eph 3:2-10)**

Again, it would seem the Apostle Paul is describing a gift of divine wisdom and knowledge.

More specifically, these gifts of divine wisdom and knowledge were used to write Scripture. Accordingly, we read in 2 Peter:

Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the [miraculous gift of divine] wisdom that God gave him. . . . His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction. (3:15-16)

Here it is clear that the early Church believed that a divine gift of wisdom enabled an Apostle such as Paul to write divinely authoritative "**Scriptures**." It is equally clear here that the reference to "**wisdom**" refers to the miraculous kind.

In addition, we have noted in the previous chapter that Jesus was labeled an Apostle in the early Church and accordingly, we believe He alludes to the gifts of divine wisdom and knowledge He possessed when He says:

**"My teaching is not My own. It comes from Him Who sent Me. . . . My teaching comes from God"** (John 7:16).

**"I do nothing on My own but speak just what the Father has taught Me"** (John 8:28).

**"The Father Who sent Me commanded Me what to say and how to say it . . . So whatever I say is just what the Father has told Me to say"** (John 12:49-50).

**“The words I say to you are not just My own. Rather, it is the Father, living in Me, Who is doing His work”** (John 14:10)

**“Everything that I learned from My Father I have made known to you”** (John 15:15)

[Praying to the Father] **“I gave them the words You gave Me”** (John 17:8)

While we would fully maintain the deity of Christ, His humanness is revealed in the fact that He repeatedly claimed that His divine knowledge was received from the Father, and not inherent at birth, and at least the references above could be described as a gift of divine wisdom and knowledge.<sup>48</sup> Likewise, we believe Christ was referring to such a revelatory gift when He told His disciples: **“The [supernatural] knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of Heaven has been given to you, but not to them [the masses]”** (Matt 13:11-12).

The gifts of divine wisdom and knowledge also seem to be described in the OT. In Isaiah’s prophecy of Christ he says, **“The Spirit of the LORD will rest on Him—the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD”** (Isa 11:2). Likewise, we read, **“God gave Solomon wisdom and very great insight, and a breadth of understanding as measureless as the sand on the seashore”** (1 Kgs 4:29; cf. Deut 34:9). Clearly this is a spiritual gift of supernatural wisdom and knowledge. Along the same lines, we read of the craftsman **“Bezalel”** whom God, **“filled . . . with the Spirit of God, with skill, ability and knowledge in all kinds of crafts”** (Exod 35:31).<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Accordingly, Cornelius Van Til wrote:

The inspiration of Christ is univocal in character because he was himself divine. Yet we must not off -hand identify Christ's human consciousness with his divine consciousness. He tells us that the words he speaks have been received, John 14:10, 24. This accords with his acceptance of human nature, and that in its weakened condition. He grew in wisdom, through the reading of Scripture, etc. (An Introduction to Systematic Theology [Unpublished syllabus, 1955], 161

<sup>49</sup> Albert Barnes saw a reference to a revelation of divine wisdom in Job 32:7-9:

**I thought, ‘Age should speak; advanced years should teach wisdom.’ But it is the spirit in a man, the breath of the**

Early Church leaders saw the revelatory gifts of wisdom and knowledge in Scripture as well, and believed these gifts to be particularly attached to the Apostles. Polycarp (c. 69-c. 155), Bishop of Smyrna, writes in his *Epistle to the Philippians*:

I am writing you these comments about righteousness, brothers, not on my own initiative but because you invited me to do so. For neither I nor anyone like me can keep pace with the [gift of divine] wisdom of the blessed and glorious Paul, who, when he was among you in the presence of the men of that time, accurately and reliably taught the word concerning the [new divine] truth. And when he was absent he wrote you letters; if you study them carefully, you will be able to build yourselves up in the faith that has been given to you.<sup>50</sup>

Justin Martyr (c. 100-165) believed these gifts were supernaturally revelatory when he wrote: "Solomon possessed the spirit of wisdom, Daniel that of understanding and counsel . . . Isaiah that of knowledge."<sup>51</sup> Tertullian (c. 160-c. 225) said of the gifts of wisdom and knowledge in 1 Corinthians 12:8, "this we see

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**Almighty, that gives him understanding. It is not only the old who are wise, not only the aged who understand what is right.**

Dr. Barnes commented:

This evidently refers to a spirit imparted from above; a spirit from the Almighty. The parallelism seems to require this, for it responds to the phrase "the inspiration of the Almighty" in the other hemistich. The Hebrew expression here also seems to require this interpretation. It is, *רוח הוא ru'ach hu'*, the Spirit itself; meaning the very Spirit that gives wisdom, or the Spirit of inspiration. . . .

All true wisdom, is the sentiment, is from above; and where the inspiration of the Almighty is, no matter whether with the aged or the young, there is understanding. Elihu undoubtedly means to say, that though he was much younger than they were, and though, according to the common estimate in which the aged and the young were held, he might be supposed to have much less acquaintance with the subjects under consideration, yet, as all true wisdom came from above, he might be qualified to speak.

The word "spirit" here, therefore, refers to the spirit which God gives; and the passage is a proof that it was an early opinion that certain men were under the teachings of divine inspiration. The Chaldee renders it *רוח נבואתא*, a spirit of prophecy (Job 32:8).

However, see C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, Electronic Edition STEP Files CD-ROM (Findex.com, 2000) for a different view

<sup>50</sup> Polycarp, *Epistle to the Philippians*, 3:1-2; online at [www.ccel.org](http://www.ccel.org).

<sup>51</sup> Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 87; online at [www.ccel.org](http://www.ccel.org).

at once is what Isaiah declared to be "the spirit of wisdom" and the "spirit of understanding and counsel" which are obviously miraculous revelatory gifts in Isaiah 11:2 as noted above.<sup>52</sup> Theodore of Mopsuestia (c. 350-428) believed that while Solomon did not have the spiritual gift of prophecy, he did have the spiritual gift of "wisdom."<sup>53</sup>

Finally, Hilary of Poitiers (315-367) wrote:

Hence it is by these miraculous workings that the manifestation of the Spirit takes place. For the gift of the Spirit is manifest, where wisdom makes utterance and the words of life are heard, and where there is the knowledge that comes of God-given insight, lest after the fashion of beasts through ignorance of God we should fail to know the Author of our life.<sup>54</sup>

Fast-forwarding to the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) agreed that the gifts of wisdom and knowledge involved direct divine revelation and wrote:

But by that knowledge which the Apostle here speaks of [at 1 Cor 13:8ff], which he says shall vanish away, he means only a particular, miraculous gift which there was in the church of God in those days; for the Apostle is here comparing charity with the miraculous gifts of the Spirit, as has been heretofore observed. There were various extraordinary gifts of the Spirit given by inspiration which were then common in the church. . . .

You see that a gift of knowledge is mentioned among these, which was a different thing both from that speculative knowledge which is obtained by reason and study, or that spiritual and divine knowledge which persons have by the saving influence of the Spirit on the soul. It was a particular gift of the Spirit with which some persons were endued whereby they were enabled by immediate inspiration to understand mysteries, or the mysterious prophecies and types of Scripture.

The Apostle speaks of this in the second verse of this chapter: 'Though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge.' It is this miraculous gift

<sup>52</sup> Tertullian, *Against Marcion*, V:8; online at [www.ccel.org](http://www.ccel.org).

<sup>53</sup> M. F. Wiles, "Theodore of Mopsuestia as Representative of the Antiochene School," *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, P. R. Ackroyd and C. F. Evans, 2 Vols. (Cambridge Press, 1970), 495.

<sup>54</sup> Hilary of Poitiers, *Trinity*, viii:30; online at [www.ccel.org](http://www.ccel.org).

which the Apostle says shall vanish away, together with other miraculous gifts of the Spirit, such as prophecy and the gift of tongues.<sup>55</sup>

The revered OT scholar from Moody Bible, Merrill F. Unger (1909-1980) wrote of these gifts:

"Knowledge," of course, was not truth taught by the Spirit through the Word, but truth revealed directly before the Word was revealed in the completed New Testament Scriptures. . . . Both "prophecy" and "knowledge," therefore, were of necessity "tie-overs" to supply the church's practical needs until the New Testament Scriptures became available.<sup>56</sup>

Several modern NT scholars agree that the gifts of wisdom and knowledge as expressly mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12:28 were supernatural and revelatory in nature. These include Leon Morris, Robert Thomas, and Anthony Thiselton.<sup>57</sup>

We see then that these gifts of wisdom and knowledge were miraculous in the fact that their result was not obtained by merely natural, human means. Therefore, their result was supernatural knowledge.<sup>58</sup>

For example, these gifts gave the Apostles knowledge of events in Christ's life in which they were not physically present. Accordingly, the Apostle John relates the story of Christ's interaction with a Samaritan woman which took place while, **"His disciples had gone into the town to buy food"** (John 4:8). While it is possible that John's reference here did not include Himself, or that Christ related the incident after His disciples returned, neither of these are the impression that John gives in the text, but rather, it would seem the incident was given to John by way of miraculous revelation, such as was promised Him by Christ (cf. John 14:26).

Likewise, the Apostle Paul **"received from the Lord"** (1 Cor 11:23) the events of the Passover meal on Christ's final night, because he was not present. We would offer this same explanation

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<sup>55</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Charity and its Fruits*, 157; online at [www.graphebooks.org/chanditfrjed.html](http://www.graphebooks.org/chanditfrjed.html)

<sup>56</sup> Merrill F. Unger, *NT Teaching on Tongues* (Kregel, 1971), 83, 94.

<sup>57</sup> Some see the gifts as revelatory (e.g., Robert L. Thomas, *Understanding Spiritual Gifts* [Kregel, 1998], 37; Morris, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians* (TNTC) [Eerdmans, 1958], 171; Thiselton, 938-944.

<sup>58</sup> For further discussion on the nature of supernatural knowledge see section 2.3.C.1.

for how the Apostle Matthew knew of Christ's forty day temptation in the desert by the devil (cf. Matt 4:1-11).<sup>59</sup>

In light of the above, we would again disagree with Dr. Grudem's arguments that the gifts of a "**word of wisdom**" and a "**word of knowledge**" (1 Cor 12:8) were not miraculous and revelatory in nature. His foundational error would seem to be the suggestion that 1 Corinthians 12:8 is, "the only information we have about these gifts . . . No interpreter anywhere has any more information than this to work with."<sup>60</sup> We have already demonstrated otherwise.

Dr. Grudem then has three arguments against the view that these gifts were miraculous and revelatory in nature. First, he suggests that the words "wisdom" and "knowledge" "are not specialized or technical terms" but rather are used here "for human wisdom and knowledge."<sup>61</sup> However, Paul specifies that the "**wisdom**" and "**knowledge**" he speaks of is "**through the Spirit,**" clearly suggesting a supernatural nature to them.

Secondly, Dr. Grudem says his "most decisive" argument is that miraculous and revelatory gifts of divine wisdom and knowledge would be exactly what prophecy is. Indeed, while we argue below that these gifts had a special relationship with the NT Apostles, biblical Prophets would seem to have at times demonstrated their attributes as well (cf. Eph 3:5; Num 24:15-16; Dan 2:21-23; 5:14; 1 Cor 13:2). (Eph 3:2-5; cf.)

However, it would seem the Apostle also distinguished the gift of knowledge from prophecy when he wrote: "**brothers, what good will I be to you, unless I bring you some revelation or knowledge or prophecy or word of instruction?**" (1 Cor 14:6). He certainly distinguishes them in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10 where he lists the gifts of "**wisdom . . . [and] knowledge**" (v. 8) separately from the gift of "**prophecy**" (v. 10).

Finally, Dr. Grudem denies that the list of gifts in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10 are entirely miraculous because Paul intends to make all Christians feel like an equally valuable part of the body no matter what their gift.<sup>62</sup> Therefore, according to him, Paul would

<sup>59</sup> Therefore, we would not agree with the popular Christian author Philip Yancey who writes, "As I read the Temptation story it occurs to me that, in the absence of eyewitnesses, all details must have come from Jesus himself." (*The Jesus I Never Knew* [Zondervan, 1995], 70)

<sup>60</sup> Grudem, 1080.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 1081.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

intentionally want to mix miraculous with non-miraculous gifts in this list. Accordingly, because all the rest of the gifts in this list are miraculous, the gifts of wisdom and knowledge must not be. On its own, and apart from the considerations above, this argument has some merit, as the promotion of equality is surely one of Paul's intentions in this passage.

However, as pointed out elsewhere, at least an equally important purpose of Apostle is teaching the Corinthians to distinguish genuine miraculous manifestations of the Holy Spirit in the congregation from faked or pagan ones (cf. 1 Cor 12:1-3).<sup>63</sup> It is clear that the issue for the Corinthians is the miraculous gifts, which is why the Apostle lists them in this passage.

In the end, we agree with others that the gifts of, "**the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and . . . the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit**" (1 Cor 12:8) involve miraculous divine revelation.

In summary, we suggest that the gifts of divine wisdom and knowledge consisted of new extra-biblical revelation from God. When it operated in a person, they were able to either speak or write the very thoughts of God, and therefore with the very authority of God. This is precisely why we refer to it in this study as a *Scripture gift*, and it is what made an Apostle of Jesus Christ who they were.

## C) Their Uniquely Apostolic Nature

While *charismaticism* generally teaches that the gifts of divine wisdom and knowledge involve supernatural revelation, not surprisingly, they also insist that virtually any Christian could possess them. We noted above Dr. Fee's description of divine wisdom as a "special [extra-biblical] word of insight given by the Spirit when the community is going through a time of difficulty or decision." Likewise, Dr. Green says the gift of knowledge, "is a particularly valuable gift for the Christian counselor, who needs to know the heart of the person to whom he is speaking."<sup>64</sup>

We would suggest that while Dr. Green is correct in claiming these gifts involved divine revelation, he has no biblical support whatsoever to suggest they were or are the common possession of

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<sup>63</sup> For further discussion on the fake nature of the phenomenon of tongues in the Corinthian congregation see esp. chapter 12.7.

<sup>64</sup> Green, 229, 230.

Christian counselors for the clairvoyant purpose of enabling them to know the private thoughts of a person.<sup>65</sup>

All of the NT references noted above describe the gifts of divine wisdom and knowledge in the context of the Apostles (cf. 1 Cor 2:6-13; 2 Cor 11:5-6; Eph 3:2-10). Nonetheless, such wisdom from divine revelation was experienced by OT characters as well. For example, "**Pharaoh said to Joseph, 'Since God has made all this [future events] known to you, there is no one so discerning [bin: "insight"] and wise [chakam] as you'**" (Gen 41:39). Joseph's divine revelation of the future is described as being "**wise.**"

Likewise, we read that, "**Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds**" (Dan 1:17), and this is described as supernatural wisdom from God:

**During the night the mystery [of Nebuchadnezzar's dream] was revealed to Daniel in a vision. Then Daniel praised the God of Heaven and said: "Praise be to the name of God for ever and ever . . . He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning. He reveals deep and hidden things [that can only be known by divine revelation].** (Dan 2:19-22)

Nevertheless, revelatory wisdom in the NT is attributed exclusively to the Apostles. This is abundantly clear in 2 Peter where we read: "Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother [and Apostle] Paul also wrote you with the [gift of divine] wisdom that God gave him" (3:15-16). Likewise, we've already noted that Paul defended his claim to apostleship by specifically claiming the gift of divine knowledge (cf. 2 Cor 11:5-6).

We would suggest the rather exclusive relationship between these gifts and the Apostles is also evidenced in 1 Corinthians 12 itself by the order of the two lists of gifts given. The first list (vs. 8-10) lists the gifts of divine wisdom and knowledge first and omits Apostles. The second list (v. 28) lists Apostles first and omits the gifts of divine wisdom and knowledge. This suggests to us that the gifts of divine wisdom and knowledge are rather interchangeable with Apostles.

Charles Hodge agreed regarding the gift of wisdom and wrote concerning 1 Corinthians 12:

That gift [of divine wisdom] stands first as the most important, and as the characteristic gift of the Apostles, as may be

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<sup>65</sup> Clairvoyancy is further discussed at section 9.12.A.

inferred from v. 28, where the arrangement of offices to a certain extent corresponds with the arrangement of the gifts here presented. Among the gifts, the first is the word of wisdom; and among the offices, the first is that of the Apostles. It is perfectly natural that this correspondence should be observed at the beginning, even if it be not carried out. This gift in its full measure belonged to the Apostles alone . . . <sup>66</sup>

The claim that these gifts were the rather exclusive possession of Apostles is suggested as well by Paul's intentional choice of prophecy as the gift that the Corinthian congregation should be seeking, rather than knowledge or wisdom. This implies that Paul expected some in a church to have the gift of prophecy, but not the gifts of divine wisdom and knowledge, because only Apostles normally possessed these.

This is perhaps reflected in his statement: "**Now, brothers, if I [a revelatory Apostle] come to you and speak in tongues, what good will I be to you, unless I bring you some revelation or [divine] knowledge or prophecy or word of instruction?** (1Cor 14:6). Here, we would suggest, is a reference to the gift of divine knowledge that Paul had claimed earlier in the letter (cf. 2:6-13). We can contrast this with Paul's description of what he expected in the Corinthian congregation in his absence where it would seem he intentionally leaves out "**knowledge**":

**What then shall we say, brothers? When you come together [in the absence of revelatory Apostles], everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction [lit. "teaching"], a revelation [from prophecy], a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church.** (1 Cor 14:26)

We would suggest that the reference here to "**revelation**" in the congregation refers specifically to the gift of prophecy that Paul has been promoting throughout the passage, but does not name as prophecy here, as he did in 14:6. Therefore, while promoting the gifts of divine wisdom and knowledge would have had the same effect as promoting prophecy, in the context of promoting gifts of divine revelation over tongues, Paul does not use the former gifts because they were the rather exclusive possession of Apostles.

Likewise, in Paul's discussion of the cessation of the miraculous gifts he specifically picks out divine knowledge, prophecy, and

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<sup>66</sup> Hodge, 1 Cor 12:8.

tongues (cf. 1 Cor 13:8). We suggest he chooses knowledge and prophecy because these were the most important gifts, knowledge referring to apostleship which was ranked "**first**," and prophecy being ranked "**second**" (cf. 1 Cor 12:28).

We would further claim that the promises of divine revelation given by Christ to the Twelve were specifically a promise of the gifts of divine wisdom and knowledge. Christ said:

**I will ask the Father, and He will give you . . . the Spirit of truth. . . . All this I have spoken while still with you. But the . . . Holy Spirit, Whom the Father will send in My name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. . . .**

**But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all truth [divine knowledge]. He will not speak on His own; He will speak only what He hears, and He will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to Me by taking [divine knowledge] from what is Mine and making it [divine knowledge] known to you. (John 14:16-17, 25-26; 16:13-14)**

If these are references to the gifts of divine wisdom and knowledge which the Apostles possessed, then they are evidence that these gifts were essentially intended for the Apostles, because, as we argue elsewhere, these promises were meant only for the revelatory Apostles.<sup>67</sup>

The early Church, as well, considered these gifts of divine wisdom and knowledge to be equated with Apostles of Jesus Christ. Tertullian states that God did not give these gifts to just any men, but to "choice men, Apostles."<sup>68</sup> Likewise, Clement of Alexandria wrote that these gifts were "apostolic."<sup>69</sup> Irenaeus (c. 180) believed that the Apostles had an exclusive divine gift of "perfect knowledge" that distinguished them from others who were claiming the same in his day. He wrote:

We have learned from none others the plan of our salvation, than from those through whom the Gospel has come down to us, which they did at one time proclaim in public, and, at a later period, by the will of God, handed down to us in the Scriptures, to be the ground and pillar of our faith. For it is

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<sup>67</sup> For further discussion concerning who these promises of divine revelation in John apply to see chapter 14.13.

<sup>68</sup> Tertullian, *Against Marcion*, V:8.

<sup>69</sup> Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, 4:21; quoted in Thiselton, 940.

unlawful to assert that they preached before they possessed “perfect knowledge,” as some do even venture to say, boasting themselves as improvers of the Apostles. For, after our Lord rose from the dead, [the revelatory Apostles] were invested with power from on high when the Holy Spirit came down [upon them], were filled from all [His gifts], and had perfect knowledge.<sup>70</sup>

Likewise, Chrysostom (347-407) would seem to have limited the gifts of divine wisdom and knowledge to the apostolic Age when he writes in his commentary on 1 Corinthians 12:8 that, “such [gifts] used to occur but now no longer take place.”<sup>71</sup>

Therefore, the biblical gifts of divine wisdom and knowledge were not for the ordinary Christian but were given to those who were messengers of new, extra-biblical divine revelation authoritative for the entire Church, and worthy to be written as Scripture. Therefore, in a very real sense, just as the gift of prophecy is synonymous with a God-sent Prophet,<sup>72</sup> the gifts of divine wisdom and knowledge are rather synonymous with a God-sent NT revelatory Apostle.

## **D) Their Abiding Nature:** *Distinguished from prophecy*

As noted above, the Scriptures clearly distinguish the gifts of divine wisdom and knowledge from that of prophecy, although it is less clear as to how they are different. It would seem the clearest difference in these gifts is that those of the Apostles operated in a more *abiding* way with a more general application to the universal Church, while prophetic revelation came in a more spontaneous way with a more specific application to an individual or local church. By *abiding* revelation we mean that the gifts of divine wisdom and knowledge gave the Apostles a store or depository of divine knowledge to write from, rather than being directly, spontaneously, and continuously “inspired” as they wrote.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, III.1.1; online at [www.ccel.org](http://www.ccel.org).

<sup>71</sup> Chrysostom, *Homilies on 1 Corinthians*, 29:1; online at [www.ccel.org](http://www.ccel.org).

<sup>72</sup> For discussion of the claim that the NT gift of prophecy is synonymous with being a NT Prophet, contrary to *charismaticism*, see section 9.4.B

<sup>73</sup> Because these gifts involved the divine knowledge itself which could potentially be withheld, we disagree with Dr. Barrett who writes:

Accordingly, the Apostle seems to distinguish the gift of “**knowledge**” from a “**revelation**” or a “**prophecy**” in 1 Corinthians 14:6, suggesting that the latter two may be a more spontaneous, immediately given revelation, while “**knowledge**” may suggest a one time deposit of divine revelation and knowledge which numerous subsequent “words” or messages of divine wisdom and knowledge were based upon.<sup>74</sup>

Along these lines, Erwin Lutzer writes:

[I]n some instances God endowed the [biblical] authors with ideas that they were allowed to write in their own words. This freedom allowed Paul, for example, to not only write with his own style, but to transition from doctrinal to personal matters. In his second letter to Timothy he could speak with authority about God's knowledge of us in eternity past (2 Timothy 1:9) and yet later say, "When you come bring the cloak which I left at Troas with Carpus, and the books, especially the parchments" (2 Timothy 4:13). God's ideas were written in Paul's style and in line with his interests and ability.<sup>75</sup>

This is a fundamental statement regarding the nature of biblical revelation. While Dr. Lutzer suggests the *abiding knowledge* of apostolic revelation only occurred in “some instances,” we would suggest this is the pervasive nature of all the NT epistles. After God supernaturally granted the Apostles divine knowledge of New Covenant doctrine through the types of supernatural revelation discussed in the next chapter, they could rather naturally use that knowledge to speak and write authoritatively on these subjects, adapting their knowledge to different circumstances, and weaving such supernatural knowledge amongst more natural knowledge.

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The gift is “*instructive discourse*” and “*It is the discourse, not the wisdom or the knowledge behind it, that is the spiritual gift, for it is this that is of direct service to the church (Schlatter). (284-5)*”

It is true that these gifts certainly involved an expression of this revelation and not just its possession, as Paul refers to them as “**the word** [*logos*: “*expression*”] **of wisdom through the Spirit**” and “**the word** [*logos*: “*expression*”] **of knowledge according to the same Spirit**” (1 Cor 12:8 NASB). However, Paul’s emphasis on the expression of divine knowledge in 1 Corinthians 12 may be because he is specifically dealing with the occurrence of supposedly Spirit-inspired utterances in the Corinthian congregation (cf. v. 3)

<sup>74</sup> For further discussion on the distinction between the gifts of prophecy and Apostleship see section 9.4.B.

<sup>75</sup> Erwin Lutzer, *Seven Convincing Miracles* (Moody, 1999), 22-3.

The abiding, as opposed to the continuous or spontaneous nature of the apostolic gifts of divine knowledge and wisdom is reflected when the Apostle Paul describes Apostles as having **"the mind [noun] of Christ"** (1 Cor 2:16).<sup>76</sup> Several NT scholars would interpret the use of **"mind"** here as "a collection of thoughts and beliefs which provides the criteria" for what is true.<sup>77</sup> Christ's knowledge of divine things was given to the Apostles through the gifts of divine wisdom and knowledge as the basis of the NT revelation. Accordingly, Christ told the disciples that they too had His "mind" when He said, **"everything that I learned from My Father I have made known to you"** (John 15:15). It was out of this abiding divine knowledge they possessed that they were able to write divinely authoritative doctrine.

The fact that apostolic revelation consisted of an *abiding knowledge*, instead of a continuous "inspiration," challenges a great

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<sup>76</sup> In our opinion, we are not able to find very many good commentators on this passage. Most modern ones claim that 1 Corinthians 2:6-16 refers to some revelation or illumination given to all Christians. We argue against this and present evidence that the Apostle is defending his apostleship in this passage and is primarily only referring to the supernatural revelation of Apostles (see section 14.13.E).

There is an absence of good discussions on specifically 1 Corinthians 2:16 as well. Most modern commentators simply don't discuss it at length. Dr. MacArthur applies it to the idea of the illumination of the believer to understand the Scriptures, a teaching we have altogether argued against elsewhere (see chapter 3.5). An older commentator like Dr. Barnes (1798–1870) thought **"the mind of Christ"** refers to His "views, feelings, and temper [character]."

The only commentator we can find who, in our opinion, offers a substantial and accurate interpretation of 1 Corinthians 2:6-16 is Charles Hodge who accordingly interpreted v. 6 as "The Lord had revealed certain doctrines" to the Apostles. Accordingly, we have written:

Finally, Paul says, **"we have the mind of Christ"** (v. 16). Was he including the Corinthian Christians in general in this statement? Not likely when a few verses later he tells them, **"Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual, but as worldly—mere infants in Christ"** (3:1). And if Paul did not mean to include the Corinthian Christians in such a claim, then no Christian today should either. It was the Apostles who possessed **"the mind of Christ,"** the very thing He had uniquely promised them in John 14:25-26 and 16:12-15 as discussed above, and which gave them their superior ability and authority to represent Christ through their writings in Scripture (14.13.E)

<sup>77</sup> Thiselton approvingly quotes this as the view of Paul Jewett and Adolf Schlatter. (275)

deal of modern thinking on this complex and controversial subject. So complex and controversial in fact, that, we will take up the topic of "inspiration" in chapters 8.8-8.11 of this book. Here we only wish to use the abiding nature of the gifts of divine wisdom and knowledge to contrast them with the gift of prophecy.

For example, many speak of the apostolic gifts of divine knowledge and wisdom as intermittent like other spiritual gifts, that they had an "on" and then "off" characteristic and that "inspiration" kind of visited them periodically and perhaps only when they were writing a NT document. On the contrary, the apostolic gifts of divine knowledge and wisdom were continuous because the knowledge and wisdom they gave was the Apostle's permanent possession.

As noted above, we would suggest that the gift of prophecy operated on a more spontaneous, circumstantially driven nature, most often applying to specific needs of the moment. This distinction cannot be pressed too dogmatically as NT Prophets were also recipients of new extra-biblical doctrine authoritative and applicable to the universal Church (cf. Eph 2:20; 3:5). Nonetheless, the abiding and more general supernatural knowledge of NT Apostles has historically been distinguished from the more spontaneous and specific revelation of Prophets.

This may be the best explanation of why Paul considers the gift of Apostleship "**first**" and Christian "**Prophets second**" "**in the church**" (1 Cor 12:28), and always lists Apostles before NT Prophets (cf. Eph 2:20; 4:11). Both possessed absolutely authoritative revelation from God, but the revelation of Apostles was more important as it more often dictated what the universal Church was to obey and believe. Perhaps it was the more local and specific revelation of the Prophets that made them "**second**" in the Church.

Accordingly, Dr. Hodge wrote concerning Paul's mention of the gift of "**prophecy**" in Romans 12:6:

From these and numerous similar passages, it appears that the prophets in the Christian church were men who spoke under the immediate influence of the Spirit of God, and delivered some divine communication relating to doctrinal truths, to present duty, to future events, etc., as the case might be.

The point of distinction between them and the Apostles, considered as religious teachers, appears to have been that the inspiration of the Apostles was abiding, they were the infallible and authoritative messengers of Christ; whereas the inspiration of the Prophets was occasional and transient. The

latter differed from the teachers, inasmuch as these were not necessarily inspired, but taught to others what they themselves had learned from the Scriptures, or from inspired men.<sup>78</sup>

In general, then, we claim that the gifts of divine wisdom and knowledge resulted in an *abiding knowledge* of new extra-biblical divine revelation, providing the Apostles with a store of knowledge by which they could speak and write with divine authority.

## E) Their Limitations

When the early Church leader Irenaeus claimed above that the Apostles possessed “perfect knowledge” he of course did not mean omniscience. What the gifts of divine wisdom and knowledge provided was perfect knowledge of the specific subjects God revealed. There are no errors in divine revelation—ever, for the simple fact that it is divine. However, through these gifts God did not reveal all He knows. Therefore the knowledge and wisdom given in these gifts applied to only the knowledge God desired someone to have. Accordingly, not even Jesus Christ knew the timing of End Time events, as the Father had not chosen to reveal this to Him or anyone else (cf. Matt 24:36). Likewise, the Apostle Paul could not remember whom he had baptized in Corinth (cf. 1 Cor 1:16).

This is not to say that God did not reveal historical, scientific, and cosmological matters in Scripture as well, but to simply say that those who possessed the gifts of divine wisdom and knowledge were not perfectly knowledgeable on all these subjects.<sup>79</sup> In other

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<sup>78</sup> Charles Hodge, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, Electronic Edition STEP Files (Findex.com, 2003), Rom 12:6.

<sup>79</sup> Because the gifts of divine wisdom and knowledge only applied to biblical matters we would disagree with Augustine, of whom Jack Rogers writes:

When Felix the Manichean claimed that the Holy Spirit had revealed to Manicheus the orbits of the heavenly bodies, Augustine replied that God desired us to become Christians, not astronomers. Such talk, Augustine said, takes up much of our valuable time and thus distracts our attention from more wholesome matters. Although our authors knew the truth about the shape of the heavens, the Spirit of God who spoke by them did not intend to teach men these things, in no way profitable for salvation. (Jack Rogers, “The Church Doctrine of Biblical Authority” in *Biblical Authority*, Jack Rogers ed. [Word, 1977], 21-23)

words, a modern botanist is more knowledgeable about the pollination of daffodils than the Apostle Paul ever was. The Apostles possessed divine knowledge, but not omniscient knowledge.

Along these lines, the "Old Princeton" theologian B. B. Warfield (1851-1921) wrote:

A presumption may be held to lie also that [Paul] shared the ordinary opinions of his day in certain matters laying outside the scope of his teachings, as, for example, with reference to the form of the earth, or its relation to the sun; and it is not inconceivable that the form of his language, when incidentally adverting to such matters, might occasionally play into the hands of such a presumption.<sup>80</sup>

In other words, it is possible that God allowed the Apostle Paul to have his scientific knowledge confined to what was taught in his day (e.g. Earth is flat, etc.), because it had no bearing on the spiritual knowledge the Apostle taught and wrote.

Nor did the gifts of divine wisdom and knowledge give a complete understanding of even biblical matters. One wonders, for example, what John's Revelation received in the early 90's would have added to Peter and Paul's knowledge of End Time events, both of whom wrote and died some 30 years earlier.<sup>81</sup>

Finally, the gifts of divine wisdom and knowledge certainly didn't guarantee perfect obedience to the revelation. The wisdom God gave Solomon was perfect, but his adherence to that very wisdom far from faithful. Likewise, while the Apostle Peter had received knowledge of the new extra-biblical revelation that God was accepting non-Jews into the New Covenant (cf. Acts 10:1-11:18), he did not consistently act accordingly (cf. Gal 2:11-14).<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> B. B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Presbyterian and Reformed, 1948), 196-97.

<sup>81</sup> In fact, we will suggest in section 3.23.2 that when Paul claims in 1 Corinthians 13:9 that, "**we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when [to teleion: "the completed thing"] comes, the imperfect [knowledge that even Apostles had at the time] disappears,**" because there was more NT revelation to come.

<sup>82</sup> The "charismatic" teacher Jack Deere unfortunately takes a shot at denigrating the authority of the Apostles with the example of Peter's hypocrisy in Antioch. Mr. Deere's purpose, which is unfortunately characteristic of *charismaticism*, is to water down the gift of Apostleship in the Bible so that a lesser gift or Apostles can be recognized today. He writes:

There is a tendency among some Protestant writers to almost deify the Apostles. Gross maintains that an Apostle "taught nothing

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## ***Extras & Endnotes***

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### ***Gauging Your Grasp***

- 1) What are several Scriptures that we claim refer to the gifts of divine wisdom and knowledge? Do you agree or disagree with this claim?
- 2) How do we describe the purpose of the gifts of divine wisdom and knowledge? Do you agree or disagree?
- 3) How do we distinguish between the gifts of divine wisdom and knowledge and prophecy? Do you agree or disagree?

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contradictory to the Word of God (Galatians 1:8, 9).” But Peter did teach something contrary to the Word. Paul said that when Peter came to Antioch, his example led a number of people into hypocrisy. This was certainly a form of teaching, and Paul had to oppose it. I do not believe the Apostles ever made a mistake writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, but they did not live under constant inspiration of the Holy Spirit. As Peter's example shows, they were capable of significant sin, just like any other believer in the church. (*Surprised by the Power of the Spirit* [Zondervan, 1993], 249)

Mr. Deere makes the mistake of equating a person's teaching, with the sin or mistakes they make. No doubt if Peter would have been asked on the occasion what the truth was, he would have infallibly communicated the truth. And Mr. Deere's admission that the Apostles were only infallible while "under inspiration" is not helpful as neither we nor those in the first century could do when this was. Peter does nothing here to refute the idea that the *teaching* of the Apostles was infallible.

In the end, we think Mr. Deere is taking a cheap shot at the biblical Apostles in order to justify his belief that revelatory and miracle working Apostles can exist today, without infallible authority or teaching, which quite conveniently covers up the gross sin and heresy that many "apostles" in *charismaticism* are guilty of. Mr. Deere should be exposing such "false apostles" instead of trying to justify them. Anyone who is at all attracted to Mr. Deere's point of view should read what we have quoted from Abraham Kuyper in section ? which does a great deal more justice to the Word of God concerning the Apostles than contemporary *charismaticism*.

8.2: *Apostolic Revelatory Gifts*

- 4) What do we mean by *abiding* revelation? How does this concept differ from a common idea of "inspiration"?
- 5) What is our suggestion for distinguishing between the gift of divine wisdom and divine knowledge?

**Publications & Particulars**



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**Chapter 8.3**  
**The Methods of Apostolic  
Revelation**  
*Seeing & Hearing God*

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**Table of Topics**

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C.3) Apostolic revelation by supernatural reminding

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*Extras & Endnotes*



### **Primary Points**

- While the gifts of divine knowledge and wisdom refer to the deposit of divine revelation from which the Apostles wrote from, here we discuss the methods by which they received that divine knowledge.
- While common notions of apostolic "inspiration" suggest some sort of continuous, spontaneous divine/human telepathy, the Scriptures describe such revelation in more physical and abiding ways.
- Jesus spoke repeatedly of receiving divine revelation by what He physically "saw" and "heard," just like OT Prophets, and especially Moses.
- We have several recorded instances of Jesus physically hearing the Father while He was on Earth.
- Promises of the Holy Spirit's guidance and revelation were uniquely and exclusively given to the Apostles.
- It was during the more than three years they personally lived and worked with Christ that "**everything that [He] learned from [His] Father [He] made known to [the Twelve]**" (John 16:25).
- Jesus exclusively, "**appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God**" (Acts 1:3). No doubt there was a tremendous amount of revelation given during this time,
- The Apostles received the divine revelation they possessed and wrote from through a number of ways that are much more physical and objective than the common idea of a mystical, subjective "inspiration."

## A) Apostolic Revelation vs. "Inspiration"

While the gifts of divine knowledge and wisdom refer to the deposit of divine revelation from which the Apostles wrote from, how did they receive that revelation? Here we wish to note several methods of apostolic revelation and some of its characteristics. In the process, we hope to reevaluate the common notion of "inspiration."

We have noted elsewhere in *KOG* that there is a consensus in modern Christianity that apostolic revelation primarily came by "inspiration," which is commonly defined as a "divine influence" on the mind of the Apostle. One gets the impression from how such "inspiration" is described, that it operated much like some sort of *human/divine mental telepathy* by which thoughts of divine revelation were directly and continuously placed in the mind as one wrote Scripture. This is an aspect of what we call *mega mysticism* in which God provides extra-biblical divine revelation and commands through mental impressions and impulses.

On the contrary, we have already argued that the divine knowledge from which the Apostles wrote was more *abiding* in nature, such that they wrote from the knowledge they already possessed rather than being spontaneously "inspired." In addition, and as demonstrated elsewhere, neither the term, nor even the common concept of "inspiration" is used to describe the reception of apostolic revelation anywhere in Scripture.<sup>83</sup> Rather, as we will see, both Jesus and the Apostles describe their experience of divine revelation in rather physical, rather than mystical ways.

## B) The "Seeing" & "Hearing" of Jesus

### B.1) Christ's claims to divine revelation

As noted in the previous chapter, in speaking of how Jesus possessed the divine knowledge and wisdom He spoke with, we must always keep His unique deity in mind. Jesus' *nature* was divine, He was God, and uniquely had the Father living in Him (cf. John 10:30; 14:9-11).

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<sup>83</sup> The common idea of "inspiration" and the popular view of divine guidance we refer to as *mega mysticism* all depend on what we call *divine/human mental telepathy* and faulty ideas about "inspiration." Concerning the first issue see chapter 7.16, and for the latter, see chapters 8.8-8.11

Nonetheless, as we also wrote, "While we would fully maintain the deity of Christ, His humanness is revealed in the fact that He repeatedly claimed that His divine knowledge was received from the Father, and not inherent at birth (cf. John 7:16; 12:49; 14:10; 17:8)."<sup>84</sup> While the boy Jesus was certainly enlightened (cf. Luke 2:46-7), we do not think Jesus was born with all the knowledge He spoke. In fact, Luke states that as a young man, "**Jesus grew in wisdom**" (Luke 2:52). Therefore, we can accurately speak of Christ receiving and learning divine revelation while on the Earth.

Jesus obviously testified to being a messenger of divine revelation. He said:

**"My teaching is not My own. It comes from Him Who sent Me. . . . My teaching comes from God"** (John 7:16).

**"I do nothing on My own but speak just what the Father has taught Me"** (John 8:28).

**"The Father Who sent Me commanded Me what to say and how to say it . . . So whatever I say is just what the Father has told Me to say"** (John 12:49-50).

**"The words I say to you are not just My own. Rather, it is the Father, living in Me, Who is doing His work"** (John 14:10).

**"Everything that I learned from My Father I have made known to you"** (John 15:15).

[Praying to the Father] **"I gave them the words You gave Me"** (John 17:8).

The divine revelation that Jesus taught were things the Father had "**taught**" or "**gave**" Him, had "**commanded**" Him to say, and that Jesus had "**learned**" from the Father. At this point, we can suggest some answers to two questions: 1) *How* did Jesus receive the divine knowledge He had, and 2) *when* did He receive it.

## **B.2) How Christ received revelation**

On the first question, and as also noted above, there is a

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<sup>84</sup> See further discussion of the relationship between Christ's deity and His revelation at section 8.1.B.

prevalent conception in Christianity that Jesus was constantly in some sort of mystical communion with the Father such that thoughts were being transmitted telepathically to Jesus in a continual stream of information. On the contrary, Jesus spoke repeatedly of receiving divine revelation by what He physically "saw" and "heard," not just what He thought:

**I tell you the truth, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen** (John 3:11).<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Christ's reference to "**what we have seen**" has produced some debate. Who is Jesus referring to in addition to Himself? Calvin wrote: "For my own part, I have no doubt that Christ mentions himself in connection with all the prophets of God, and speaks generally in the person of all." (*Commentaries*; online at [www.ccel.org](http://www.ccel.org)). If Christ is speaking of the revelation of new divine doctrine, then this is the only acceptable answer for us. Both Jesus and the Prophets spoke from what they had seen in visions. This seems to be the best interpretation.

In our opinion, D. A. Carson successfully debunks two common interpretations, but his own is inadequate:

Jesus speaks in the plural: *we speak ... we know ... we testify ... we have seen*. As in v. 7, the 'you' also becomes plural: hence NIV'S *you people*. A few commentators therefore conclude that the historical Jesus thereby identifies himself with his disciples [cf. Morris, 196; Ridderbos, 134, Barnes]. This is unlikely: at this point in their pilgrimage the disciples could not be described as speaking of what they know and testifying to what they have seen, *viz.* heavenly things (v. 12).

The majority of interpreters detect frank anachronism: v. 11 does not report what Jesus said to Nicodemus, but what the church of John's day said to the synagogue. Bruce (pp. 86-87) makes a virtue of this perceived necessity: the Evangelist does not care whether he relates the witness of Jesus, or the witness of the later church to Jesus, since at bottom the witness is all one and the same. But although it may be 'the same' in the sense that all of it ultimately relates to the same divine self-disclosure in Jesus Christ, the sameness stops there. John is persistently careful to distinguish between what the disciples understood during Jesus' ministry and what they understood only later (*cf.* notes on 2:22, and Carson, 'Mis').

The simplest explanation for the plurals in this verse is that Jesus is sardonically aping the plural that Nicodemus affected when he first approached Jesus (v. 2). 'Rabbi', Nicodemus said, 'we know you are a teacher who has come from God .... ' 'I tell you the truth', responds Jesus, 'we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen' - as if to say, 'We know one or two things too, we do!' (*The Gospel According to John* [Eerdmans, 1991], 198-99).

Again, because the revelation that Jesus is speaking of is "**heavenly things**" (v. 12), it seems best to understand Him as grouping Himself

**The One Who comes from Heaven is above all. He testifies to what He has seen and heard" (John 3:31-2).**

**By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and My judgment is just (John 5:30).**

**He Who sent Me is reliable, and what I have heard from Him I tell the world". . . I do nothing on My own but speak just what the Father has taught Me [through what I heard] (John 8:26, 28).**

**I am telling you what I have seen in the Father's presence (John 8:38).**

**You are determined to kill Me, a man Who has told you the truth that I heard from God (John 8:40).**

It seems clear that Christ is speaking literally about physically hearing and seeing revelation.<sup>86</sup> There is no reason to interpret

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with others who testified to direct divine revelation, most immediately referring to the Prophet John the Baptist.

<sup>86</sup> NT scholar Herman Ridderbos (1909-2007) commented on John 3:11 and 5:30:

Intended above all is the Son's unmediated knowledge of the Father (cf. 1:18), which in vss. 31-36 is defined as knowledge on the part of him who "comes from above" and who "bears witness to what he has seen and heard" (vss. 31, 32f.; cf. 7:28 f.). Elsewhere, too, Jesus bases his knowledge of God on what he has "seen" and "heard" (e.g. 5:19, 20, 30; 8:26, 28, 40, 50; 12:50), and that in contrast with those who have never heard his voice or seen him (5:37; cf. 6:46). . . . The Fourth Gospel repeatedly traces Jesus' speech and action to what he "saw" and "heard." Herman Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John* (Eerdmans, 1997), 133, 192.

Unfortunately, Dr. Ridderbos has been about the only commentator who even recognized the physical meaning of Christ's language, let alone its significance. However, even he claimed that the "seeing" Christ refers to in John 3:11 cannot be "referring to visions, which certainly does not fit Jesus" (133). Why not? He was a Prophet from God. And Dr. Ridderbos, to our knowledge, while recognizing that Jesus described His revelations as "seeing" and "hearing" never describes more specifically what Jesus meant by that.

Calvin has little comment on Jesus' description of his revelations. Barnes rather pathetically comments on 3:11:

Jesus had seen by his omniscient eye all the operations of the Spirit on the hearts of men. His ministers have seen its effects as we see

Him here as merely speaking metaphorically or mystically. Especially when we have ample biblical descriptions of His fellow Prophets seeing and hearing the revelation of God as well, either in visions or actual apparitions.<sup>87</sup>

It is interesting to note that all of these rather physical descriptions of how Jesus received revelation is given by the Apostle John who was especially focused on demonstrating the authenticity of Christ (cf. John 20:30-1). The contexts of these statements are often when Jesus is defending the authenticity and divinity of His revelations. How convincing would it be for Him to merely claim, "The Father is constantly giving Me mental impulses regarding the truth"? How much more helpful for Him to say He is actually seeing and hearing the Father.

Admittedly, the language is remarkable, and the present tenses used would again suggest to some a kind of continual mental telepathy between the Father and Son. But Jesus did not speak in terms of mere mental impulses, but again of what He saw and heard. Therefore, the safest conclusion is that He again is speaking of visions and/or apparitions. While the past tenses in some verses suggest visions He experienced in the past, other verses suggest

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the effects of the wind, and, having seen men changed from sin to holiness, they are qualified to bear witness to the truth and reality of the change. (*Barnes' Notes on the New Testament*; online at [www.ccel.org](http://www.ccel.org))

The "seeing" and "hearing" language Jesus uses to describe the means of his revelation meant a lot more than Him merely witnessing changes in people's lives. Dr. Barnes had little comment on the other verses in John referring to this phenomena.

Leon Morris and D. A. Carson are equally uninterested in Jesus' descriptions of His revelations. The closest they come to any description is at 3:31 where Dr. Carson writes: "only the Son of Man can speak with supreme authority of heavenly things, for he alone *testifies to what he has seen and heard* in the heavenly sphere" (213). Dr. Morris uses identical language (*The Gospel According to John (NICNT)* [Eerdmans, 1995], 216). However, neither elaborates on what they mean by "heavenly sphere."

At times, Dr. Morris seems to especially miss the more objective/physical nature of Christ's revelatory experiences and gives an unbiblical mystical twist to them when he writes on John 5:19: "There is a continual contemplation of the Father by the Son, an uninterrupted communion" (277). Likewise on 5:30 he writes: "the language is metaphorical and points to the Son's complete dependence on the Father . . . He is always in touch with the Father" (286).

<sup>87</sup> For examples of physical revelation to the Prophets in the OT see section 9.5.A and chapters 10.10-10.11.

Jesus may have continually experienced visions rather immediately before He did something or judged someone.

Jesus spoke what He had **"heard"** the Father say (John 8:26), and had **"seen in the Father's presence"** (8:38). Why then do so many conclude that all of this Father/Son communication was silent, mystical, mental telepathy? Why do most outright reject the suggestion that Christ physically saw and heard the Father with His human eyes and ears as part of the process by which He received the divine revelation He spoke? It is because we live in a mystical age when such a notion is not spiritual enough for many, but that some sort of higher ESP is.

It is probable that Christ saw and heard the Father in revelatory visions like the Prophet Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, etc. The experience of a vision, for example, may best explain His statement: **"I am telling you what I have seen in the Father's presence"** (John 8:38). This seems to be describing an experience of being translated to the heavenly realm much like several biblical Prophets to receive revelation. Accordingly, Jesus no doubt saw and heard divine revelation in such visions.<sup>88</sup>

However, we would suggest Christ also habitually experienced His revelation in a more physical way with His human eyes and ears. We would suggest at least two reasons for this. First, we have several recorded instances of Jesus physically hearing the Father while He was on Earth, which in itself is a very unique experience. Accordingly, we have noted elsewhere:

At the time of Christ's baptism, **"a voice from Heaven said, 'This is My Son, Whom I love; with Him I am well pleased'"** (Matt 3:17). Likewise, at Christ's transfiguration, **"a bright cloud enveloped them, and a voice from the cloud said, 'This is My Son, Whom I love; with Him I am well pleased. Listen to Him!'"** (Matt 17:5). And again, at Christ's request for the Father to glorify His Name, John records, **"Then a voice came from Heaven, 'I have glorified it, and will glorify it again.' The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to Him"** (John 12:28-29).<sup>89</sup>

Why couldn't the Father have spoken audibly to Christ at other times?

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<sup>88</sup> For further discussion of the recorded instances when Christ physically heard the Father while on Earth see section 10.10.A.

<sup>89</sup> Excerpt from section 10.10.A.

Our second line of evidence that the seeing and hearing through which Christ received revelation was of a physical kind is the ministry of Moses. Accordingly, we have written elsewhere:

God said:

**When a Prophet of the LORD is among you, I reveal Myself to him in visions, I speak to him in dreams. But this is not true of My servant Moses; he is faithful in all My house. With him I speak face to face, clearly and not in riddles; he [physically] sees the form of the LORD.** (Num 12:6-8)

Of course, neither Moses nor any human has literally seen God's face (cf. Exod 33:20; John 1:18; 6:46; 1 Tim 6:16; 1 John 4:12), although we are told Moses was granted an apparition of God's "**back**" (Exod 33:23). But God uses the metaphor to reflect how intimate Moses' experiences with God were. As we read elsewhere, "**The LORD would speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks with his friend**" (Exod 33:9). The phrase also probably reflects the fact that while Moses only saw "**the form of the Lord,**" he physically heard the voice of the Lord as if God were facing Him.

Therefore, when we read almost 140 times "**The Lord said to Moses,**" we have good reason to believe these revelatory experiences were in the context of seeing "**the form of the Lord**" and speaking to Him as "**face to face,**" just as God Himself described (Num 12:8). Accordingly, we can conclude that essentially the whole Law of Moses, consisting of large portions of Exodus and Numbers, and virtually all of Leviticus and Deuteronomy, were received in this very same way. Not in visions, but in a very physical experience with God, either on Mount Sinai (cf. Exod 31:18; Lev 25:1; 27:34), or in the Tent of Meeting (cf. Exod 33:9; Num 1:1).<sup>90</sup>

In Numbers 12:6-8 God is making it clear that the physical revelations that Moses was accustomed to experiencing with his physical eyes and ears were superior to the merely mental visions He gave other Prophets. Why then would we relegate Christ to a means of divine revelation less than what Moses experienced as the communicator of the Old Covenant? In fact, God Himself parallels the revelatory ministry of Moses with Christ when He foretold, "**I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brothers**" (Deut 18:18).<sup>91</sup> If God is equating Christ with Moses in

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<sup>90</sup> Excerpt from section 10.10.B.

<sup>91</sup> Dr. Barnes wrote regarding Deuteronomy 18:18:

some way, as most commentators believe, then this would seem to be some evidence that if Moses habitually experienced divine revelation in a physical way, then so did Christ.

Granted, we have no detailed descriptions in Scripture of Christ receiving revelations. What we do have is His repeated statement that His divine revelation came through what He "heard" and "saw" from the Father, either physically like Moses, or in visions like other Prophets. What we do not have is any indication in Scripture of the *mega mystical* idea of a constant telepathic communion between the Father and Son.

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The ancient fathers of the Church and the generality of modern commentators have regarded our Lord as the prophet promised in these verses. It is evident from the New Testament alone that the Messianic was the accredited interpretation among the Jews at the beginning of the Christian era (compare the marginal references, and John 4:25); nor can our Lord Himself, when He declares that Moses "wrote of Him" John 5:45-47, be supposed to have any other words more directly in view than these, the only words in which Moses, speaking in his own person, gives any prediction of the kind. (*Barnes' Notes on the Old Testament*, Electronic Step Files [Findex.com])

C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch remarkably have no comment on the relationship between Moses and Christ at Deuteronomy 18:18 (*Commentary on the Old Testament*, Electronic Edition STEP Files CD-ROM [Findex.com, 2000]).

### B.3) When Christ received His revelation

Regardless of whether Christ's seeing and hearing revelation was the physical or visionary kind, when would we suggest these revelatory episodes occurred? The most likely time was during the many occasions that Christ intentionally went to solitary places alone. Luke records, "**Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed** (5:16), and at least on one occasion this was for a whole "**night**" (6:12; cf. Matt 14:23; Mark 1:35; 6:46). During these times of intercession with the Father, Jesus no doubt was spoken to by the Father.

In other words, why would we assume that what Jesus experienced with others at His "transfiguration" was unique? We read that, "**there [physically] appeared . . . Moses and Elijah, [audibly] talking with Jesus,**" and that the Father Himself spoke audibly (cf. Matt 17:3-5). Perhaps the only thing unique about this incident in Christ's life is that His three closest disciples were invited to personally witness it. Otherwise, there is no reason to believe that Christ did not receive much of the divine revelation He possessed in this same rather physical manner while He was on Earth.

Such visions could have occurred at the times of solitude noted above. One especially thinks of the 40 days of fasting in the desert that occurred at the very beginning of His ministry (cf. Matt 4:1-11). While obviously no such experience is recorded, such supernatural phenomena as interacting with the devil and being attended to by Angels suggests He sure could have interacted with His Father as well. Moses, of whom the prophetic ministry of Christ was to be patterned after (cf. Deut 18:18), received much of his physical revelation when he was, "**with the LORD forty days and forty nights without eating bread or drinking water**" (Exod 34:28).

## C) The "Seeing" & "Hearing" of the Apostles

### C.1) Claims & promises of apostolic revelation

Christ claimed that His Apostles uniquely possessed divine revelation when He said "**The knowledge of the secrets of the Kingdom of Heaven has been given to you, but not to them [other people following Jesus]**" (Matt 13:11). We believe, and

support elsewhere, that the following claims and promises of Christ exclusively applied to the Apostles as well <sup>92</sup>:

**All this I have spoken while still with you. But the . . . the Holy Spirit, Whom the Father will send in My name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.** (John 14:25-26)

**I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from My Father I have made known to you** (John 15:15).

**I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on His own; He will speak only what He hears and He will tell you what is yet to come.** (John 16:12-13)

**Though I have been speaking figuratively, a time is coming when I will no longer use this kind of language but will tell you plainly about My Father.** (John 16:25)

We do not believe anyone else apart from Christ's Apostles can claim these descriptions and promises for themselves. It is only through the writings of the Apostles that we can now have the revelation Christ speaks of above. The Apostles alone had direct revelation of "**everything**" Jesus had "**learned from [the] Father,**" (5:15) of "**all truth**" pertaining to the New Covenant, including "**what is yet to come,**" (16:12-13) and revelation about God the Father.

It was this unique gift and possession of divine wisdom and knowledge that gave them their unique apostolic authority in the Church and equipped them to write divinely authoritative documents for the Church. And it was these statements of Christ that were His promises of this very unique revelation. If, in fact, these promises are intended to be claimed by all Christians for themselves, we then have no biblical promises of any kind of unique, authoritative revelation on the part of the Apostles.

But these promises were uniquely to the Apostles. Accordingly, they claimed a unique possession of divine revelation and a unique authority to write it. The Apostle Peter wrote at the end of his epistle, "**I have written briefly to you, exhorting and declaring that this is the true grace of God**" (1 Pet 5:12 ESV). Likewise,

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<sup>92</sup> For arguments that promises of divine revelation to the Apostles cannot be claimed by Christians today see chapter 14.13.

the Apostle John claimed to have divine revelation concerning the source of eternal life when he introduced his epistle by writing:

**That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The Life appeared; we have seen It and testify to It, and we proclaim to you the Eternal Life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us.**  
(1 John 1:1-3)

The Apostle Paul was personally commissioned as a messenger of new divine revelation by Christ Himself on the Damascus Road. Ananias confirmed the incident when he told Paul: **“The God of our fathers has chosen you to know His will and to see the Righteous One and to hear words from His mouth”** (Acts 22:14). The Apostle was to later recount that Christ said to Him:

**“I am Jesus . . . I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen of Me and what I will show you.’ . . . I am sending you to [Gentiles] to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in Me”** (Acts 26:15-18)

Of course, for the Apostle to carry out this commission, he needed a revelation of the new saving Gospel which Paul claimed when he wrote:

**I want you to know, brothers, that the Gospel I preached is not something that man made up. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.** (Gal 1:11-12)

However, it was not only a revelation of the Gospel that Paul claimed, but he claimed divine revelation for all of the doctrine and commands he wrote in Scripture. Thus, he wrote the Ephesians: **“Surely you have heard about the administration of God’s grace [gift of divine wisdom and knowledge] that was given to me for you, that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly [e.g. Eph chs. 1-2]”** (Eph 3:2-3).

Concerning the sacrament of the Lord's Supper Paul wrote: "**I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night He was betrayed, took bread . . .**" (1 Cor 11:23). Paul did not receive his knowledge of what occurred on that night from one of the disciples, but rather, Jesus Himself described to Paul what had happened and the significance of it.

It was because Paul was uniquely "**called to be an Apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God,**" (1 Cor 1:1) that he possessed direct divine revelation that included his "**testimony about Christ**" (1 Cor 1:6), and "**a message of . . . God's secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden**" (1 Cor 2:6-7). He could claim that God had "**revealed**" to him "**by His Spirit**" what "**no eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived**" which is "**what God has prepared for those who love Him**" (1 Cor 2:9-10) and that he could, "**speak not in words taught . . . by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words**" (1 Cor 2:12).<sup>93</sup> Accordingly, he declared, "**I do have knowledge**" of new divine revelation from Christ that proves I am one of His few Apostles (2 Cor 11:6).

Contrary to much popular opinion,<sup>94</sup> then, the Apostle Paul demonstrated his own belief that he was writing divine Scripture when he tells the Corinthians, "**what I am writing to you is the Lord's command**" (1 Cor 14:37). The issue Paul was writing about here concerned the proper regulation of the gifts of tongues and prophecy in the Christian assembly. We have no other record of Christ giving these commands, and the Apostle no doubt received them by divine revelation from Christ, and then wrote accordingly.

## **C.2) Apostolic revelation by direct physical contact**

How then did the Apostles receive the divine revelation they possessed and wrote from? There are a number of ways described in Scripture. First, the Twelve Apostles were physically present for, and physically heard and saw the vast majority of the teachings and actions of Jesus. Perhaps the only exceptions were His time of

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<sup>93</sup> For arguments that the claims to divine revelation made in 1 Corinthians 2 apply only to Apostles see section 14.13.E

<sup>94</sup> Some Christian scholars have disagreed that the Apostles knew they were writing divinely authoritative documents. Such views would seem to clearly contradict several statements of the Apostles themselves. For further discussion see section 8.4.A.

temptation in the desert (cf. Matt 4:4ff) and His conversation with the Samaritan woman (cf. John 4:4ff).<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> There is a question as to how present the Twelve were during Christ's interrogations and beatings prior to His crucifixion. At the beginning of Christ's arrest, we are told, "**Then all the disciples deserted Him and fled**" (Matt 26:56; cf. v. 31), suggesting none were present to personally witness what followed. However, Matthew immediately records, "**But Peter followed Him at a distance, right up to the courtyard of the high priest. He entered and sat down with the guards to see the outcome**" (Matt 26:58). John gives even more detail, writing: **Simon Peter and another disciple [John] were following Jesus. Because this disciple [John] was known to the high priest, he went with Jesus into the high priest's courtyard,<sup>16</sup> but Peter had to wait outside at the door. The other disciple [John], who was known to the high priest, came back, spoke to the girl on duty there and brought Peter in.** (John 18:15-16).

Clearly, then, both the Apostles Peter and John were present for Christ's first interrogation by the high priest Annas (cf. John 18:13, 19, 22, 24; Carson, 581-2). Consequently, there is no reason to believe they were not present for the subsequent interrogations of Caiaphas and Pilate, accompanying the crowd of people that were following these events (cf. Matt 26:47; 27:17). Although at the point of the rooster crowing the third time, Peter is said to have "**went outside [the courtyard] and wept bitterly**" (Matt 26:75), it seems likely that afterward he continued to observe the rather public events that followed.

Evidence that John was present particularly for the interrogations is the fact that he evidently had some sort of privileged relationship with the high priest (cf. John 18:15). We are told emphatically that John was present at the crucifixion as he was "**standing nearby**" the cross when Christ was dying to accept Mary as his "mother" (cf. John 19:25-27), and upon reporting that Jesus was stabbed on the cross John wrote, "**The man who saw it has given testimony, and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the truth, and he testifies so that you also may believe**" (John 19:35).

The most difficult dialogue to account for is that between Christ and Pilate. While much of what Pilate said was public for the disciples to personally hear, John reports, "**Pilate then went back inside the palace, summoned Jesus and asked Him, 'Are You the King of the Jews?'**" (John 18:33). It is unlikely that anyone else was present for the conversation that took place, except perhaps a Roman guard. How then do we know what Pilate and Jesus said? While most would suggest some sort of subsequent "inspiration" in which this dialogue was simply telepathically placed in the minds of those who recorded it, we would suggest that Jesus perhaps related the conversation to them after His resurrection during the forty days in which He "**spoke to them about the kingdom of God**" (Acts 1:3), which, by the way, was precisely the topic that Pilate and Jesus were discussing privately (cf. John 18:33-37).

It was for the purpose of giving divine revelation that Christ **"appointed twelve—designating them Apostles—that they might be with Him and that He might send them out to preach"** (Mark 3:14) the revelation they were given. It was during the more than three years they personally lived and worked with Christ that **"everything that [He] learned from [His] Father [He] made known to [the Twelve]"** (John 16:25). Likewise, Christ noted during His rather lengthy Upper Room Discourse, **"All this I have spoken while still with you"** (John 14:25-26).

Accordingly, the Apostle John claimed that the divine revelation the Apostles spoke and wrote was what, **"we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life"** (1 John 1:1). An example of this is when John records of himself:

**One of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water. The man who saw it has given testimony, and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the truth, and he testifies so that you also may believe.** (John 19:34-35)

John's knowledge of the real death of Christ was not "inspiration" but observation. He had physically witnessed it with his own eyes. There is nothing here that is normally understood as "inspiration" or a mere "influence of the Spirit," or divine/human telepathy. Rather, John is very intentional in describing the apostolic revelation in the most objective, physical, sensual terms possible. No doubt he did this in opposition to the Gnostics who were misleading those he was writing to, and who claimed mystical and subjective divine revelations.<sup>96</sup> John was making the point that the Apostles of Jesus Christ, unlike the Gnostics, received their revelation of Christ in very physical, objective terms.

The Apostles experience of revelation by direct physical contact with Christ is illustrated when Christ told the Twelve: **"The knowledge of the secrets of the Kingdom of Heaven has been**

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A final point of clarification concerns the fact that John's version of these events adds additional information to what we find repeated in the other three Gospels. We would suggest this is because the version in the Synoptics originated from Peter (this is especially so of Mark), who personally witnessed the events. John, later being aware of the contents of these Gospels, added information from what he had witnessed.

<sup>96</sup> For further on the Apostle John's battle with the Gnostics in his epistle see section 14.15.B.

**given to you"** (Matt 13:11). Out of context, this could be used by modern Gnostics and *mega mystics* as a proof text to suggest the disciples were mystically "inspired" with "**the knowledge of the secrets of the Kingdom of Heaven.**" However, Christ goes on to tell them:

**Blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear. For I tell you the truth, many Prophets and righteous men longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it. Listen [physically] then to what the parable of the sower means. (vs. 16-18)**

How then did the disciples receive "**The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven?**" Through all the experiences they saw with their "**eyes**" and the teaching heard with their "**ears**," including listening to Christ's personal explanation of this parable.

Likewise, when Peter confessed that Jesus is, "**the Christ, the Son of the living God,**" "**Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by My Father in Heaven"** (Matt 16:16-17). How was it revealed? No doubt through all the things that Peter had seen with his eyes and heard with his ears including the changing of water into wine (cf. John 2:1-11), a "**furious storm**" being commanded to cease (cf. Matt 8:23-27), and a dead girl being raised to life (Matt 9:18-26). This is how the "**Father in Heaven**" had revealed Christ's identity to Peter, not through some mystical divine telepathy.

Because of the physical, personal nature of the apostolic revelation, Peter spoke as follows about the man who would replace Judas as a messenger of Christ's revelation:

**Therefore it is necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from John's baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us. For one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection. (Acts 1:21-22)**

Accordingly, the vast majority of what Matthew and John wrote in their Gospels did not come from visions or some sort of "inspiration," but rather from their personal physical experiences with Christ. They were *there* when Jesus gave the Sermon on the Mount (cf. Matt 5-7), and *only* they were there when He taught the Olivet Discourse (cf. Matt 24-25) and the Upper Room Discourse (cf. John 13-17).

Not only did such men spend over three years with Jesus learning what they would later teach and write, but after His resurrection, Jesus exclusively, **“appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God”** (Acts 1:3).

<sup>97</sup> No doubt there was a tremendous amount of revelation given during this time, which Christ was probably specifically referring to when He said, **“Though I have been speaking figuratively, a time is coming when I will no longer use this kind of language but will tell you plainly about My Father”** (John 16:25). We would suggest it was also during those 40 days that He at least partially fulfilled the following promise:

**I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on His own; He will speak only what He hears and He will tell you what is yet to come.** (John 16:12-13)

When we read that the subject during those 40 days was **“the kingdom of God”** it no doubt includes the future kingdom of God. The death of Christ had brought about many questions concerning the promises of such a kingdom, prompting even the question recorded here when Luke writes: **“So when they met together [during the 40 days], they asked Him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?”** (Acts 1:6). Surely His teachings included further information on His second coming.

Regardless, we have above a variety of events that provided significant apostolic revelation by direct physical contact with Christ, as opposed to some “inspiration.”

### **C.3) Apostolic revelation by supernatural reminding**

Certainly, immediately after the post-resurrection teachings Christ gave the Eleven, they began to teach what they had learned. While they perhaps waited several years to write it, they began to

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<sup>97</sup> While Luke records that this period of post-resurrection appearances of Christ occurred for 40 days, Irenaeus (c. 180) wrote:

But after his resurrection he tarried [on earth] eighteen months; and knowledge descending into him from above, he taught what was clear. He instructed a few of his disciples, whom he knew to be capable of understanding so great mysteries, in these things, and was then received up into heaven, (*Against Heresies*, I.30.14; online at [www.ccel.org](http://www.ccel.org))

teach it immediately. While the fact that their personal presence with Christ had no doubt rather burned His teachings on their heart, Christ gave an additional promise that would ensure their ability to accurately and faithfully pass on His teachings. On the night before He died He told the Twelve:

**All this I have spoken while still with you. But the . . . Holy Spirit, Whom the Father will send in My name, will teach you all things and will [supernaturally] remind you of everything I have said to you.** (John 14:25-26)

Several things can be said about this rather remarkable promise. First, while the memories and rather immediate and constant recitation of what Christ taught would seem to have been sufficient for the faithful transmission of Christ's teachings, He promised an additional assurance that they would be supernaturally reminded of "**everything**" He had said to them. Accordingly, we read, "**After He was raised from the dead, His disciples recalled what He had said [about the temple]. Then they believed the Scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken**" (John 2:18-22; cf. Luke 24:8).

Secondly, this is perhaps the foundational promise for the accuracy and authenticity of particularly the writings of Matthew and John to whom this promise was made.

Thirdly, in light of all the personal experience the Apostles had with Christ, and this promise of a supernatural reminding, we do not need the many natural explanations or disclaimers for the Gospels of Matthew and John, including the suggestion that Jews had good memories, that these Gospels are only summaries of what Jesus said, or that Matthew and John took notes which they later

used.<sup>98</sup> There may be some truth to all of these, but they are not

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<sup>98</sup> On apostolic note taking, NT scholar David Farnell writes:

In Jewish practice of the day, especially in rabbinic circles, disciples kept private notes of their rabbinical instruction . . . Gundry, a supporter of the Two-/Four Source Hypothesis, accepts short written accounts stemming from apostolic origin: "[T]he Apostle Matthew was a note taker during the earthly ministry of Jesus.... [H]is notes provided the basis for the bulk of the apostolic gospel tradition.... Shorthand was used possibly as early as the fourth century B. C. and certainly by Jesus time" . . . .

The combination of exacting oral tradition and short written accounts helped not only to ensure the accuracy of the Gospels' records of events and sayings but also to provide a reasonable explanation of why the synoptics have extensive agreement among themselves. (*Three Views on the Origins of the Synoptic Gospels*, Robert Thomas, ed. [Kregel, 2002], 283)

None of this is needed if Christ's promise of supernatural remembrance is taken seriously. Likewise, Norm Geisler writes:

There are many long discourses of Jesus recorded in the Gospels, including the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7), the parables (e.g., Matt. 13), the denunciation of the Jewish leaders (Matt. 23), the Mount Olivet Discourse (Matt. 24-25), the Upper Room Discourse (John 14-17), and the high-priestly prayer (John 17). It is alleged to be very unlikely that these could have been remembered word-for-word a generation or more later, when they were recorded.

In response, the critics overlook some important facts.

First, their dates for the Gospels are too late (see page 474). Evidence places the writings closer to the events than previously thought, even within ten years, according to some.

Second, memories were more highly developed in this preliterate culture, making it feasible that all of this was memorized.

Third, even today many persons have memorized much more than this, even whole gospels.

Fourth, Matthew, who has most of the long discourses, was a record keeper by vocation. He may have kept records of Jesus' exact words that were then available for others, just as the early Christian writer Papias said he did (see Eusebius, EH, 3.24.6). [We cannot find this claim in Eusebius]

Fifth, even if these long discourses were summaries and paraphrases of Jesus' exact words, there is no evidence to indicate that they are not accurate. In fact, as we have seen above, all the evidence is to the contrary.

Sixth, Jesus promised supernatural activation of the disciples' memories, saying, "But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you" (John 14:26). (*Systematic Theology, Volume 1* [Bethany House, 2002], 490)

important in light of Christ's promise of a subsequent revelation of the Spirit to remind them exactly what He said.

Fourthly, as we argue elsewhere, this promise would seem to only apply to the Eleven.<sup>99</sup> It is not a promise to those of us who now possess the written record of the Apostles, that we will supernaturally remember "**everything**" Christ said. Nor is it a promise the we will somehow supernaturally remember what Christ said. This is no shortcut for memorizing the word of God.

Finally, it is possible that this "reminding" occurred in the same more physical and objective ways that much of divine revelation was received by Apostles and Prophets such as miraculous visions, auditions, and apparitions.<sup>100</sup> This would surely help them know with certainty that they were remembering the words of Jesus rather than "**the delusions of their own minds**" (Jer 14:14). Imagine mere thoughts going through your mind regarding a conversation or teaching that occurred decades ago. Wouldn't you be doubtful that you were really remembering it word for word? Accordingly, when Jesus promised, "**the . . . Holy Spirit . . . will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you**" (John 14:26), we do not believe this would occur through some sort of *divine/human mental telepathy*. Notice that the promise is *not* that the Eleven would be enabled to *remember* within their own minds, but that they would receive a *revelation*, a reminder from the Holy Spirit.

Such as revelation of reminder would have been especially applicable to the Apostle John who wrote long passages of Christ's discourses more than sixty years after Christ spoke them. Perhaps this is why we find this remarkable promise of the Spirit's revelation of reminding only in John's Gospel.

At this point, we can ask, do we have descriptions of Christ and the Holy Spirit giving revelation to John? The *Revelation of Jesus Christ* provides that. And did this revelation come in some sort of *divine/human mental telepathy* of mere thoughts? No. So why would we ignore the probability that the *reminding* of Christ came in the same manner as the *revelation* of Jesus Christ? Especially when we note the good possibility that both the Revelation and the Gospel were written near the end of the Apostle's life in the late 90's. All of

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Only the last argument is needed, and all the others would be insufficient to reflect the authority of the Gospels.

<sup>99</sup> For arguments that the promise of John 14:25-6 only apply to the Apostles see section 14.13.C.

<sup>100</sup> For a study of these common modes of divine revelation as experienced by Apostles and Prophets see chapters 10.10 and 10.11.

this is why we believe the supernatural reminder Christ promised the Eleven was another revelation of the Spirit, and came in a more objective and recognizable way than the common notion of "inspiration."

Accordingly, the promise in John 14:25-26 is not a proof text for the claims of *mega mysticism* in which God is supposedly providing direct guidance on extrabiblical issues through some sort of *divine/human mental telepathy*. The promise was specifically to eleven men in order to enable them to write Scripture.

#### **C.4) Apostolic revelation by visions/appearitions**

While much of the revelation written in the Gospels and the epistles of Peter and John probably originated in their personal, physical experiences with Christ before and after His resurrection, this would obviously not be the case with the Apostle Paul. As we have noted, even his first encounter with Christ was in a vision (cf. Acts 9:3-7).

A key text in understanding how Paul received the divine revelation he preached and wrote is Ananias' statement to him at his conversion experience:

**"The God of our fathers has chosen you to know His will and to see the Righteous One and to hear words from His mouth. You will be His witness to all men of what you have seen and heard."** (Acts 22:14-15).

Why would we assume that Paul's experience of seeing and hearing Jesus was only to occur at his conversion? Subsequently, we read of other divine visitations the Apostle Paul experienced. In some cases, we cannot be sure if they were experienced physically as an apparition, or mentally as a vision,<sup>101</sup> and even Paul confessed to not always being able to tell the difference either (cf. 2 Cor 12:1-4).

In Jerusalem, in the context of being attacked by an angry mob, Paul told them:

**When I returned to Jerusalem and was praying at the temple, I fell into a trance [ekstasei] and saw the Lord speaking. 'Quick!' He said to me. 'Leave Jerusalem immediately, because they will not accept your testimony about Me.'** (Acts 22:17-18)

Luke records that later, **"The following night the Lord stood near Paul and said, 'Take courage! As you have testified about Me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome'"** (Acts 23:11).

Again, it is not clear if Jesus appeared to Paul here in a physical way much like He did with the other Apostles after His resurrection, or whether this was a vision. Nonetheless, Jesus personally visited Paul, granting him an encouraging and supernatural prediction of his future.

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<sup>101</sup> For further discussion of the distinguishing characteristics of apparitions and visions see chapter 10.10.

At another time, **“Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, ‘Come over to Macedonia and help us’** (Acts 16:9), after which he immediately left Troas. Of his initial visit to Corinth we read:

**One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: ‘Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city.’ So Paul stayed for a year and a half, teaching them the word of God** (Acts 18:9-11) (Acts 23:11).

Of course, a significant divine vision experienced by the Apostle was described to the Corinthians when he wrote:

**I will go on to visions and revelations from the Lord. <sup>2</sup> I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know—God knows. <sup>3</sup> And I know that this man—whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows— <sup>4</sup> was caught up to paradise. He heard inexpressible things, things that man is not permitted to tell.** (2 Cor 12:1-4)

Finally, while in the midst of a storm at sea, Paul was also visited by **“an Angel of . . . God”** who **“said, ‘Do not be afraid, Paul. You must stand trial before Caesar; and God has graciously given you the lives of all who sail with you’”** (Acts 27:23-4).

It would seem that revelatory visions were an important part of the Apostle Paul’s life and ministry. Therefore, when the Apostle speaks of receiving something by revelation, it would seem best to infer that it occurred through a vision. Accordingly, when Paul writes, **“I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you”** (1 Cor 11:23) about the Lord’s Supper, we would conclude this revelation was received in a personal appearance of the Lord.

Likewise, when the Apostle claims:

**I want you to know brothers, that the Gospel I preached is not something that man made up. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation [apokalypseōs] from Jesus Christ** (Gal 1:11-12).

This would have been a perfect opportunity to use the term “inspiration,” but Paul uses **“revelation,”** to describe how he received his knowledge of the Gospel **“from Jesus Christ.”** And it would seem to us that the reason Paul describes His **“revelation”**

of the Gospel as coming from Christ, is because Christ personally appeared to Him to give Paul this knowledge.<sup>102</sup> The same can be said of the Apostles statement that, "**the mystery** [i.e. New Covenant doctrines taught in Eph chs. 1-2, was] **made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly**" (Eph 3:2-3).

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<sup>102</sup> Unfortunately, one of our favorite NT scholars John Stott inexplicably describes Paul's reception of the revelation of the Gospel in Galatians 1:11-12 in this way:

[I]t is much more likely that he [Paul] went into Arabia for quiet and solitude [cf. Gal 1:17 after his conversion] . . . He seems to have stayed there for three years (verse 18). We believe that in this period of withdrawal, as he meditated on the Old Testament Scriptures, on the facts of the life and death of Jesus that he already knew and on his experience of conversion, the gospel of the grace of God was revealed to him in its fullness. (*The Message of Galatians* [Intervarsity, 1968], 34)

If we understand Dr. Stott correctly, he is here denying not only that Christ appeared to Paul to teach Him the Gospel, but he seems to also deny that Paul's knowledge of the Gospel was by supernatural divine revelation at all.

Richard N. Longenecker is no better, claiming that the revelation Paul received of the Gospel was specifically that Gentiles were now part of God's plan, but "as for the basic content of the gospel, Paul was dependent on those who were his Christian predecessors." (*Galatians* (WBC) [Word, 1990], 24). On the contrary, the Apostle said: "**the Gospel I preached is not something that man made up. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ**" (1:11-12). "**The Gospel**" he "**preached**" included much more than what Dr. Longenecker would allow. And as far as the Apostle being dependent on "his Christian predecessors" the Apostle adds:

**But when God, who set me apart from birth and called me by his grace, was pleased** <sup>16</sup> **to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not consult any man,** <sup>17</sup> **nor did I go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went immediately into Arabia and later returned to Damascus.** (Gal 1:15-17)

Dr. Barnes and John MacArthur are much more accurate here, the former noting:

That is, he was not appointed by man, nor did he have any human instructor to make known to him what the gospel was. He had neither received it from man, nor had it been debased or adulterated by any human admixtures. He had received it DIRECTLY from the Lord Jesus. (cf. John MacArthur is much more accurate here (*MacArthur's New Testament Commentary* Electronic Edition STEP Files CD-ROM [Parsons Technology, 1997]), Gal 1:10-24)

There simply is no biblical reason for why *all* of Paul's revelatory encounters with Christ, to receive the divine wisdom and knowledge by which he wrote Scripture, did not occur in such objective, physical ways. We have no reason to believe that the Apostle Paul ever received his divine knowledge merely through some mystical, subjective manner in which "inspired" thoughts merely entered his consciousness, bypassing his physical senses. On the contrary, we would suggest that Paul initially received his knowledge through physical means, then spoke and wrote through the *abiding knowledge* he possessed. The common idea that he was spontaneously "inspired" through some kind of mental telepathy while he wrote or spoke divine revelation is unnecessary, and is nowhere explicitly described in Scripture.<sup>103</sup>

It is because there are no descriptions of a subjective, mystical, telepathic "inspiration" in Scripture, nor is the term even used, that we conclude that all references to divine revelation in Scripture are of the objective, physical kind that is received through human senses of sight and hearing. Accordingly, we have written elsewhere:

We suggest that the objective nature of divine revelation in Scripture has several important ramifications in contemporary theology. First, it makes the volumes of debate on different theories of divine "inspiration" rather obsolete. In other words, the great deal of discussion that has occurred in order to describe how the Holy Spirit merely "influenced" the minds of Apostles and Prophets is unnecessary because that is not how God granted them their revelation anyway.

Secondly, the objective view of divine revelation makes that which we possess in Scripture more trustworthy. Even the

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<sup>103</sup> The major objection, of course, to the idea that God supernaturally taught the Apostles, but then left them to more natural means to communicate it, is that humans are not capable of sufficiently doing the latter. In other words, what we are suggesting is that God could, in a vision, tell an Apostle a New Covenant truth, and then with their natural human abilities they were able to faithfully and accurately re-communicate that knowledge without needing divine assistance to guide their mouths as they spoke or minds as they wrote.

We have had repeated occasion throughout *KOG* to remind us that God will not do for us what He has already enabled us to do. And He has enabled us to accurately communicate what has been communicated to us. In other words, we do not need all of the theories of inspiration which try to explain how God supernaturally guided the Apostles speaking or writing, because after He had supernaturally provided the revelation, they could have written the revelation much like any other information. For further discussion on this issue in "inspiration" see chapter 8.10.

non-Prophetic or non-apostolic historians who have writings included in Scripture derived their information from the objective means of observation, research, and testimony. We know that the biblical writers did not write simply the subjective thoughts that mystically came into their mind, but that there is a real, physical, and historical basis for what they wrote.

Thirdly, it is rather ironic that *mega mystics*<sup>104</sup> popularly claim to be divinely guided by mere thoughts, impressions, and intuitions, when in fact Prophets and Apostles never claimed to be spoken to by God in this manner. Accordingly, as we demonstrate elsewhere, there is no biblical basis for the potentially hazardous doctrines of *mega mysticism*, because there are no biblical examples of God ever communicating to anyone in the way they claim God is telepathically communicating to them.<sup>105</sup>

Of course, the Apostle Paul was not the only Apostle to receive divine revelation through visions. All of Revelation is a vision experienced by the Apostle John. Likewise, we read of the following concerning Peter:

**About noon the following day as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray.<sup>10</sup> He became hungry and wanted something to eat, and while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance.**

**<sup>11</sup> He saw Heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to Earth by its four corners. <sup>12</sup> It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles of the Earth and birds of the air. <sup>13</sup>**

**Then a voice told him, "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat." "Surely not, Lord!" Peter replied. "I have never eaten anything impure or unclean." The voice spoke to him a second time, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean." This happened three times, and immediately the sheet was taken back to Heaven. (Acts 10:1-16)**

This was a monumental revelation to Peter as he understood from it that **"God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear Him and do what is right"** (Acts

<sup>104</sup> For further discussion of *mega mysticism* see chapters

<sup>105</sup> Excerpt from section 10.7.C.

10:34-5). This vision was the beginning of the Church understanding the critical and revolutionary truth that, **"God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life"** (Acts 11:18). Accordingly, the vision was supernaturally authenticated in several ways, including its repetition three times, a corroborating vision by the Gentile Cornelius, and a subsequent supernatural conversion of Cornelius' Gentile household authenticated by the gift of tongues. Therefore, we see that even for those Apostles who spent personal time with Jesus, there was to be more revelation given through subsequent visions.

Revelatory visions such as these, like the many experienced by OT Prophets before them, would seem to be another explanation of how Christ fulfilled the following promise to the Apostles:

**I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on His own; He will speak only what He hears and He will tell you what is yet to come.** (John 16:12-13)

Perhaps one of the truths the Apostles would not be able to **"bear"** before Christ's crucifixion and resurrection, and the reception of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, was the revolutionary expansion of God's saving grace beyond the Jews. And of course, it was a vision through which the Apostle John was told by the Spirit, **"what is yet to come."** Accordingly, we would claim that the revelation that Christ promised after His ascension, in which the **"Spirit"** would **"guide"** them **"into all truth"** and **"speak"** to them **"what is yet to come,"** would consist of revelatory visions. We do not believe there is biblical evidence that this was a promise of some sort of telepathic "inspiration" consisting of merely thoughts entering the mind.

### **C.5) Apostolic revelation by auditions**

More specifically, John says that when the Spirit reveals these things to the Apostles that He **"will speak"** (16:13). The Greek word here, *lalēsei*, means "to make a sound, utter words."<sup>106</sup> Accordingly, it would seem that the Spirit's revelation would come by something the Apostles would hear with their ears. Certainly to

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<sup>106</sup> *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Early Christian Literature (BAGD)*, F. W. Danker, ed., 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (University Of Chicago Press, 2001).

say the Spirit would **"speak"** to them meant more than just putting thoughts in their head.

Accordingly, we have biblical evidence that the Apostles heard the voice of God. After Peter had experienced the important vision described above, we read: **"While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Simon, three men are looking for you. So get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them"** (Acts 10:19). It is possibly the revelation of the Spirit occurred as part of the vision, but it seems it occurred afterward in a physical way heard with his ears.

Likewise, the Apostle Paul reports as part of his initial encounter with Christ: **"I saw a light from Heaven, brighter than the sun, blazing around me and my companions. We all fell to the ground, and I heard a voice saying to me in Aramaic, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me?'"** (Acts 22:6-7).

While it may be difficult to dogmatically prove, we would suggest that both of these instances of hearing the Spirit or Jesus occurred in a physical way, as perhaps in Peter's case, or in a vision as clearly in Paul's case. It is, of course, instances like this in which biblical characters heard God's voice that *mega mystics* wish to use to support their claim that the Spirit regularly "speaks" to them through mental impulses. We simply don't believe these examples support such a notion as God was either heard physically with the person's ears, or psychically in a vision.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Accordingly, we have written elsewhere concerning auditions:

The above examples of people hearing God's voice clearly occurred in a physical way with people hearing the voice of God with their ears. However, most of the time that Scripture records people hearing God, it is in the context of a vision in which the sound is not physically heard, but is rather "mentally" heard. Nonetheless, it is often difficult to be sure in many cases which kind of divine voice people experienced, the physical one or the mental one. Not only is it difficult to discern the difference in the biblical text, but we would suggest the person themselves could hardly tell the difference because of God's use of the sensical parts of the person's mind while they experienced the vision. In other words, even in a mental vision, it seemed to the person that God was physically speaking to them (cf. 2 Cor 12:1-4).

Accordingly, we cannot be dogmatic about whether the voice of God was experienced in a physical or more psychical way when **"The LORD God commanded the man [Adam], saying [amar: "utter," "say"] . . ."** (Gen 2:16), or later when **"the LORD God called [qara: "call," "proclaim"] to the man, 'Where are you?'"** (Gen 3:9). However, the Hebrew words used to describe God's communication, and the fact that the first man and woman clearly experienced God in

## C.6) Apostolic revelation through Christian Prophets

There were times that Apostles received revelation through Prophets. We read of the clearest example as follows:

**After we had been there a number of days, a Prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. Coming over to us, he took Paul's belt, tied his own hands and feet with it and said, "The Holy Spirit says, 'In this way the Jews of Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt and will hand him over to the Gentiles.'"** (Acts 21:10-11)

a physical way, as they "**heard the sound of the LORD God as He was walking in the garden**" (Gen 3:8), strongly suggest they typically experienced God's voice in a physical way as well. We would suggest the same when Samuel first heard God call Him (cf. 1 Sam 3:4-10).

However, even if the voice of God was not experienced physically, it occurred as something "heard" in the person's mind, not just a thought entering the mind in a telepathic way. Unfortunately, many people claim they have heard the voice of God, or that God told them something, when in reality all they experienced was a strong impression or emotional impulse. They actually didn't hear anything, whether physically or mentally. But again, biblically speaking, people only either heard God's voice audibly such that others could hear it too, or they "heard" His voice in a vision. What many call "hearing God" is not biblically hearing God at all.

Therefore, when we read, "**The Spirit told Philip, "Go to that chariot and stay near it"**" (Acts 8:29), we would suggest that such instruction occurred as an audible sensation, and the incident gives no biblical evidence for the *mega mystical* idea of merely mental "leadings" of the Holy Spirit as so many commonly claim. As we have said, there is no biblical evidence for the idea that God gives us instruction to obey through mere mental promptings. . . .

While God may provide *divine revelation* [through an audition], we can always expect divine authentication to accompany it. God knows that humans are susceptible to the "**delusions of their own minds**" (cf. Jer 14:14; 23:26-28; Col 2:18-19). Not even God expects us to receive any revelation as divine, including either a physical or psychological "voice," until it has been sufficiently authenticated as such. Accordingly, when God first spoke to Moses, He did it from a supernaturally burning bush (cf. Exod 2:1-6; cf. 3:12). Supernatural revelation from God will always be accompanied by undeniable supernatural authentication from God. In addition, no "voice of God" will contradict already authenticated revelation such as Scripture. (Excerpted from 10.10.A)

Here, the Holy Spirit communicated extra-biblical revelation to Paul and did it through a NT Christian Prophet.

We believe the same thing occurred in the following event where we are told NT Prophets were present:

**In the church at Antioch there were Prophets and Teachers . . . As they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said** [through one of the Prophets], **“Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.** (Acts 13:1-3)

The clearest understanding of the source of this direct quote of the Holy Spirit's command is that it came from one or more of the NT Prophets present there.<sup>108</sup> In the passage above, the “**Prophets**” present had, no doubt, already been miraculously authenticated as Prophets and their words were quickly and unquestionably obeyed as the direct words of the Holy Spirit.<sup>109</sup> Accordingly, those who heard it immediately obeyed this extra-biblical revelation, accepting it as God's specific will for Saul and Barnabas, regardless of the hardships and dangers they were sending them into.

We would also suggest the following revelation to Paul came through a prophetic ministry as well. He writes:

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<sup>108</sup> I. H. Marshall comments on how the Spirit “spoke” here:

The Spirit is named as the author, since it is he who appoints leaders in the church (20:28) and guides the church at crucial points. But the Spirit speaks through human agencies (4:25), and it must be assumed that one of the prophets in the church received the message. (*Acts (TNTC)* [Eerdmans, 1999], 216)

F. F. Bruce concurs, stating, “the Holy Spirit made known his will to them—doubtless through an inspired utterance from one of their number.” (*The Book of the Acts (NICNT)* [Eerdmans, 1988], 245)

<sup>109</sup> One indication that the modern second-rate “prophecy” of *prophetism* is just that, is that *prophetists* themselves repeatedly and consistently warn Christians *never* to heed their “prophets” in this manner. Accordingly, we quoted Dr. Grudem above: “There is almost uniform testimony from all sections of the charismatic movement that prophecy is imperfect and impure, and will contain elements that are not to be obeyed or trusted.” It seems apparent that Saul and Barnabas did not view real NT Prophets as modern *prophetists* do. For further discussion on the biblical nature of the gift of prophecy see Book 9.

**Compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me.** (Acts 20:22)

Note that Paul says these divine warnings came when he visited “**every city**” on his way to Jerusalem. More specifically, he was no doubt visiting a church in each of those cities, and characteristic of the time, the local churches had Prophets. What Paul is describing here probably occurred in much the way he experienced the Prophet Agabus’ warning, which was also during the same trip.

Likewise, the Apostle wrote: “**The Spirit clearly says** [*legei*: to express oneself orally or in written form, *utter in words, say, tell, give expression to* <sup>110</sup>] **that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons**” (1 Tim 4:1; cf. 1 Tim 1:7; 2 Tim 2:7). Once again, the use of *legei* here excludes the idea of some sort of direct mental telepathy. The Spirit *uttered* something audible. However, it is most likely that this is another instance of the Spirit giving this prediction through a Christian Prophet. <sup>111</sup> While there is little NT Scripture from NT Prophets (Jude may be an example), here is at

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<sup>110</sup> BAGD.

<sup>111</sup> Opinions vary as to how the Spirit spoke this revelation referred to in 1 Tim 4:1. G. W. Knight thinks Paul is referring to the warnings recorded in the Gospels (i.e. Matt 24:10) (*Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles* [Eerdmans, 1992], 188), and Stott suggests the possibility of His messages in Revelation (*The Message of 1 Timothy and Titus* [Intervarsity, 1996]).

However, I. H. Marshall points out: “But this is improbable here, since elsewhere [Christ’s] teaching is attributed to him personally as the Lord [not the Spirit] (*The Pastoral Epistles* [T & T Clark, 1999], 537). Gordon Fee and Dr. Stott suggest the possibility of “the Spirit speaking to Paul as he writes [inspiration?],” apparently based on the present tense of *legei* (*1 & 2 Timothy & Titus* [Hendricksen, 1988], 98). But again, Marshall points out:

*Legei* (pres. tense) introduces a statement which remains valid though spoken in the past [cf. 1 Tim 5:18; Rom 4:3, 6; 9:15 etc.]. There is, therefore, no need for the explanation that the author means that the Spirit is speaking to him even as he is writing (Ibid.).

Dr. Marshall offers support for the idea that the Spirit’s utterance here had come through a Christian Prophet, referring to Rev 2:7; 14:13; 22:17 and C. K. Barrett (537). Gordon Fee suggests this as well in his commentary, but more strongly argues for it in his *God’s Empowering Presence* (Hendricksen, 1994, 769). MacArthur does not comment on this.

least a probable instance of a prophetic revelation recorded in apostolic writing.

We would offer a similar explanation for the following event as well:

**Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to.** (Acts 16:6-7)

We would suggest that at least one of Paul's "**companions**" was a Prophet as well, and through him, the Holy Spirit provided this specific direction. In fact, we know that Silas was both accompanying Paul at this point in his journey (cf. Acts 15:40) and he was known as a Christian Prophet (cf. Acts 15:32). If this explanation is unconvincing, we note that Paul has a vision immediately after this incident instructing him to go to Macedonia. No doubt the Spirit could have provided such warnings in the same way.

The same explanation is best for Acts 15:28 where we read that after the "Jerusalem Council" the Apostles wrote the churches: "**It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements.**" How did the Apostles and Elders present know that their decision "**seemed good to the Holy Spirit**"? Because there were Christian Prophets present who were able to receive direct divine Scripture-quality revelation from God. The Council sent "**Judas and Silas**" (v. 22) to deliver the letter to "**the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia**" (v. 23). These two men were no doubt present at the Council and are specifically and intentionally described by Luke as follows: "**Judas and Silas . . . were Prophets**" (v. 32). And considering the pivotal and new nature of the doctrine coming from the "Jerusalem Council" it is understandable that God would authenticate it with the authority of authenticated Prophets. Some sort of feeling or mere thought that these divine directions "**seemed good to the Holy Spirit**" might be sufficient for modern *mega mystics* but not for first century Christians.

Nevertheless, such biblical data gives no support to the *mega mystical* claim that God normally guides us through mental impressions. Paul never was.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Dr. Barnes commented on the guidance of the Spirit described in Acts 16:6-7 as "Probably by a direct revelation." Nonetheless, most

## C.7) Apostolic preaching through Church tradition

It is readily recognized that men who were not Apostles like Luke wrote Scripture based on eye witness testimony, personal interviews, historical research, and an understanding of early Church tradition. At times, the Apostle Paul wrote from similar sources. For example, he writes the Corinthians:

**For what I received [as testimony from the other Apostles] I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, <sup>4</sup>**

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commentators put a *mega mystical* spin on this passage. John Stott writes:

[H]ow the Holy Spirit did his preventive work on these two occasions we can only guess. It may have been through giving the missionaries a strong, united inward impression, or through some outward circumstance like illness, Jewish opposition or a legal ban, or through the utterance of a Christian prophet, perhaps Silas himself (15:32). (*Acts, in loc*)

"[S]trong, united inward impression," or interpreting "some outward circumstance like illness" or "Jewish opposition" is the language of *mega mysticism* and has no biblical support whatsoever. How in the world would these men know that a mere "inward impression" was the Holy Spirit's prohibition to go somewhere? It just as well could have been heartburn from what they had eaten for lunch. "The utterance of a Christian prophet" is the only suggestion with biblical merit.

Likewise, I. H. Marshall writes: "Presumably some inner compulsion is meant, or perhaps a prophetic utterance by one of the party" (*Acts, 262*).

Along the same lines, F. F. Bruce commented:

Paul's missionary journeys display an extraordinary combination of strategic planning and keen sensitiveness to the guidance of the Spirit of God, however that guidance was conveyed—by prophetic utterance, inward prompting, or the overruling of external circumstances. (*Acts, 307*).

On the contrary, God ensures that His commands do not require "keen sensitiveness," to notice them, but will be readily perceived.

Dr. MacArthur is hardly better in this regard, commenting: "The missionary team's experience illustrates a basic principle of knowing God's will: to move ahead and allow Him to close doors until the right opportunity is reached." Discerning open and closed doors in our circumstances in an attempt to decipher a divine command that must be obeyed is again, *mega mystical* language and not biblical.

For further discussion regarding *mega mysticism* see Book 14. For further discussion on how Paul was led by reason in his decision making see section 4.4.A.

**that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,** <sup>5</sup> **and that He appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve.** <sup>6</sup> **After that, He appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep.** <sup>7</sup> **Then he appeared to James, then to all the Apostles,** <sup>8</sup> **and last of all He appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.** (1 Cor 15:3-7)

While at 1 Corinthians 11:23 he had said he “**received from the Lord what I also passed on to you**” concerning the Lord’s supper, here the Apostle does not specify that he received information about the death, burial, resurrection, and appearances of Christ from the Lord. Rather, it is more likely that the core beliefs about Christ came from his interaction with other Apostles during his three or four visits to Jerusalem after his conversion but before writing 1 Corinthians. <sup>113</sup> Especially the testimonies concerning Christ’s post-resurrection appearances to “**Peter . . . the Twelve . . . five hundred brothers . . . James . . . all the Apostles**” would seem more likely to have come from the Apostles themselves instead of a personal revelation from Christ to Paul. Accordingly, Leon Morris writes concerning this passage:

Paul did not originate the message he gave them. He simply passed on what he had received. This is the accepted language for the handing on of tradition. What follows is a very early summary of the church’s traditional teaching Paul is not giving us some views has worked out for itself his passing on what had been told him. <sup>114</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> For a suggested chronology of Paul’s life and ministry see F. F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (Eerdmans, 1977), 475.

<sup>114</sup> Leon Morris, *1 Corinthians* (Eerdmans, 1985), 201. Most modern commentators agree (cf. Anthony Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Eerdmans, 2000), 1186-87; C. K. Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Hendrickson, 1968), 337; Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Eerdmans, 1987), 721-22). However, older commentators maintained that Paul was referring to direct revelation from Christ (cf. Calvin, *Commentaries*; online at [www.ccel.org](http://www.ccel.org); Barnes, Hodge, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*; online at [www.ccel.org](http://www.ccel.org)). John MacArthur interprets this as meaning the Apostle received it from OT Scripture (*Commentary*).

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## ***Extras & Endnotes***

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### ***Gauging Your Grasp***

- 1) How is the “inspiration” of the Apostles usually described?
- 2) How does this idea of “inspiration” reflect what we call *mega mysticism*?
- 3) How does the Bible’s description of how Jesus and the Apostles received revelation differ from the common idea of “inspiration”?
- 4) What are examples of the more physical ways that Christ received revelation?
- 5) We claim that promises concerning the revelatory work of the Holy Spirit exclusively apply to the Apostles. Do you agree or disagree and why?
- 6) What special occasions do we claim Christ used to reveal revelation to the Apostles through simply speaking to them as a person?
- 7) What are examples of the more physical ways that Christ received revelation?

**Publications & Particulars**

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## Chapter 8.4

# The Divine Authority & Authentication of Apostles

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### Primary Points

- To say that Christ is our authority is not enough, for even He does not exercise His authority directly today, but through the Apostles.
- Revelatory Apostles spoke the very word of God and were to be believed and obeyed accordingly.
- Paul demonstrated his own belief that he was writing divine Scripture when he wrote, "**what I am writing to you is the Lord's command.**"
- "The Apostles are men different in kind from all other men."
- "[H]owever great its present and future progress, it [theology] will never possess a grain of truth more than when the apostolate passed away."
- The Apostles *are our only link to every spiritual truth we need to believe.*
- Timothy was not to receive direct, *divine revelation*, but was commanded to teach from the written revelation given to him.
- *God-like deeds* are the required authentication of anyone claiming *God-like authority*.
- *No one in Scripture had miracle working abilities apart from the need to be authenticated as a source of new extra-biblical divine revelation for all to believe and obey.* God does not grant a person a *divine healing* ministry unless they also have a *divine "revealing"* ministry.
- No one since the Apostles have been able to match their supernatural deeds, and therefore no one can match the authority of their words.
- Three biblical authentications for Apostle are: 1) convincing miracle-working abilities, 2) supernatural virtue, and 3) sound doctrine.



## A) The Divine Authority of Revelatory Apostles

### A.1) Biblical Support for the Authority of Apostles: *"As the Father has sent Me, I am sending you"*

We have written elsewhere in *Knowing Our God* regarding divine authority:

The first "link" in God the Father's divine chain of command is obviously God the Son. When Christ said, "**All authority in Heaven and on Earth has been given to Me**" (Matt 28:18), He was speaking of authority that had been delegated to Him by God the Father, not an authority that automatically and intrinsically resided in Himself. . . . Christ is indeed the Lord of the Church, even calling it "**My church**" (Matt 16:18). By giving Christ "**all authority in Heaven and on Earth**" (Matt 28:18), God the Father has made God the Son our rightful Lord. . . .

However, to say that Christ is our authority is not enough, for even He does not exercise His authority directly today. Therefore, we see the divine chain of command from God the Father through Christ to the Apostles when Christ says to them: "**He who receives you [Apostles] receives Me [Christ], and he who receives Me receives the One Who sent Me [God the Father].**" (Matt 10:40; cf. John 13:20; 15:20; 17:18; 20:21; Acts 1:8; 2 Cor 5:20). The Apostles' commission from Jesus was just as authoritative as the Father's commission of Him. Accordingly, Christ told the Father, "**As you sent Me into the world, I have sent them into the world**" (John 17:18). Here we see the divine chain of command from God the Father, to God the Son, to the Apostles of Christ.

Paul reminds the Galatians of this God-ordained and God-authenticated chain of command when he opens his letter to them with: "**Paul, an Apostle--sent not from men nor by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, Who raised Him from the dead**" (Gal 1:1; cf. 2:8). The God-like authority of Apostles of Jesus Christ is clearly communicated when Paul told the Thessalonians, "**you know what instructions we [Apostles] gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus . . . Therefore, he who rejects this**

**instruction does not reject man but God**" (1 Thess 4:2, 8; cf. 2 Cor 10:8; 1 Cor 14:37; 2 Pet 3:15-16).<sup>115</sup>

The Apostle Jesus Christ certainly had authority and testified to being a messenger of divine revelation. He said, among other things:

**"My teaching is not My own. It comes from Him Who sent Me. . . . My teaching comes from God"** (John 7:16).

**"I do nothing on My own but speak just what the Father has taught Me"** (John 8:28).

**"The Father Who sent Me commanded Me what to say and how to say it . . . So whatever I say is just what the Father has told Me to say"** (John 12:49-50).

**"Everything that I learned from My Father I have made known to you"** (John 15:15)

However, Christ's divine authority was not derived merely because He represented God the Father, but because He was also God the Son. The rest of the Apostles derived their authority merely from whom they represented, but their authority was obviously Godlike in that they were nothing less than direct representatives of Christ Himself (cf. Matt 10:40; Luke 10:16; John 13:20; 1 Thess 4:2, 8).<sup>116</sup>

Accordingly, even after His resurrection, Jesus told the Apostles:

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<sup>115</sup> Excerpt from section 3.1.B.

<sup>116</sup> Confirming the authority of the Apostles in relation to Christ, NT scholar Colin Brown writes:

The view that only Jesus' proclamation is revelation, and that the preaching of the early Church is but an approximation to it (so J. Jeremias, *The Problem of the Historical Jesus*, 1964), does not, in view of the above affirmations, do justice to the statements of the NT. The NT does not draw a distinction here: the apostolic message is called the "Word of God" just as much as the word of Jesus (cf. Lk. 5: 1; 8:21; with I Cor. 14:26; Col. 1:25).

The consequence of this understanding was that early Christianity accepted both the words of Jesus transmitted in the Gospels and the apostolic writings into the Canon, and gave them recognition as the authoritative records of the divine revelation. ("Revelation" in *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology (NIDNTT)*, Colin Brown ed., 4 vols., [Zondervan, 1986], III:315).

**As the Father has sent Me, I am sending you. . . . If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.** (John 20:21, 23)

Such a statement vividly demonstrates both their being Apostles ["sent ones"] of Jesus Christ, and their tremendous spiritual authority (cf. Matt 16:18-19; 18:18; 1 Cor 5:3-5).

Not surprisingly, the writings of early Church leaders reflect a belief in the unique divine authority of the Apostles as well. In addition to the citations above regarding the divine nature of their revelations, we read in the *Didache* (c. 70 <sup>117</sup>): "**Let every Apostle, when he comes to you, be received as the Lord**" <sup>118</sup>

We have argued in chapter 8.2 that the gifts of divine wisdom and knowledge were the special possessions of revelatory Apostles, and essentially defined what such an Apostle was, much like the gift of prophecy defined what a Prophet was. Therefore, contrary to popular opinion particularly in *charismaticism*, <sup>119</sup> to disobey someone given these gifts, was to disobey God. Revelatory Apostles uniquely possessed the saving and guiding word of God regarding the New Covenant and therefore the early Church, "**devoted themselves to the Apostles' teaching**" (Acts 2:42), and particularly devoted themselves to obeying and believing it as they would God Himself. <sup>120</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> For the dating of *The Didache* see *The Apostolic Fathers*, Michael W. Holmes, ed., trans. by J. B. Lightfoot and J. R. Harmer (Baker, 1989), 146.

<sup>118</sup> *The Didache*, 11:5; online at [www.ccel.org](http://www.ccel.org).

<sup>119</sup> Regarding a definition of *charismaticism* see endnotes in chapter 8.2.

<sup>120</sup> Some have wondered if even the Apostle Paul had doubts about the authority of his revelation, including the Gospel he preached. This is based on an interpretation of Galatians 2:1-3 where the Apostle writes:

**Fourteen years later I went up again to Jerusalem, this time with Barnabas. I took Titus along also. <sup>2</sup> I went in response to a revelation and set before them the gospel that I preach among the Gentiles. But I did this privately to those who seemed to be leaders, for fear that I was running or had run my race in vain.**

It could be understood here that the Apostle wanted human confirmation of his revelation of the Gospel. On the contrary, as John Stott remarks:

It was not, we may be sure, that he had any personal doubts or misgivings about his gospel and needed the reassurance of the other Jerusalem Apostles, for he had been preaching it for fourteen years; but rather lest his ministry, past and present, should be rendered

## A.2) Divine Authority of Apostolic Writings: "What I am writing to you is the Lord's command" (1 Cor 14:37)

Therefore, apostolic authority resides in the writings of the Apostles as well. This was, in fact, Christ's will as demonstrated in His commandment to the Apostle John in Revelation: **"Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea"** (1:11).

Accordingly, the Apostle Peter reflects his knowledge that he is writing authoritative divine revelation when he writes, **"I have written to you briefly, encouraging you and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand fast in it"** (1 Pet 5:12).

Likewise, Paul wrote the Thessalonians:

**So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter. . . . In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers . . . If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of him. Do not associate with him, in order that he may feel ashamed.** (2 Thess 2:15; 3:6, 14)

**I charge you before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers.** (1 Thess 5:27; cf. Col 4:16)

The Apostle Paul told the Corinthians: **"This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit"** (1 Cor 2:13).

Along the same lines he wrote the Ephesians:

**Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation [i.e. the gifts of divine wisdom and knowledge], as I have already written briefly [e.g. Eph 1:4-9].** (Eph 3:2-3)

fruitless by the judaizers. It was to overthrow their influence, not to strengthen his own conviction, that he laid his gospel before the Jerusalem Apostles. (*The Message of Galatians* [Intervarsity, 1968], *in loc.*)

For agreement on this see Albert Barnes, *Barnes' Notes on the New Testament*; online at [www.ccel.org](http://www.ccel.org); James M. Boice, *Galatians (EBC)*, Frank Gaebelin ed., [Zondervan, n.d.]; F. F. Bruce, *Paul's Epistle to the Galatians* (NIGTC) [Paternoster, 1982]).

Paul is clearly saying that the divine revelation he had received concerning the New Covenant was deposited in writing in this letter.

To Titus, Paul wrote that a leader of the Church, **“must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught [by the Apostles], so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it”** (Tit 1:9; cf. 1 John 2:24). In other words, all the divine revelation that the leaders of a local church needed was that which had been taught by the Apostles of Jesus Christ. By possessing this revelation one would be assured of correct **“doctrine”** and anyone opposing or adding to what the Apostles taught were false teachers who needed to be refuted.

The Apostle Paul expressed the divine authority his writings had because of the divine knowledge he possessed when he wrote the Corinthians:

**Nevertheless, each one should retain the place in life that the Lord assigned to him and to which God has called him. This is the rule I lay down in all the churches.** (1 Cor 7:17)

**The reason I wrote you was to see if you would stand the test and be obedient in everything.** (2 Cor 2:9)

**I already gave you a warning when I was with you the second time. I now repeat it while absent: On my return I will not spare those who sinned earlier or any of the others, since you are demanding proof that Christ is speaking through me.** (2 Cor 13:2)

**For even if I boast somewhat freely about the authority the Lord gave us for building you up rather than pulling you down, I will not be ashamed of it.** (2 Cor 10:8)

Contrary to the opinion of some, the Apostle Paul demonstrated his own belief that he was writing divine Scripture when he tells the Corinthians, **“what I am writing to you is the Lord’s command”** (1 Cor 14:37).<sup>121</sup> The issue Paul was writing about here concerned

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<sup>121</sup> Some have doubted that the Apostles knew they were recording divine revelation. For example, H. B. Swete (1835-1917), an early 20<sup>th</sup> century Professor of Divinity at Cambridge wrote:

There is no indication that any of the writers of the New Testament was conscious of contributing to a second canon of inspired scriptures. No ulterior purpose of creating a Christian literature or of ministering to the spiritual needs of posterity appears on the surface

the proper regulation of the gifts of tongues and prophecy in the Christian assembly. Nowhere else had Christ given these commands, and the Apostle no doubt received them by divine revelation through the gifts of wisdom and knowledge, and then wrote accordingly.

### **A.3) Modern Support for Apostolic Authority:** *"The Apostles are men different in kind from all other men."*

Because the world, the devil, and eventually the Church all eventually denigrate what God exalts, let us be reminded by at least two men, both Dutch theologians, of the unique position the Apostles of Jesus Christ hold in humanity by the Creator's own design. First, Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) wrote: "I am not obliged to obey Paul because he is clever, or exceptionally clever, but I must submit to Paul because he has divine authority."<sup>122</sup>

Secondly, perhaps no one in the history of the Church, nor in modern times, has dusted off the glory of the Apostolate more than Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920) who is worth the following rather lengthy quote:

By omitting the word "holy," as many do, we make the Apostles common; we consider them as ordinary preachers; in degree above us undoubtedly, being more richly developed, especially by their intercourse with Christ, and as His

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of the books. (*The Holy Spirit in the New Testament* [MacMillan, 1909], 333)

Also, C. F. Evans, Professor of NT Studies at University of London, King's College has written: "The only New Testament book which appears to have been written self-consciously as if for canonical status (but only until the imminent end) is Revelation. ("The New Testament in the Making" in *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, P. R Ackroyd and C. F. Evans eds., 2 vols. [Cambridge Press, 1970], 234). He also quotes A. Deissman in his book *Bible Studies*: "Paul had better work to do than the 'writing of books, and he did not flatter himself that he could write scripture" (Ibid., 237).

Even more recently, the rather liberal scholar L. M. McDonald has written: "When the writers of the NT were producing their manuscripts . . . they were not consciously aware that they were producing inviolable or Prophetic Scripture." (*The Canon Debate*, L. M. McDonald and James A. Sanders, eds. [Hendrickson, 2002], 611).

The Scriptures we have quoted here prove otherwise.

<sup>122</sup> Soren Kierkegaard, *On Authority and Revelation* (Harper and Row, 1997), 104.

witnesses very dear to us, but, occupying the same level with other teachers and ministers of the Church of all ages.

And so the conviction will be lost that the Apostles are men different in kind from all other men; lost is the realization that in them appeared a peculiar and unique ministry; lost also is the grateful confession that the Lord our God gave us in these men extraordinary grace. . . .

For this reason we repeat purposely the title of honor, "holy Apostles," in order that the peculiar significance of the apostolate may again receive honorable recognition in our churches. . . .

[The Apostle John] says: "The Word became flesh and in that incarnate Word life was manifested; and that that manifested Life was heard and seen and handled with hands." [cf. 1 John 1:1-3]. By whom? By everybody? No, by the Apostles; for he adds emphatically: "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, and shew you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested unto us." [v. 3].

And what was the aim of this declaration? To save souls? Surely this also, but not this in the first place. The purpose of this apostolic declaration is to bring the members of the Church into connection with the apostolate. For, clearly and emphatically, he adds: "This we declare unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us" [v. 3]. And only after this link is closed and the fellowship with the apostolate an accomplished fact, he says: "And truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ" [v. 3].

The Apostle's reasoning is as transparent as glass. Life was manifested in such a way that it could be seen and handled . . . . They who saw and handled it were the Apostles; and they were also to declare this life unto the elect. By this declaration, the required fellowship between the elect and the apostolate is established and in consequence of this, there is fellowship also for the elect with the Father and the Son. . . . [E]very child of God must exercise communion with the Father and the Son through the apostolate. . . . [T]his is St. John's positive claim. . . . Only when these things are clear to the soul, the glorious word of Christ, "Father, I pray not for them alone, but for them, also which shall believe on Me through their word," will be well understood. . . .

This unique significance of the apostolate is so deeply embedded in the heart of the Kingdom, that when, in the Revelation of St. John we get a glimpse of the New Jerusalem, we see that the city has twelve foundations, and on them the

names of the twelve Apostles of the Lamb-Rev. xxi. 14. Hence their significance is not transient and temporary, but permanent and including the whole Church. And when its warfare shall be ended and the glory of the New Jerusalem shall be revealed, even then, in its heavenly bliss, the Church shall rest upon the very foundation on which it was built here, and therefore bear, engraven on its twelve foundations, the names of the holy Apostles of the Lord. . . .

Moreover, the Lord Jesus did not only promise them that the word proceeding from their mouth would be a word of the Holy Spirit, but He granted them such personal power and authority, that it would be as though God Himself spoke through them. St. Paul testified of this to the church of Thessalonica, saying, "For this cause we thank God that ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the Word of God" (I Thess. ii. 13).

And St. John tells us that both before and after the resurrection, the Lord Jesus gave His disciples power to bind on earth in the sense that their word—"Whosoever sins ye remit"--would have binding power forever. "They are, remitted unto them; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained"--words that are horrible and untenable except they be understood as implying perfect agreement between the minds of the Apostles and the mind of God.

Of similar import are the words of Christ to Peter: "Whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." . . . [L]et us, in our contending with Rome [Roman Catholic Church], not fall into the opposite error of disparaging the plain and clear meaning of the word. . . .

[T]he words of Jesus referred to do not receive justice so long as we refuse to recognize in the Apostles a working of the Holy Spirit entirely peculiar, unique, and extraordinary. We dilute the words of Jesus and violate their sense so long as we do not acknowledge that, if the Apostles were still living, they would, have the power to forgive us our sins; and that Peter, if he were still living, would have power and authority to issue ordinances binding upon the whole Church. The words are so plain, the qualification was granted in such definite terms, that it can not be denied that John could forgive sin, and that Peter had power to issue an infallible decree. . . .

They were saints because they were hid in Christ like other Christians; but they were holy Apostles not on the ground of their spiritual state and condition, but only by virtue of their

[unique] holy calling and the working of the Holy Spirit that was [uniquely] promised and given unto them. . . .

[H]owever great its present and future progress, it [theology] will never possess a grain of truth more than when the apostolate passed away. Afterward the gold mine might be explored; but when the Apostles died the mine itself existed already. Nothing can be added to it or ever will; it is complete in itself. For this reason the great men of God, who, in the course of ages, by brave words have animated the Church, have always pointed back to the treasures of the Apostles; and without exception told the churches: "Your treasure lies not, before, but behind you, and dates from the days of the Apostles. . . ."<sup>123</sup>

We should not only affirm, but rejoice in the Christ-like authority that the revelatory Apostles and their writings have, because *they are our only link to every spiritual truth we need to believe*. This is why the almost universal criteria in the earliest Church for accepting a document as Scripture was that it was penned by an Apostle of Jesus Christ.<sup>124</sup>

#### A.4) Modern Misconceptions of Apostolic Authority

Note in the NT epistles that Christ did not communicate with these churches directly, but through His Apostles, just as He does today. This is an important point in a culture that worships individualism and a Church that presumes private and personal revelations apart from Scripture. We have discussed this *mega mysticism* elsewhere and among other things wrote:

We no longer have Apostles and Prophets proclaiming direct *divine revelation* from God to the people. Rather, we have the record of these revelations and therefore their ministries have ceased, and the ministry of an Apostle like Paul was replaced by a teacher like Timothy.

Accordingly, the Apostle directs in his last recorded piece of *divine revelation* to Timothy: "**the things** [revealed to me by *divine revelation* and which] **you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses, entrust to reliable men**

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<sup>123</sup> Abraham Kuyper, *The Work of the Holy Spirit*, trans. by Henri De Vries, (Eerdmans, 1946), 140, 142-4, 154-6, 165-6

<sup>124</sup> For further discussion on the earliest Church's view of the canon of Scripture see Volume 3.

**who will also be qualified to teach others”** (2 Tim 2:1-2). Paul did not expect Timothy to receive direct, *divine revelation* for the Church, let alone for himself, but the Apostle constantly pointed him to the written revelation Timothy was to teach from (cf. 1 Tim 4:13; 2 Tim 3:15-4:2). . . .

It seems unlikely that the Apostle [Paul] could conceive of God habitually granting revelation to just an individual, which was not also intended to be of value to the body. This is precisely why he insists throughout 1 Corinthians 14 that any private revelations are to be made public, because Paul assumes that any revelations that may come from God to individuals will not be intended for only private use, but for the community. . . .

God does not value individualized divine communication like American Christians do because He yearns for community. Contrary to the core values of *mega mysticism*, God would rather have us living in unity around Scripture and the direction of His ordained authorities in the local church, rather than giving us independent revelations for personal direction.

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There are other errors that are dealt with as well when we have a proper understanding of the unique revelatory experience and authority of the Apostles. For example, J. D. G. Dunn, the rather liberal, if not heretical British theologian, uses the NT Apostolate in an attempt to justify schismatic individualism, particularly apparent in *charismaticism*, when he writes:

The enthusiast [i.e. *mega mystic*] is an unpopular figure in Christian history and theology. He believes he has been specially favored by God, that the Spirit of God has been given to him in a fuller way than to other believers. He claims to experience God more directly and in more evident manner than others. He knows God's will and acts as his agent, accountable only and directly to him. The world is for him an arena where supernatural forces are at work often with visible and powerful effect. . . . So sure is he of the rightness of his beliefs and actions that he will not hesitate to break even with the most sanctified and respected tradition, and schism often begets schism.

This “identikit picture” of the enthusiast, drawn from our knowledge of enthusiasm as a historical phenomenon, would appear to “fit” many of the earliest Christians with amazing

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<sup>125</sup> Excerpt from section 7.3.D.

precision. Christianity began as an enthusiastic sect within first-century Judaism! Such a claim may be distasteful to some, but it is one with which we will have to reckon with increasing seriousness . . . <sup>126</sup>

Of course the Apostles fit Dr. Dunn's description fairly well, but they were *Apostles of Jesus Christ*, possessing new extra-biblical divine revelation, Christ-like authority, and all supernaturally authenticated. Dr. Dunn's claim that, "many of the earliest Christians" had authority from God to act this way is unbiblical and misleading. Therefore, his suggestion that the authentic Christian today should emulate the Apostles in anything but their virtue is a breeding ground for all sorts of rotten things.

As we have stated several times in Volume 2 of *Knowing Our God*, if you have the personal divine commission, monumental world-changing mission, revelatory experiences, and ability to miraculously heal any and all diseases on command including raising a dead person to life, then perhaps you can do all that the Apostles did. But until then, it is great sin for anyone to presume we can act as Dr. Dunn suggests.

Another attempt to ignore the uniqueness of the Apostolate is found in Stuart Hackett, former Professor of the Philosophy of Religion at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. Dr. Hackett writes:

In the NT there is always a decisive distinction between the [authority of the] Lord Jesus and His Apostles. . . . The Apostle Paul himself seems to have had a clear knowledge and awareness of this distinction, since, in one and the same letter [1 Cor 7:12] he claims . . . that the words in which he writes to them are words not taught him [by Jesus]. <sup>127</sup>

Dr. Hackett is referring to Paul's statement that:

**To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord): A wife must not separate from her husband. . . . To the rest I say this (I, not the Lord): If any brother has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her.** (1 Cor 7:10, 12)

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<sup>126</sup> James D. G. Dunn, "Ministry and the Ministry: The Charismatic Renewal's Challenge to Traditional Ecclesiology" in *Charismatic Experiences in History*, Cecil M. Robeck Jr. ed. (Hendrickson, 1985), 157.

<sup>127</sup> Stuart Hackett, *The Reconstruction of the Christian Revelation Claim* (Baker, 1984), 271.

Is the Apostle making some distinction between his authority and Christ's as Dr. Hackett suggests? Was Paul suggesting that what he writes here is only a human opinion and not divine revelation that needs to be heeded?

First, do we really doubt that Paul's command is true? Of course God wouldn't want a believer to divorce a willing unbeliever they are already married to. There should be no question that this is divine revelation.

The proper understanding of the passage is found when we realize that Paul is merely stating he had no revelation from Christ, written or otherwise, on the specific matter of mixed marriages. As the influential British NT scholar C. K. Barrett points out, "Jesus, whose ministry was cast almost exclusively within Judaism did not have occasion to deal with mixed marriages between the people of God [Jews] and others [Gentiles]." <sup>128</sup> The Apostle is pointing out the same thing in v. 25 when he writes, "**Now about virgins: I have no command from the Lord,**" and indeed we have nothing recorded in the Gospels on such a question.

Nonetheless, while Paul is honest that he has no direct revelation from Christ on these matters, his apostolic gifts of divine wisdom and knowledge have given him "**the mind of Christ**" (1 Cor 2:16), and even in the passage in question he reminds his readers that, "**I give a judgment as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy**" (v. 25), and "**I too have the Spirit of God**" (v. 40), all of which refer to his revelatory gifts as an Apostle.

In fact, Paul's statements here backfire on the liberal theologians who wish to use them to dilute apostolic and biblical authority. First, Dr. Morris points out:

[NT scholar James] Moffatt points out that Paul's careful discrimination between a saying of the Lord and his own injunction tells strongly against those [liberal scholars] who maintain that the early church was in the habit of producing the sayings it needed and then ascribing them to Christ: 'It is historically of high importance that he did not feel at liberty to create a saying of Jesus, even when, as here, it would have been highly convenient in order to settle a disputed point of Christian behaviour.'<sup>129</sup>

Secondly, Dr. Grudem writes:

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<sup>128</sup> C. K. Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians (BNTC)* (Hendrickson, 2000), 163-4.

<sup>129</sup> Leon Morris, *1 Corinthians* (Eerdmans, 1985), 106.

It is remarkable therefore that Paul can go on in verses [1 Cor 7:]12-15 to give several specific ethical standards for the Corinthians. What gave him the right to make such moral commands? He said that he spoke as one "who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy" (I Cor. 7:25). He seems to imply here that his considered judgments were able to be placed on the same authoritative level as the words of Jesus. Thus, I Corinthians 7:12, "To the rest I say, not the Lord," is an amazingly strong affirmation of Paul's own authority: if he did not have any words of Jesus to apply to a situation, he would simply use his own words, for his own words had just as much authority as the words of Jesus!<sup>130</sup>

A final error that can be dealt with here regarding apostolic authority is penned by the neoorthodox theologian Colin Gunton (1941-2003):

The Apostles, and that does not mean only the twelve who are called Apostles but includes the community gathered around them in the first days of the church, are those upon whom the historical Jesus, the Jesus of past history, made his particular impact as the revelation of God. . . . Part of what it means to say that scripture is inspired is accordingly to be found in an affirmation that God the Spirit enabled [non-apostolic] members of a community in a particular time to articulate what it was about that particular configuration of events that is uniquely significant for the salvation of the world.<sup>131</sup>

Here, Dr. Gunton completely sets aside the unique revelatory gifts and divine authority of the Apostles and suggests "a community" of people merely around the Apostles were the authors of what ended up in Scripture. Such conjecture is not only unbiblical, but unreasonable, with absolutely no historical support whatsoever.<sup>132</sup>

## **B) The Divine Authentication of Apostles**

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<sup>130</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Zondervan, 1994), 76-77.

<sup>131</sup> Colin E. Gunton, *A Brief Theology of Revelation* (T&T Clark, 1995), 76.

<sup>132</sup> For further discussion of how the canon of the NT was produced see Volume 3

## B.1) Miracle Working

Obviously the great divine authority the revelatory Apostles possessed needed to be divinely authenticated. Along these lines, we wrote in chapter 8.1, based on Christ's commissioning of the Twelve in Matthew 10:

The unique requirements of being an Apostle of Jesus Christ are all described here. They include: 1) being personally commissioned by Christ (cf. Matt 10:1, 5), 2) being given new divine revelation (i.e. "**The Kingdom of Heaven is near**" v. 7) and, 3) being given supernatural authenticating abilities "**to heal every disease and sickness**" (v. 1), and even "**raise the dead**" and "**cleanse those with leprosy**" (v. 8). It is these attributes which are unique to Apostles of Jesus Christ.<sup>133</sup>

While all three of these criteria were necessary for someone to claim they were a revelatory Apostle, it is only the last one that truly authenticated them as such, as the other two could merely be claimed with no proof.

Accordingly, we have made the claim throughout *KOG* that *God-like deeds* are the required authentication of anyone claiming *God-like authority*. Among other things, we have written:

[Jesus Christ] did not expect someone to grant Him God-like authority without believing He had done God-like deeds. Christ plainly described His God-like credentials when He said:

**Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in Me? The words I say to you are not just My own. Rather, it is the Father, living in Me, Who is doing His work. Believe Me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me** [and that He possessed the Father's authority]; **or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves** (John 14:10-11; cf. 5:36).

The first Christians believed that Christ's God-like deeds authenticated His God-like authority, as demonstrated when the Apostle Peter says, "**Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited ["publicly endorsed" NLT] by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through Him, as you yourselves know**" (Acts 2:22). Christ's miraculous abilities were specifically to authenticate

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<sup>133</sup> Excerpt from section 8.1.A.

His divine authority to God's people. Nicodemus told Christ, **"Rabbi, we know You are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs You are doing if God were not with him"** (John 3:2).

When Jesus was asked if He was the Christ, and worthy of God-like authority, He said, **"The miracles I do in My Father's name speak for Me"** (John 10:25). When the Pharisees questioned the magnitude and source of Christ's authority He replied, **"so that you may know that the Son of Man has [God-like] authority on earth to forgive sins . . ." Then He said to the paralytic, "Get up, take your mat and go home"** (Matt 9:6). This God-like deed proved His God-like authority.

After Christ had zealously cleared the temple area, **"the Jews demanded of Him, "What miraculous sign can you show us to prove your [God-given and God-like] authority to do all this?""** (John 2:18). Christ told the Pharisees that the ultimate authentication of His authority would be His resurrection (cf. John 2:19; Matt 12:38-40). Accordingly, the Apostle Paul, in the context of an evangelistic message, says to the Athenians: **"For He [God] has set a day when He will judge the world with justice by the man [Christ] He has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising Him [Christ] from the dead"** (Acts 17:31).

It should be remembered that God does not deem it necessary to actually personally observe a divine messenger performing a miracle in order for them to exercise authority over our life. The Apostle John recorded the miracles of Jesus so that His authority could be authenticated to future generations. Accordingly, John writes:

**Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name.** (John 20:30-31).

How then do we know that this same authority was passed on to the Apostles and Prophets as they claim? Once again, God authenticated their God-like authority by giving them the ability to perform God-like deeds. Accordingly, Jesus told His disciples, **"As you go, preach this message: 'The kingdom of heaven is near.' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons"**

(Matt 10:7-8; cf. Mark 6:12; Luke 9:1, 6; 10:8). Preaching new divine revelation that is to be obeyed will always be accompanied by miraculous deeds in order for people to know the revelation is from God. . . .

The same was obviously true of Christ's Apostles. They were to exercise Christ-like authority in the Church and God gave them Christ-like abilities in order to authenticate them. For example, Luke records that, "**Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time there [in Iconium], speaking boldly for the Lord, who confirmed the message of His grace by enabling them to do miraculous signs and wonders**" (Acts 14:3; cf. 15:12; 19:10-12).

When Paul is defending His right to exercise apostolic authority over the Corinthian Christians he tells them:

**Actually I should have been commended by you, for in no respect was I inferior to the most eminent Apostles, even though I am a nobody. The signs of a true Apostle [and someone with Christ-like authority] were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles.** (2 Cor. 12:11-12 NASB; cp. Rom. 15:18-19).

The writer to the Hebrews summarizes our view when we read:

**This [authoritative revelation of the New Covenant] salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard Him. God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to His will.** (Heb 2:3-4).

It is the God-like authentication of the Prophets and Apostles that grants their writings in the Scriptures God-like authority. We are not expected to give such authority to documents written merely by good men.<sup>134</sup>

Indeed, the distinguishing mark of a revelatory Apostle was their ability to perform the miraculous (cf. Acts 2:43; 3:6; 5:12-16; 8:5-7; 9:34; 13:11; 14:10; 16:18; 19:11-12; 20:9-11; 28:5, 8-9). There was no such thing in the early Church as a revelatory Apostle who could not perform miraculous deeds. In fact, *no one in*

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<sup>134</sup> Excerpt from section 3.1.D. For further discussion of the divine authentication of divine revelation see section 7.1.B.5 and refs. there.

*Scripture had miracle working abilities apart from the need to be authenticated as a source of new extra-biblical divine revelation for all to believe and obey.* The biblical record is clear: God does not grant a person a divine *healing* ministry unless they also have a divine “*revealing*” ministry. We have dealt with objections to this view elsewhere.<sup>135</sup>

## **B.2) Modern misconceptions on apostolic authentication**

No one since the Apostles have been able to match their supernatural deeds, and we are therefore warranted in believing that no one can match the authority of their words. One recognizes here some of the dangers when some insist that “healers” today can claim the ability to do God-like deeds, and modern day “prophets” have words from God. There would seem to be a lack of respect here for the absolutely unique and critically important process by which God has produced and authenticated the Scriptures. *Super-supernatural*<sup>136</sup> theology, without scriptural or historical warrant, dangerously blurs God-ordained lines that were intended.

In light of the biblical witness of miracle working as the authentication of Apostles, it is unfortunate to see this neglected in particularly liberal theology, but also in Evangelical theology today. For example, Dr. Barrett, in a book considered a classic, *The Signs of an Apostle*, only tells half the story when he implies that “the unique role and importance” of the Twelve was merely that they were the “primary eye-witnesses of the career of Jesus.”<sup>137</sup> What about their possession of the gifts of divine wisdom and knowledge by which they could preach and write new extra-biblical divine revelation that all Christians must believe and obey?

Secondly, in a book written by one of the most respected NT scholars, with the title given it, one would think there would be some exposition of 2 Corinthians 12:12, but there is not. In fact, Dr. Barrett thinks that Paul’s claim to be an Apostle of Jesus Christ, “was a proposition he could assert but could not prove,” and that the whole “apostolic company” was “unable to prove that Christ

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<sup>135</sup> For further discussion of the biblical purpose of miracle working see section see section 7.1.B.5 and refs. there.

<sup>136</sup> *Super-supernaturalism* is the over-expectation of miracles, including the belief in “faith healers” and particularly a part of *charismaticism*. For further on this serious error see chapters 10.13-16.

<sup>137</sup> C. K. Barrett, *The Signs of an Apostle* (Cox & Wyman, 1970), 35

spoke in them”<sup>138</sup>

Likewise, in the popular *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* published by Intervarsity, there is not even a mention of miracle working or 2 Corinthians 12:12 in a discussion by Dr. Paul Barnett of how the Apostle defended his claim to Apostleship in 2 Corinthians. Dr. Barnett goes on to list the typical things scholars stress today including his claim to have been personally commissioned by Christ, his faithfulness to teach the truth, his ability to win converts and start a church in Corinth, and his hardships.<sup>139</sup>

While Paul certainly mentions these things in defense of his Apostleship (cf. 1 Cor 9:1; 4:9-13; 2 Cor 6:3-10; 11:21-33), they are not unique to Apostleship either, nor are they the kind of divine authentication that the people of God need in order to accept someone’s words as the words of God. Many people then and today could claim to have seen the risen Christ, and all the other things are the common experiences of missionaries all over the world.

In general, liberal biblical scholarship ignores the two most important divine authentications of Apostles, both of which are claimed by Paul when he writes:

**Actually I should have been commended by you, for in no respect was I inferior to the most eminent Apostles, even though I am a nobody. The signs of a true Apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles.** (2 Cor. 12:11-12 NASB; cp. Rom. 15:18-19).

Why so much modern NT scholarship chooses to ignore Paul’s statement is beyond us. Perhaps it is their *anti-supernatural* bias.<sup>140</sup>

On the other hand, we have noted elsewhere that *super-supernaturalists*:

. . . ignore the plain meaning of the text in 2 Corinthians 12:12 simply to justify their claim that miracle workers were abundant then, and are today. . . . The apparent desperation to find biblical support for their doctrine and practices is evidenced when Dr. Grudem claims that while the word “**signs**” in the latter part of the sentence “must refer to

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 41, 42.

<sup>139</sup> Paul Barnett, “Apostles” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Intervarsity, 1993).

<sup>140</sup> For further discussion of *anti-supernaturalism* see chapter 10.12.

miracles," Paul's reference to "**signs**" in the first part of the sentence refers to "suffering and hardship."<sup>141</sup>

All of this to deny the obvious biblical fact that the gifts of miracle working were unique enough to the first century Apostles, that Paul could refer to them as "**the signs of a true Apostle**," which again, makes the *super-supernaturalist's* claim to the ordinary nature of these gifts then and today an absurd and unbiblical one.<sup>142</sup>

The *sign gifts* of healing and miracle working authenticated the *Scripture gifts* of divine wisdom and knowledge.

### B.3) Supernatural Virtue

However, notice an important second authenticating sign mentioned by Paul in 2 Corinthians 12:12, which liberal theologians also often ignore. Paul says he did not simply perform *physical miracles* but exercised the *spiritual miracle* of supernatural "**patience**" (*hupomonē*: "a patient enduring").<sup>143</sup> Along these lines, Chrysostom (c. 349-407) wrote: "Notice that Paul says that all these things [miracles] were done in great patience, for to bear all things nobly is the sign of an Apostle."<sup>144</sup>

Accordingly, the Apostle Paul also defends his authority as an Apostle based on his sufferings for Jesus, which we discuss thoroughly elsewhere<sup>145</sup> (cf. 1 Cor 4:9-13; 9:1-13; 2 Cor 1:12; 2:17; 6:3-10; 11:21-28; 1 Thess 1:5; 2:1-11). Therefore, we have written at length elsewhere that because Satan is allowed to work amazing miracles at times, supernatural virtue is the ultimate authentication of God's messengers of extra-biblical revelation,

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<sup>141</sup> Grudem, 363.

<sup>142</sup> Excerpt from section 11.1.F.

<sup>143</sup> For further discussion of the important distinction between *physical* and *spiritual miracles* and examples of the latter see chapters 10.4-5.

<sup>144</sup> Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians*, 27.1.3; online at [www.ccel.org](http://www.ccel.org).

<sup>145</sup> For further discussion regarding Paul's claim to supernatural virtue as an authentication of his apostleship see section 5.4.A.3.

even though it cannot replace the need for *physical miracle working*.<sup>146</sup>

Along these lines, the great Baptist theologian Augustus H. Strong (1836-1921) wrote many years ago:

Miracles, therefore, do not stand alone as evidences. Power alone cannot prove a divine commission. Purity of life and doctrine must go with the miracles to assure us that a religious teacher has come from God. . . . No amount of miracles could convince a good man of the divine commission of a known bad man.<sup>147</sup>

#### **B.4) Sound doctrine**

The NT recognizes a third authentication of God-sent Apostles as well, and that is sound biblical doctrine. This is a secondary authentication because Apostles by nature revealed new extra-biblical doctrine, making particularly their miracle working and supernatural virtue especially important. Nonetheless, the Apostle Paul often pointed to agreement with the New Covenant revelation as a test for an Apostle.

Accordingly, in 2 Corinthians 11 he speaks of **“false Apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as Apostles of Christ”** (v. 13), and earlier in the passage describes them as someone who would lead the Corinthians, **“astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ,” “preaches a Jesus other than the Jesus we preached”** (v. 4), **“or a different Gospel”** (vs. 3-4; cf. Gal 1:6-9; 1 John 2:22-27). All of these concern correct doctrine, and once established, would obviously be useful in exposing a false Apostle.

Therefore, we would suggest three biblical and divine authentications for accepting anyone as an Apostle: 1) convincing miracle-working abilities,<sup>148</sup> 2) supernatural virtue,<sup>149</sup> and 3)

<sup>146</sup> For further discussion of supernatural virtue as the ultimate distinction between divine and demonic messengers or miracle workers see chapter 11.13.

<sup>147</sup> Augustus H. Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 3 Vols. (Judson, 1907, 1953), 128

<sup>148</sup> For further discussion of what convincing miracle-working abilities would look like in view of biblical examples see section 11.1.E.

<sup>149</sup> For further discussion of what supernatural virtue would look like from a biblical perspective see applicable chapters of Book 5: *Biblical Apologetics*.

sound doctrine. All of these are important to keep in mind because throughout the Church's history, people have claimed to be Apostles, attempted to infiltrate the Church, and mislead God's people. Accordingly, we have discussed the issue of demonic deception through false Apostles elsewhere.<sup>150</sup>

No doubt, the Ephesian church used all of these authenticating criteria in the first century when they were commended for, **"test[ing] those who claim[ed] to be Apostles but [were] not, and . . . found them false"** (Rev 2:2). Likewise in our own day, with many claiming that the NT gift of Apostleship is operating today, as discussed below, the biblical attributes of the gift must be applied, and when it is, no one will be found to have met the qualifications.

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## ***Extras & Endnotes***

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### ***Gauging Your Grasp***

- 1) Why is it not sufficient to say that Christ is our authority?
- 2) How would you describe the authority of a revelatory Apostle?
- 3) How did Paul demonstrate his own belief that he was writing divine Scripture?
- 4) In what ways were the revelatory Apostles different from all other men?
- 5) We claim that the Apostles are our only link to every spiritual truth we need to believe. Do you agree or disagree and why?
- 6) What are the ramifications of the fact that Timothy was not to receive direct, *divine revelation*, but was commanded to teach from the written revelation given to him?

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<sup>150</sup> For further discussion of discerning false Apostles, including the biblical fact that they may preach the Gospel, see section 11.13.E.

- 7) We claim *no one in Scripture had miracle working abilities apart from the need to be authenticated as a source of new extra-biblical divine revelation for all to believe and obey*. Can you think of an exception to this?
- 8) What are the three unique biblical authentications for an Apostle? Give a biblical reference to each one.

### **Publications & Particulars**



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**Book 8**  
**God's Apostles**  
**Part II**  
**Cessation of *Scripture* &  
*Sign Gifts***

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- ◆ **8.5:** The Historical Cessation of Apostles 115
- ◇ **8.6:** The Biblical Cessation of *Scripture*  
& *Sign Gifts:* 135  
*A Closer Look at 1 Cor 13:8-13*
- ◇ **8.7:** Answering Arguments Against 227  
*Historicism*



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## Chapter 8.5

# The Cessation of Apostles

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### *Table of Topics*

- A) Apostles are Not Church Leaders, Planters, or Missionaries**
- B) Heretical Claims to Apostleship:** *From Mormons to charismaticism*
- C) Biblical Evidence for the Cessation of Apostles**
- D) Historical Evidence for the Cessation of Apostles**
- E) Arguments Against the Cessation of Apostleship**

*Extras & Endnotes*

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### **Primary Points**

- There is no biblical support for designating church leaders, planters, or missionaries as Apostles, and such labeling only confuses people.
- After the disappearance of Apostles, leadership functions on a regional basis were handled by men called Bishops as soon as the second century, many of whom had been personally appointed by Apostles of Christ.
- The revelatory ministry of Apostles has been replaced with Scripture, their church planting with evangelists, and their regional church leadership with various kinds of oversight.
- Because *charismaticism* denies that miracle working was the authenticating sign of an Apostle in the early church, they dangerously leave the door open for many to claim they are biblical Apostles.
- While martyrdom marked the lives of real Apostles, money is the chief characteristic of modern so-called "apostles" of Jesus Christ.
- The Pastoral Epistles clearly pass on the authority of the churches to Teachers and Pastors, and there is no hint of the continuation of apostolic ministry.
- The essential and unique ministry of revelatory Apostles was their communication of the revelation necessary to implement the New Covenant. With the completion, duplication, distribution, and recognition of the NT Scriptures this need ceased, and so did biblical Apostleship. Accordingly, the historic position of the Church since the second century has been that only rather heretical groups would claim such a gift.
- The obvious cessation of the gift of apostleship is important evidence that other miraculous, first-century gifts have ceased as well.

## A) Apostles are Not Church Leaders, Planters, or Missionaries

The definitions of biblical Apostles demonstrated in chapter 8.1 reflect the fact that the only kinds of Apostles in the NT were Jesus Christ, those possessing new extra-biblical divine revelation and authenticating miraculous gifts, and ambassadors of local churches. Therefore, there is little, if any, biblical support for designating church leaders, church planters, or missionaries as Apostles, and such labeling only confuses people.

Concerning church leadership, the only kind of NT Apostles who exercised any authority over local churches were revelatory Apostles of Jesus Christ. Even then, however, their authority was limited. Along these lines, the eminent Church historian Andrew F. Walls has written:

[T]he NT has less to say than might be expected of the Apostles as ruling the church. They are the touchstones of doctrine, the purveyors of the authentic tradition about Christ; apostolic delegates visit congregations which reflect new departures for the church (Acts 8:14ff.; 11:22ff.).

But the Twelve did not appoint the Seven; the crucial Jerusalem Council consisted of a large number of elders as well as the Apostles (Acts 15:6; cf. 12, 22); and two Apostles served among the 'Prophets and teachers' of the church at Antioch (Acts 13:1). Government was a distinct gift (1 Cor 12:28), normally exercised by local elders; Apostles were, by virtue of their commission, mobile. Nor are they even prominent in the administration of the sacraments (cf. Cor. 1:14). The identity of function which some see between Apostle and 2<sup>nd</sup> century bishop (cf. K. E. Kirk in *The Apostolic Ministry*, p. 10) is by no means obvious.<sup>151</sup>

Church history is clear that before the first century Apostles died, they personally appointed men called Bishops over a city or region of churches. By the mid 90's A. D. Bishop Clement of Rome, is writing an epistle to Corinth. In the early 100's A. D. Bishop Ignatius is writing to exhort churches throughout Asia Minor. Clearly, the Apostles themselves instituted this ministry to oversee local churches in a particular city or region. This arrangement was not just a Roman Catholic institution, but an apostolic one initiated by ones like the Apostle Paul and Peter.

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<sup>151</sup> Andrew F. Walls, "Apostles," in the *New Bible Dictionary*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed.; J. I. Packer et. al. eds. (Intervarsity, 1996), 59.

Accordingly, Bishop Irenaeus (c. 180) writes:

It is within the power of all, therefore, in every Church, who may wish to see the truth, to contemplate clearly the tradition of the apostles manifested throughout the whole world; and we are in a position to reckon up those who were by the apostles instituted bishops in the Churches, and [to demonstrate] the succession of these men to our own times. . .

[I]f the apostles had known hidden mysteries . . . they would have delivered them especially to those to whom they were also committing the Churches themselves. For they were desirous that these men should be very perfect and blameless in all things, whom also they were leaving behind as their successors, delivering up their own place of government to these men;

Since, however, it would be very tedious, in such a volume as this, to reckon up the successions of all the Churches, we [write] . . . that tradition derived from the apostles, of the very great, the very ancient, and universally known Church founded and organized at Rome by the two most glorious apostles, Peter and Paul; as also [by pointing out] the faith preached to men, which comes down to our time by means of the successions of the bishops.

For it is a matter of necessity that every [local] Church should agree with this [universal] Church, on account of its pre-eminent authority, that is, the faithful everywhere, inasmuch as the apostolical tradition has been preserved continuously by those [faithful men] who exist everywhere.<sup>152</sup>

Accordingly, we have convincing testimony in the early Church that the Apostles appointed Bishops over regions and a city of local churches. Of course the Roman Catholic Church has taken advantage of this tradition by claiming it remains the only faithful inheritor of it, but even Irenaeus claimed this tradition faithfully existed "everywhere" in the Church, not just Rome. Nevertheless, the institution of Bishops over the churches was an apostolic act that occurred several centuries before the prominence of the Bishopric of Rome was widely recognized.

Accordingly, leadership functions on a regional basis were handled by men called Bishops as soon as the second century, many of whom had been personally appointed by Apostles of Christ. Therefore, it would seem that a more historical term for regional

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<sup>152</sup> Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, III.3.1-2; online at [www.ccel.org](http://www.ccel.org).

and national leaders today would be Bishops, rather than Apostles. In fact, as we document below, the early Bishops were very careful to distinguish themselves from the Apostles, testifying to the extinction of this office.

Others refer to missionaries or church planters as Apostles as well. Obviously this was one of the primary functions of Apostles in the NT. However, the NT position of “**evangelists**” (Eph 4:11) would seem a more accurate term for this function today. This would be in the biblical tradition of referring to a NT church planter like Philip as, “**Philip the evangelist**” (Acts 21:8) instead of an Apostle.

Technically, of course, any ambassador between churches could be given the name of Apostle in the tradition of an Epaphroditus (cf. Phil 2:25). However, this seems unwise, can cause confusion, and lead to the denigration of the term “Apostle” that Dr. Kuyper spoke of in the previous chapter.

In the end, it is best to see the gift and ministry of Apostleship as something that has ceased in the Church. Their function as church planters and communicators of the Gospel is fulfilled by modern missionaries and evangelists, and their oversight of a region of pastors and churches replaced by various positions depending on the group of churches. The revelatory Apostles’ possession of new extra-biblical revelation was unique to them, and no longer necessary, nor at all demonstrated today.

## **B) Heretical Claims to Apostleship:** *From Mormons to charismaticism*<sup>153</sup>

Nonetheless, heretical groups have claimed the restoration of Apostles through them in the past. Mormonism is governed by its “Quorum of the Twelve Apostles,” second in authority only to the leading Prophet or “First President.”<sup>154</sup>

Since the 1800’s there has been various branches of the Apostolic Catholic Church (Irvingism) that have claimed the restored office of Apostle. While they do not stress the revelatory nature of biblical Apostles, they make it clear that a person’s eternal salvation is dependent upon the personal meeting of one of their “apostles.”<sup>155</sup> As we have documented elsewhere, the whole

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<sup>153</sup> Regarding a definition of *charismaticism* see endnote in chapter 8.2.

<sup>154</sup> For further information regarding Mormonism’s “Quorum of Twelve Apostles” see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quorum\\_of\\_the\\_Twelve](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quorum_of_the_Twelve)

<sup>155</sup> Among other things, the statement of faith of *Irvingism* is:

movement was denounced as heretical soon after its inception.<sup>156</sup> In its day, the distinguished Christian scholar, Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920) wrote of the Irvingite “apostles”:

Nor have the results realized the expectations of these brethren. Their apostolate has been a great disappointment. It has accomplished almost nothing. It has come and gone without leaving a trace.<sup>157</sup>

Which has, and will be, the experience of any future claims to Apostles.

Obviously, *charismaticism’s* beliefs that all the gifts of the first century church have returned after centuries of absence, would eventually lead it to claim Apostles among them as well. Accordingly, NT scholar D. A. Carson has written:

Once the charismatic movement had rehabilitated all of the other spiritual gifts explicitly mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12-14, it is not surprising that some felt there should be a place for Apostles as well. As a result some wings of Pentecostalism do not hesitate to appoint modern Apostles.<sup>158</sup>

Although the idea that Apostles could exist today was at one time a minority position in even *charismaticism*, it has quickly picked up steam. Accordingly, many books have come out of this movement suggesting that Apostles are amongst us, promoting the “five fold ministry” which claims all the gifts listed in Ephesians 4:11 including Apostles and Prophets exist today.

Authors such as C. Peter Wagner, David Cannistraci, Jack Deere, and Bill Hamon are among those at the forefront of promoting this “Apostolic Movement.” Dr. Wagner in fact refers to himself as the,

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I believe that the Lord Jesus rules His church through living Apostles until His return, and that He has sent them into the world and still sends them with the commission to teach, to forgive sins in His name and to baptize with water and the Holy Spirit. . . . Those baptized with water must receive the Holy Spirit through an Apostle, to obtain the childhood in God, whereby they become incorporated as members in the body of Christ. (From the official website of this denomination at <http://www.nak.org/en/faith-and-church/creed>)

<sup>156</sup> For further discussion of the Irvingites see section 12.13.E.

<sup>157</sup> Abraham Kuyper, *The Work of the Holy Spirit*, trans. by Henri De Vries, (Eerdmans, 1946), 158-9.

<sup>158</sup> D. A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit: A Theological Exposition of 1 Corinthians 12-14* (Baker, 1987), 88.

"Presiding Apostle of the International Coalition of Apostles."<sup>159</sup> That's quite a self-proclaimed title considering the biblical teaching on Apostles. Nevertheless, none of these authors present anything worthwhile that cannot be explained by the different, "**ministries**" and "**effects**" (1 Cor 12:5-6) of legitimate spiritual gifts such as "**evangelist**" (Eph 4:11), and "**leadership**" (Rom 12:8).

Nonetheless, many in *charismaticism* insist that God has restored Apostles to the Church. For example, former member of the Board of Directors of the Association of Vineyard Churches, Tom Stipe, tells of a "private meeting" where "prophets" told the Vineyard leadership that:

the Lord was restoring Apostles . . . to the church. We were challenged to accept the arrival of Apostles and Prophets because today's church already had plenty of teaching, pastoring, and evangelizing.<sup>160</sup>

One wonders what else needs to be done in the Church except "teaching, pastoring, and evangelizing"?

The claims of Vineyard leaders echo Jack Deere who told an audience:

With the [current] third wave [of the Spirit supposedly] would come endtime Apostles and Prophets who would "do greater [miraculous] works than the Apostles, than Jesus, or any of the Old Testament Prophets."<sup>161</sup>

Accordingly, Mr. Deere has written:

The addition of Paul, Barnabas, James, and possibly others [to the office of Apostleship in the NT] opens the possibility of God giving additional Apostles at any time in history. No specific

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<sup>159</sup> Pastor Bob Dewaay reports regarding C. Peter Wagner:

[In the words of Mr. Hamon] The National Symposium on the Post-Denominational Church convened by Dr. C. Peter Wagner at Fuller Seminary, May 21-23, 1996, was a historical occasion in God's annals of Church history. It was prophetically orchestrated by the Holy Spirit to fulfill God's progressive purpose of bringing His Church to its ultimate destiny. . . . The consensus of the panelists was that there are still Apostles and Prophets in the Church, and that there is an emerging Apostolic Movement that will revolutionize the 21<sup>st</sup> century Church. The last-generation Church will have an Apostolic Reformation that will be as great as the first generation Apostolic Movement." . . . Hamon claims that he himself is one of God's "new breed" of last-days Apostles. (Dewaay, CIC, #103, 5-6)

<sup>160</sup> Hank Hanegraaff, *Counterfeit Revival* (Word, 1997), ix-x.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.* 144.

text of Scripture prevents Jesus from appearing to and commissioning others in an apostolic office."<sup>162</sup>

Mr. Deere's argument is typical of *charismaticism* which is both dangerous and attempts to confuse the issues. The question to be answered is not whether or not God *could* reinstate Apostles appointed personally by Christ, but *has* He? And if He did, how would we know? Just because someone claims they saw a vision of Christ and He commissioned them? On the contrary, because Mr. Deere and *charismaticism* denies that miracle working was the authenticating sign of an Apostle in the early church,<sup>163</sup> and consistently redefines and dilutes the uniqueness of NT miracle working, they dangerously leave the door open for many to claim they have been appointed to such an office.

The danger of this becomes evident when we are reminded that a primary function of NT Apostles was the revelation of previously unrevealed divine doctrine that all Christians are obligated to believe and obey. Although those in *charismaticism* like Mr. Deere would deny that they think the canon of Scripture can be reopened, they cannot make statements like the above and wonder how the rest of us could make such an accusation.

In fact, Mr. Deere claims:

God could give Apostles at any time in history, or those with more power and authority than the [NT] Apostles, without doing violence to his Word or the gospel.<sup>164</sup>

Baloney. Obviously someone with "more power and authority than the [NT] Apostles," could certainly add to the NT revelation additional revelation that all Christians would need to believe and obey.

## C) Biblical Evidence for the Cessation of Apostles

Regardless of the growing modern claims to the contrary, there is a great deal of biblical evidence that God is not granting the gift of Apostleship to the Church today. First of all, no one today can meet the biblical requirements to claim the gift. It is no doubt

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<sup>162</sup> Ibid., 251.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid., 252.

<sup>164</sup> Jack Deere, *Surprised by the Power of the Spirit* (Zondervan, 1993), 250.

*revelatory* Apostles that Paul is referring to in Ephesians 4:11 and if someone wants to claim a "five-fold ministry" today then their Apostles need to meet their biblical qualifications as defended in chapters 8.1-8.4. And no one can. How dare people claim the lofty title of an Apostle of Jesus Christ today without the credentials. That is the height of arrogance. And so we should stay away from the designation at all.

First, no one today can claim they have been personally commissioned by the Lord Jesus, and if someone did, God Himself would be pleased to have us expose them as deluded and demonic. Along these lines, Dr. Barnett has written:

Were there Apostles *after* Paul? Is there a historical point after which, according to Paul, there were no Apostles? 1 Corinthians 15:5-11 bears on these important questions. . . .

These Apostles are not sent by ordinary people on a mundane mission. The sender is Christ, the Messiah of God. The overwhelming number of Paul's references to *Apostle* belong to this category, which, however, may be further divided into other Apostles and Paul himself.

1 Corinthians 15:5-11 bears on these important questions. Paul's words "[Christ] appeared to Cephas, *then* to the twelve . . . *then* to more than five hundred brothers . . . *then* . . . to James . . . *then* to all the Apostles. *Last of all* . . . he appeared also to me" seems to demarcate a span of resurrection appearances beginning with Cephas and ending with Paul. Paul does not say, "*Then* he appeared to me" but "*Last of all* he appeared to me," suggesting a finality of appearances.

Paul is able to go on to say "I am the least of the Apostles . . . by the grace of God I am [an Apostle]" because the Apostles are a group limited in number. He can say that he is the "least of the Apostles" since he is, in reality, the "last" Apostle to whom the Lord "appeared." The first and most basic test of apostolicity is that the claimant has "seen the Lord" (1 Cor 9:1).

From Paul's standpoint the unusual nature of Christ's resurrection appearance to him serves to mark him out as the end point of such appearances and therefore the end point of apostolic appointment.<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> P. W. Barnett, "Apostle," in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, Gerald F. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin, eds.; CD-ROM (Parsons Technology, 1997).

Nor does anyone today perform “**signs, wonders, and miracles**” like the Apostles, which are the “**signs of a true Apostle**” (2 Cor 12:12 NASB), regardless of what *charismaticism* and Mormonism wish to claim.<sup>166</sup>

Finally, in contrast to the hardships and poverty experienced by real Apostles in the first century, most of those who claim such a lofty title today live in luxury. While martyrdom marked the lives of real Apostles, money is the chief characteristic of modern so-called “apostles” of Jesus Christ.

There are other biblical indications that the gift of Apostleship has not operated since the early Church. In general, as we have discussed elsewhere, from a biblical perspective, we would not expect such gifts to be operating unless God intends to implement yet another, and different covenant with humanity, requiring additional authenticated Scriptures to be added to the Bible.<sup>167</sup>

Along these lines, the Apostle Paul seems to indicate the cessation of revelatory Apostleship himself in at least two instances. To the Corinthians Paul writes that the gift of “**knowledge**,” that would seem to be the essence of revelatory Apostleship, will “**cease**” with the completion, documentation, and distribution of the New Testament revelation.<sup>168</sup>

Similarly, Paul tells the Ephesians:

**Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household [the Church], built on the foundation [themelios] of the Apostles and [NT] Prophets, with Christ Jesus Himself as the chief cornerstone. (2:19-20)**

Paul’s description of the first century ministries of the NT Apostles and Prophets as “**the foundation**” on which the Church has been built suggests a once-and-for-all event. The word *themelios* is consistently used in the NT to simply refer to the foundation of a building (cf. Luke 6:48-49;14:29; Acts 16:26; Rom 15:20; 1 Cor 3:10-12; Heb 11:10; Rev 21:14, 19). It goes without saying that in order to build anything on a foundation, the work of

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<sup>166</sup> For discussion of the biblical attributes of miracle working see chapter 11.1.

<sup>167</sup> For further discussion of the relationship between divine/human covenant making and divine revelation see section 7.2.C and 7.3.B.

<sup>168</sup> For a discussion of the interpretation of 1 Corinthians 13:8-13 chapter 8.6.

the foundation must be completed and then cease.<sup>169</sup> Accordingly, Dr. Walls notes: "since no foundation repeats itself, they are irreplaceable in any subsequent generation."<sup>170</sup>

As discussed elsewhere, it is no doubt that the gift of Apostleship mentioned in Ephesians 4:11 is the same "**Apostles**" who were "**the foundation**" (Eph 2:20) of the NT Church, and recipients of the extra-biblical NT revelation, "**which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy Apostles and Prophets**" (Eph 3:5).<sup>171</sup> It is simply irresponsible for anyone to claim these same kind of Apostles exist today in a "five fold ministry," and to ignore the unique position and abilities of the Apostles Paul was referring to.

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<sup>169</sup> The *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology (NIDNTT)* defines *themelios* as follows, and supports our interpretation of Eph 2:20: [In classical Greek] it means that which lies beneath, foundation (stone), base . . . in the lit. sense (e.g. foundations of a house, city, or building). . . . The NT use of *themelios* extends throughout the NT (in all it occurs 16 times), and does not differ from the cl. Gk. usage in its meaning. . . . In Eph. 2:20 the Prophets [and Apostles] form part of the "foundation" of the church. This image suggests that the period in which the foundations of the church were laid is over, i.e. the Prophetic [and apostolic] office is a thing of the past. (J. Blunck, Colin Brown ed., 4 vols., [Zondervan, 1986], 1:660-1 and 3:84.

Likewise, NT scholar Thomas Edgar points out:

Just as the cornerstone, Jesus Christ, has been set, so the foundation has been laid and the church built upon it. There is no need for other cornerstones (other messiahs), since Christ accomplished his work, and the church still benefits from it. In the same way there is no need for other foundations (other, later Apostles [or Prophets]), since the Apostles' work is accomplished and the church is built on that foundation and cornerstone. (*Satisfied by the Promise of the Spirit* [Kregel, 1996], 60).

In addition, the *NIDNTT* entry on "Apostle" demonstrates the probable relationship between this ministry and the Hebrew understanding of a *šālîah* ("messenger"). Then it is concluded:

What has been said of the use of *apostello* in the LXX applies equally to the *šālîah*. The term does not denote a continuing office, important in itself, but the exercise of a function limited in scope and duration by a definite commission, and terminating on its completion. (E. von Eicken, H. Lindner, I.128)

<sup>170</sup> Andrew F. Walls, "The Canon of the New Testament", *Expositors Bible Commentary*, Vol. 1 (EBC) (Zondervan, 1979), 59

<sup>171</sup> For further discussion on the meaning of Eph 2:20 see section 9.6.C.1

In addition, many have pointed out the fact that the Pastoral Epistles clearly pass on the authority of the churches to Teachers and Pastors, and there is no hint of the continuation of apostolic ministry. These epistles were specifically intended by the Apostle Paul to give the principles and positions for church leadership throughout its existence, and while they mention Elders, Evangelists, Teachers and Deacons, they never mention Apostles. Accordingly, the Apostle Paul encouraged a Teacher like Timothy to preserve apostolic revelation precisely because the gift would not continue (cf. 2 Tim 2:2).

In the epistle of Jude we read, “**dear friends, remember what the Apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ foretold**” (v. 17). The use of “**the**” implies a unique group. And it would seem that the author needs to point back in history to find words from Apostles, as there are none in his day.

## D) Historical Evidence for the Cessation of Apostles

This perspective is clearly reflected in the post-apostolic Church. After the death of the Apostles, none of the leaders of the early Church claimed to be Apostles, nor do they refer to anyone else as Apostles. For example, Ignatius, (c. 35-c. 110) bishop of Antioch, who wrote many authoritative epistles to churches just like the Apostles, nonetheless wrote in his *Epistle to the Romans*: “I do not give you orders like Peter or Paul: they were Apostles.”<sup>172</sup>

Likewise, we have already quoted, Polycarp (c. 69-c. 155), bishop of Smyrna:

I am writing you these comments about righteousness, brothers, not on my own initiative but because you invited me to do so. For neither I nor anyone like me can keep pace with the [gift of divine] wisdom of the blessed and glorious Paul, who, when he was among you in the presence of the men of that time, accurately and reliably taught the word concerning the truth. And when he was absent he wrote you letters; if you study them carefully, you will be able to build yourselves up in the faith that has been given to you.<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> Ignatius, *Epistle to the Romans*, 4:3; online at [www.ccel.org](http://www.ccel.org).

<sup>173</sup> Polycarp, *Fragments*, 3:1-2; online at [www.ccel.org](http://www.ccel.org).

Polycarp, like Ignatius, was one of the most powerful and popular leaders of the early Church, yet he intentionally distanced himself from the Apostles because in his day, none existed, and he did not want to be considered one of them. What a far cry from the arrogant, self-serving, false Apostles who make claims to Apostleship today.

Clement of Rome (died c. 99) clearly describes the progression from Apostles to other church leaders in the early Church:

The Apostles received the gospel for us from the Lord Jesus Christ; Jesus the Christ was sent forth from God. So then Christ is from God, and the Apostles are from Christ. Both, therefore, came of the will of God in good order.

Having therefore received their orders and being fully assured by the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ and full of faith in the Word of God, they went forth with the firm assurance that the Holy Spirit gives, preaching the good news that the kingdom of God was about to come. So, preaching both in the country and in the towns, they appointed their firstfruits, when they had tested them by the Spirit, to be bishops and deacons for the future believers.<sup>174</sup>

Likewise, we read in the priceless, ancient document referred to as the *Muratorian Fragment* that the ministry of Apostles has ceased. This document is the oldest list of NT documents we have, confidently dated before 170 A.D. The writer tells us:

But Hermas wrote the *Shepherd* very recently, in our times, in the city of Rome, while bishop Pius, his brother, was occupying the [episcopal] chair of the church of the city of Rome. And therefore it ought indeed to be read; but it cannot be read publicly to the people in church either among the Prophets, whose number is complete, or among the Apostles, for it is after [their] time.<sup>175</sup>

Accordingly, the early Church did not believe in the succession of Apostles.<sup>176</sup> There is a reason that the early Church spoke of Apostles as something in the past. They recognized that there were other gifts operating such as teaching (cf. Rom 12:7; 1 Cor 12:28), leading (cf. Rom 12:8), and evangelism (cf. Eph 4:11; Acts 21:8)

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<sup>174</sup> Clement of Rome, *Epistle to the Corinthians*, 42; online at [www.ccel.org](http://www.ccel.org).

<sup>175</sup> *Muratorian Fragment*, sections 73-80; online at <http://www.bible-researcher.com/muratorian.htm>

<sup>176</sup> Concerning the Roman Catholic issue of the papacy see chapter 13.7.

that could replace some of the ministry that the first century Apostles were performing. However, the essential and unique ministry of revelatory Apostles was their communication of the revelation necessary to implement the New Covenant. With the completion, duplication, distribution, and recognition of the NT Scriptures this need ceased, and so did biblical Apostleship. Accordingly, the historic position of the Church since the second century has been that only rather heretical groups would claim such a gift.<sup>177</sup>

Along these lines, Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) not only believed that the gift of divine knowledge and wisdom was confined to the revelatory Apostles, but also that the gifts had ceased as predicted in 1 Corinthians 13:8-13 and observed in history. Along these lines, John Gerstner writes of a particular sermon:

In the later manuscript sermons on 1 Corinthians 13:8-13, Edwards relates the charismata or extraordinary gifts more especially to immediate revelation. This is the stress at the beginning and end of the long triple sermon. We shall see later that many in his own day were claiming to see truth not merely in, but alongside the Bible, and to have the power of discerning the state of their own hearts and the hearts of others.

This is what led Edwards to charge them with claiming these extraordinary gifts of the Spirit which consisted originally in immediate revelation, including supernatural discernment which Edwards thought had ceased, to continue.<sup>178</sup>

Because it is undeniable that those designated as revelatory Apostles had the ability to speak and write direct revelation from God, few Christians claim that such a gift exists today. Even most in *charismaticism*, while insisting that all the other *Scripture* and *sign gifts* are operating today, admit that Apostleship has ceased to function. Accordingly, Stanley M. Horton, Distinguished Professor of Bible and Theology Emeritus at the Assemblies of God Theological Seminary denies that anyone today could be called an Apostle.<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> For related historical information about miracle working and Prophets see chapters 11.7 and 9.13

<sup>178</sup> John Gerstner, in *The Rational Biblical Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, 3 vols. (Berea, 1991), I.162.

<sup>179</sup> *Systematic Theology*, Stanley M. Horton, ed., rev. ed. (Logion, 1995), 176-177.

Most would agree too that the timing of the termination of Apostles coincided with the completion of the NT Scriptures. Even the *charismatic* theologian Dr. Grudem concedes:

In place of living Apostles present in the church to teach and govern it, we have instead the writings of the Apostles in the books of the New Testament. Those New Testament Scriptures fulfill for the church today the absolutely authoritative teaching and governing functions which were fulfilled by the Apostles themselves during the early years of the church.<sup>180</sup>

In other words, after the Apostles had received and recorded the NT revelation, they had fulfilled their purpose and this gift to the Church ceased to function. While there may be men ministering in "apostolic" ways such as church planting, evangelistic missions, regional oversight of churches, and the appointment of church leadership, the ministry of revelatory Apostles has ceased. With the completion and acceptance of the NT Scriptures the ministry of such an Apostle was gradually replaced by gifted Teachers and Pastors expounding the revealed and written word of God.

The only way the above groups can claim to possess NT Apostles is to admit their "apostles" are merely messengers between churches, or to gut the gift of revelatory Apostles of their biblical attributes. The latter is very common in *charismaticism*.

In a similar fashion, it is popular in this movement to insist that the gifts of divine wisdom and knowledge are still operating today, yet admit that they do not possess the authority that a word from God has. In other words they desire to walk the fence of claiming that instruction through these gifts is a revelation from God, but those that are spoken to need not obey it as such. This is completely foreign to these gifts as they are described in the NT, and this error will be discussed further in our discussion of the gift of prophecy.<sup>181</sup>

The fact that the gift of Apostleship has ceased is an important factor in any discussion regarding the current status of other *Scripture* and *sign gifts*. Dr. Carson states the obvious that:

As long as "Apostles" are understood to refer to a select group whose positions or functions cannot be duplicated after their

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<sup>180</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Zondervan, 1994), 911. See also 1031 note 21.

<sup>181</sup> For further discussion on the dilution of the biblical attributes of the gift of prophecy in modern *charismaticism* see virtually all of Book 9: *God's Prophets*.

demise, there is a *prima facie* [obvious] case for saying *at least one* of the charismata [spiritual gifts] passes away at the end of the first generation. . . . Therefore, there is a precedent for asking if there were other spiritual gifts in Paul's day that cannot be operative in our day . . . it is clear that the gift of Apostleship that Paul mentions in this text [1 Cor 12:28] is not transferable to persons living in our day.<sup>182</sup>

Therefore, it can be suggested that what has obviously happened to the gift of Apostleship is not an isolated exception, but rather further evidence that the other *Scripture* and *sign gifts*, including divine wisdom and knowledge also ceased with the completion of the NT canon. Along these same lines, the "five-fold ministry" gifts listed in Ephesians 4:11 cannot be used as evidence that Apostles and Prophets still operate in the Church because the gifts of teaching and pastoring do. This argument is inconsistent, because the gift of Apostleship has ceased, making the Ephesians 4:11 list applicable to when it was written and not today.<sup>183</sup>

## E) Arguments Against the Cessation of Apostleship

Not surprisingly, the primary tactic of *charismaticism* to ignore this evidence is to claim that Apostleship was not a spiritual gift. Accordingly, J. Rodman Williams claims that Apostleship was not a spiritual gift because it is described as an "appointment" instead of a gift in Ephesians 4:11.<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> Carson, 88, 91.

<sup>183</sup> Unfortunately R. P. Spittler, Professor from Fuller Theological Seminary, in his entry to the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia (ISBE)* under "Spiritual Gifts" is both confusing and inaccurate when he writes:

Obviously the role that these early leaders played as founders of the faith cannot be repeated. But since the functions of Prophet and teacher have continued throughout church history, it would be strange if Apostle did not (Geoffrey W. Bromiley ed. 4 vols., [Eerdmans, 1988], 4:604).

Dr. Spittler's addition that he does not mean Apostles equal with "the original circle" does not clear up the problems with his statement. Unfortunately, both this vagueness and unsubstantiated claims characterize the whole article on this important topic.

<sup>184</sup> J. Rodman Williams, "The Greater Gifts," in *Charismatic Experiences in Christianity*, Cecil M. Robeck ed. (Hendrickson, 1985), 44-5.

First, the text says Christ **"gave"** (*edōken*) these ministries, and there is no connotation of "appointment" in the Greek. Secondly, the fact that Apostles were divinely commissioned does not mean their ministries were not founded on spiritual gifts. The ministry of **"Teachers"** is described as **"appointed"** (1 Cor 12:28), but it is still a spiritual gift. Thirdly, the ministries of **"Prophets"** and **"Teachers"** are in the same list with Apostles in Ephesians 4:11, are both clearly referred to as spiritual gifts elsewhere (cf. Rom 12:6-7; 1 Cor 12:28), and make it difficult for anyone to deny that Paul thought Apostleship was a spiritual gift like them.

Another attempt to redefine Apostleship as something other than a spiritual gift of God's supernatural grace is offered by the Pentecostal NT scholar Gordon Fee:

It is popular to refer to Apostleship as "the greatest charisma of all"; it is doubtful, however, whether Paul actually considered his Apostleship a gift of the Spirit. His Apostleship in particular is related to God's will and Christ's commissioning; he himself never calls it a Spirit-gifting as such. . . .

[T]here is no place in Paul where there is a direct connection between the Spirit and Apostleship. His Apostleship is received "from Christ" (Rom 1:4-5) and "by the will of God" (1 Cor 1:1); it is never suggested to be a "charism" of the Holy Spirit, as though the Spirit gifted some people for this "office."  
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It would seem here that Dr. Fee loses his characteristic common sense. And all for the reason, it would seem, to simply deny that God intended to withdraw any spiritual gifts from the Church.

Jack Deere as well attempts to offer several arguments to deny that NT Apostleship was a spiritual gift. He writes:

It is virtually impossible to define the "gift" of Apostleship in the same way that the other gifts can be defined. We can easily conceive of someone exercising the gift of prophecy without being a prophet.<sup>186</sup>

Can we? On what basis does Mr. Deere make such a nonsensical statement? As we discuss elsewhere, such a statement regarding

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<sup>185</sup> Gordon Fee, *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Hendrickson, 1994), 34, n. 39, 192

<sup>186</sup> Deere, 242

the gift of prophecy has no biblical justification.<sup>187</sup> It would seem best to conclude that a NT Prophet possessed the NT gift of prophecy and that the Apostles as well possessed a gift of Apostleship.

Mr. Deere goes on:

Paul himself does not call apostleship a spiritual gift, either in I Corinthians 12 or in Ephesians 4:11. What I mean is that he never applies the term *charisma* to apostleship. . . . The first three items [listed in I Cor 12:28, apostles, prophets, and teachers] are not gifts but persons who represent ministries. . . the remaining items are gifts [healing, etc.].<sup>188</sup>

First of all, Mr. Deere ignores the context and meaning of 1 Corinthians 12 where Apostleship is listed, without clarification, along with several other spiritual gifts (12:28-29). Who would confidently deny that when Paul writes: "**in the church God has appointed first of all Apostles**" and then proceeds to list seven abilities that are referred to elsewhere in Scripture as spiritual gifts (e.g. Prophets and Teachers in Rom 12:6-7), that he did not include Apostleship among them? Likewise, the fact that Teachers, Pastors, Prophets, Evangelists, and Apostles are described as offices or ministries in Ephesians 4 does not change the fact that it was, and is, spiritual gifts that enable Christians to perform such ministries.

Secondly, Mr. Deere is wrong to imply that *charisma* ("a gift of grace") is the only Greek word Paul uses to refer to spiritual gifts. On the contrary, the Scriptures use several cognates of *charis* ("grace") to refer to spiritual gifts, including Apostleship. What else is Paul talking about in the following verses except his spiritual gift?:

**Through Him [Christ] and for His name's sake, we received grace [charin: "favor"] and Apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith.** (Rom 1:5)

**We have different gifts [charismata], according to the grace [charin] given us.** (Rom 12:6)

**For I am the least of the Apostles and do not even deserve to be called an Apostle, because I persecuted**

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<sup>187</sup> For further discussion on the erroneous attempt of modern *prophetism* to distinguish between the NT gift of prophecy and the NT ministry of a Prophet see section 9.4.B

<sup>188</sup> Deere, 242.

**the church of God. But by the grace [*chariti*] of God I am what I am, and His grace [*charis*] to me was not without effect.** (1 Cor 15:9-10)

**I became a servant of this Gospel by the gift [*dōrean*: "gift"] of God's grace [*charitos*] given me through the working of His power.** (Eph 3:7)

**When He [Christ] ascended on high, He led captives in His train and gave gifts [*edōken*] to men. . . . It was He who gave some to be Apostles** (Eph 4:8, 11).

Contrary to Mr. Deere then, it is apparent that even the Greek text reveals that Paul viewed Apostleship as a grace gift.

Finally, Mr. Deere suggests that the prediction of the Prophets Moses and Elijah <sup>189</sup> prophesying and working miracles during End Time events (cf. Rev 11:3-12) is biblical evidence that God could restore NT Apostles. We think most people would agree that using a biblical text that applies only *after* the Church Age, to support a doctrine *for* the Church Age, is a mark of desperation, not sound interpretation.

The biblical fact that Apostleship was a spiritual gift, coupled with the historical fact that it ceased in the early Church, is precisely the kind of evidence that *charismaticism* needs to suppress in order to make its claim that God has desired all the biblical spiritual gifts to continue. Because the most important of all spiritual gifts has ceased by God's own design and desire, is it not at least possible that all the other *Scripture* and *sign gifts* have ceased as well? In fact, elsewhere in *Knowing Our God*, we argue from both Scripture and history that it is more than a possibility, but a fact. <sup>190</sup> And a fact in line with over 1600 years of virtual universal testimony in the Church. Charles Hodge (1797–1878) reflected this ancient and united belief when he wrote:

[T]he fact that any office existed in the apostolic church is no evidence that it was intended to be permanent. In that age there was a plenitude of spiritual manifestations and

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<sup>189</sup> For arguments that the two witnesses in Revelation 11 are Moses and Elijah see section 10.5.A.3.

<sup>190</sup> For biblical and historical arguments that the *Scripture* and *sign gifts* have ceased see applicable sections in Books 9, 11, and 12. For arguments that 1 Corinthians 13:8-13 is specifically teaching the cessation of these gifts with the completion of the NT canon see chapter 8.6

endowments demanded for the organization and propagation of the church, which is no longer required. We have no longer prophets, nor workers of miracles, nor gifts of tongues.<sup>191</sup>

And he included Apostles in that list as well. More succinctly, Dr. MacArthur has written: "When the New Testament was completed, the office of Apostle ceased."<sup>192</sup>

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## ***Extras & Endnotes***

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### ***Gauging Your Grasp***

- 1) What are the problems with designating modern church leaders, planters, or missionaries as Apostles?
- 2) What did the regional leadership of the Church transition to after the Apostles? When did this occur? How did this occur?
- 3) What has God provided to replace the following functions of Apostles: 1) reception of New Covenant revelation, 2) spreading the Gospel, 3) church leadership.
- 4) How does *charismaticism* leave the door open for many to claim they are biblical Apostles? What is the danger of this?
- 5) What does the contents and nature of the Pastoral Epistles tell us about the transition of authority in the churches?
- 6) What do we claim was the unique purpose of the revelatory Apostles? When was this function completed? What would we have expected to happen at this time?
- 7) What is the significance of the fact that since the second century and for the subsequent 1600 years of Church history, the vast

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<sup>191</sup> Charles Hodge, *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1 Cor 12:28; online at [www.ccel.org](http://www.ccel.org).

<sup>192</sup> John MacArthur, *MacArthur's New Testament Commentary*, Electronic Edition STEP Files CD-ROM (Parsons Technology, 1997), 1 Cor 12:28.

majority opinion of the Church was that the gift of Apostleship had ceased and only rather heretical groups would claim such a gift?

- 8) What are arguments given against our claim that the gift of Apostleship has ceased? What are our answers? Do you agree or disagree and why?
- 9) What affect do we claim the cessation of Apostleship has on the question of whether other first century spiritual gifts have ceased? Do you agree or disagree and why?

### **Publications & Particulars**

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## Chapter 8.6

# The Biblical Cessation of *Scripture & Sign Gifts*

*A Closer Look at 1 Corinthians 13:8-13*

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## A) The Context of 1 Corinthians 13:8-15

### A.1) The Modern Context: *the charismatic debate*

Throughout the volume *Divine Revelation*, and the books contained here, we repeatedly encounter the claim of *charismaticism*<sup>193</sup> that miraculous gifts such as divine knowledge, prophecy, and tongues have been uniquely restored to them after their cessation some 1600 years ago.<sup>194</sup> In the context of this modern debate, the Apostle Paul's prediction that these gifts would cease is obviously important, and will therefore be thoroughly discussed here.

In helping the Corinthians value love more than miraculous gifts, the Apostle Paul wrote:

**(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 [teleion: "completion"] comes, the partial [ek meros: "in pieces"] will be done away.**

**(11) When I was a child, I used to speak as a child, think as a child, reason as 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 shall know fully just as I also have been fully known. (13) But now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love. (1 Cor 13:8-13 NASB)**

Paul's statement in verse 8 that the "**gifts of prophecy . . . will be done away . . . tongues . . . will cease . . . (and) knowledge . . . will be done away**" is obviously important to our study concerning the viability of these gifts today. It is clear that the Apostle said these gifts would cease.<sup>195</sup> The debate concerns when,

<sup>193</sup> Regarding a definition of *charismaticism* see endnote in chapter 8.2.

<sup>194</sup> For further on the historical cessation of these gifts see chapters 9.13; 11.7; and 12.13.

<sup>195</sup> The Apostle's clear statement that these gifts *would* cease, makes the following statement by the rightly respected D. M. Lloyd-Jones inexplicable. Lloyd-Jones concludes his summary of the cessation arguments with typical bluntness: "The Scriptures never anywhere say that these things were only temporary-never! There is no such statement

and the relative difficulty in interpreting the passage has given rise to a great deal of debate about it.<sup>196</sup>

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anywhere." (*Sovereign Spirit* [Harold Shaw, 1985], 33). On the contrary, the Apostle said: "**if there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease**" (1 Cor 13:8).

Likewise, the eminent Pentecostal NT scholar Gordon Fee seems to not give the Apostle much credit when he writes regarding this passage:

Related to the previous discussion is that of the cessation of the [gifts]. This question, of course, is related not to questions that concerned Paul [then why did he write about the timing of their cessation?], but to those raised by our own history of the church. But in a manner unrelated to the way the question has been raised in our time, Paul does speak to it. . . .

What does not seem possible to extract from this answer is that Paul expected the [gifts] to cease within his lifetime, or shortly thereafter. This particular "answer" to the issue is raised not on the basis of reading the biblical text, but from the greater concern as to their "legitimacy" today. But this is a hermeneutical question, pure and simple, and one that Paul could not have understood. (*God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul*, [Hendrickson, 1994], 893)

We had better be careful to assume what the Apostle "could not have understood."

Likewise, several NT scholars suggest that this passage has no bearing on the modern "charismatic" debate. For example, Anthony Thiselton claims regarding Paul's statement that "**if there are tongues, they will cease**," that this:

hardly addresses the debate between Reformed and neo-Pentecostalist writers about "tongues will cease" after the close of the canon or at a given stage of individual or historical maturity. . . . This issue must be determined on other grounds than exegetical discussions of this verse. . . . *These verses should not be used as a polemic for either side in this debate*" (*The First Epistle to the Corinthians* [Eerdmans, 2000], 1062, 1064).

This seems a little self-serving on the part of those who want to claim these gifts are operating today. On the contrary, Paul *is* addressing several issues regarding the modern "charismatic" movement because several of these issues were occurring in the Corinthian congregation.

<sup>196</sup> Bruce R. Compton, Professor of Biblical Languages and Exposition at the Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, has written an excellent exposition of 1 Corinthians 13:8-13 in the theological journal published by his seminary: "1 Corinthians 13:8-13 And The Cessation of Miraculous Gifts" *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 9 (2004): 97-144. If we had discovered it before essentially completing this chapter, we may have simply referred to Dr. Compton's article, and accordingly we have added his thoughts especially to the endnotes. Nonetheless, his thorough treatment of the

The key verse in the debate is verse 10 where the Apostle says these gifts will cease when “**the completed/perfect thing comes [to teleion].**” There are basically two different views of what “**the completed/perfect thing**” is and thus, when the gifts were, or

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subject at least confirmed that our own treatment is rather thorough as well.

are, to cease: <sup>197</sup> 1) When Christ returns and/or the Eternal State

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<sup>197</sup> Dr. Compton reflects the more complete *four* categories commonly given for this debate:

Allowing for minor differences, the views on the interpretation of “the perfect” in 1 Corinthians 13:10 may be catalogued under four headings. These are that “the perfect” refers to (1) the completed New Testament canon [*historicism*, see endnote 1]; (2) the return of Christ, with the miraculous gifts ceasing before then [“knowledge” view] (3) the spiritual maturity of the church [“maturity” view]; and (4) the return of Christ, with the miraculous gifts continuing until then [“continuationist” view]. (*Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 9 [2004], 99)

View 1, the traditional “historicist” argument, or what we prefer to call *historicism* (see endnote 1) is the one we argue for. View 4, the relatively recent “continuationist” view, is what we argue against. We call it recent because while there have been many Christian teachers throughout the history of the Church who thought the Apostle was speaking of Christ’s return in 1 Corinthians 13:8-13, they did not believe it offered support for the continuation of the miraculous gifts, because they universally believed that they had ceased. Which seems a bit of a contradiction to us.

View 2, which we will call the “knowledge” view, does not impress us either, even though it comes to the same conclusion as we do on the cessation of the gifts. Nonetheless, because of the number of respectable scholars who share it, we will allow Dr. Compton to describe it here:

Proponents of this view generally take all three gifts mentioned in 13:8, prophecy, tongues, and knowledge, as involving direct revelation from God. Similar to the [“maturity”] view, the expression “in part” in 13:9 refers to the knowledge gained from these gifts rather than to the gifts themselves. In contrast to the [“maturity”] view, however, it is the quality of knowledge, not simply the quantity of knowledge, that is being described. What the church is able to know of God from these gifts is not only fragmentary but temporary and indirect and, in that sense, partial and imperfect [in full agreement with the *historicist* view].

Accordingly, “the perfect” in 13:10 points to the return of Christ and specifically to the rapture of the church and the perfect knowledge that results when the church is in the presence of the Lord. Yet this does not mean that the gifts mentioned in 13:8 continue until that time. Since the contrast between the partial and the perfect in these verses refers to the kind of knowledge the church has rather than to the gifts themselves or even to the revelation they provide, the cessation of the gifts is not directly addressed.

Based on passages such as Ephesians 2:20, this view concludes that these gifts ceased with the completion of the New Testament canon. All that Paul is addressing in 1 Corinthians 13 is the replacing

of the church's partial and imperfect knowledge of God with full and perfect knowledge at the return of Christ. (102-103)

Samuel Waldron succinctly describes the "knowledge" view in his book, *To Be Continued?*:

The conclusion must be that Paul is teaching the doing away of partial knowledge in favor of perfect knowledge in verse ten. He says nothing about when the gifts of prophecy and tongues pass away. He only refers to the passing of the present partial knowledge that was conveyed through those gifts. He leaves open the question of the time of the passing of the gifts of prophecy and tongues. ([Calvary, 2005], 64)

Waldron's book is endorsed by R. Albert Mohler, President of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Tom Nettles, Professor of Theology at Southern Theological Seminary, and John MacArthur.

Dr. Compton lists the following scholars as supporting this view:

With minor variations, see Stanley D. Toussaint, "First Corinthians Thirteen and the Tongues Question," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 120 (October–December 1963): 311–16; Gaffin, *Perspectives on Pentecost*, pp. 109–12; idem., "A Historicist View," pp. 55–56; George W. Knight III, *Prophecy in the New Testament* (Presbyterian Heritage, 1988), pp. 21–22, n. 12; R. Fowler White, "Richard Gaffin and Wayne Grudem on 1 Cor 13:10: A Comparison of Historicist and Nonhistorical Argumentation," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 35 (June 1992): 173–81.

Gaffin equivocates on the meaning of "knowledge" in 13:8, uncertain whether it refers to the gift of knowledge or simply to the knowledge gained from the other two gifts. Commenting on 1 Cor 13:8, he says, "Prophecy and tongues are in view as *modes of revelation* related to the believer's present knowledge (whether or not 'knowledge' in verse 8 is an additional, third gift, parallel with prophecy and tongues)" (*Perspectives on Pentecost*, p. 110). White, on the other hand, takes "knowledge" in 1 Cor 13:8 as a reference to the gift of knowledge ("Richard Gaffin and Wayne Grudem on 1 Cor 13:10," p. 179).

Edgar follows the same basic line of argument as this view, but arrives at a different conclusion regarding when "the perfect" is attained. Based on Paul's use of the first person singular in 13:12b, "now I know in part, but then I shall know fully just as I also have been fully known," Edgar argues that "the perfect" in 13:10 refers to the full knowledge believers receive when they die rather than at the rapture of the church. See Edgar, *Miraculous Gifts*, pp. 333–44; idem, *Satisfied by the Promise of the Spirit*, pp. 243–46.

Again, these are fine scholars, but to suggest that "the cessation of the gifts is not directly addressed" by the Apostle in this passage is inconceivable to us. In addition, the Apostle's reference to "**knowledge**" in 13:8 is no doubt the *gift* of divine knowledge he mentions in 12:8, not just spiritual knowledge in general (for further on the gift of divine

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knowledge see section ?). For an extended and convincing refutation of the "knowledge" view of 1 Corinthians 13:8-13 see Dr. Compton, 128-31.

begins;<sup>198</sup> or 2) When the NT revelation was completed and made

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<sup>198</sup> Dr. Compton describes the view that the Apostle was predicting the miraculous gifts would continue until Christ's return:

Advocates differ about which of the three gifts Paul mentions in 13:8 involves direct revelation from God. Some identify prophecy alone, while others include tongues and/or knowledge. In any case, all agree that the revelation provided does not have the same authority as Scripture. These gifts are revelatory in the sense that the message communicated comes from the Spirit of God. Yet, unlike Scripture, the message once received by those so gifted is, in turn, communicated in merely human words, words which lack divine authority and which may be errant.

The three gifts in 13:8 are said to be "in part" because the message they communicate and the knowledge gained from this message . . . may not be . . . communicated accurately. Thus, "in part" signifies the ideas of that which is partial, as well as of that which is imperfect.

Similar to the previous view [the "knowledge" view described above], "the perfect" in 13:10 refers to the return of Christ and the full, clear, and complete picture of God the church will enjoy when it stands in Christ's presence. Unlike the ["knowledge"] view, however, the contrast between the partial and the perfect involves both the kind of knowledge the church has, as well as the mode of revelation on which this knowledge is based. Consequently, what is replaced when "the perfect" comes includes both the church's partial knowledge of God *and* the revelatory gifts which form the basis for that knowledge. (104)

As will be detailed in this chapter, we see several problems with this view. The most critical is the fundamental errors made in defining what the biblical gifts of divine knowledge, prophecy, and tongues were. *Charismaticism* waters down the biblical attributes of these gifts, gutting them of their truly miraculous nature, so that they can label the lesser counterfeits practiced today with these lofty biblical titles.

Wayne Grudem's redefining of the gift of prophecy is well known (see. ?), and accordingly he is representative of a "continuationist view when he states, "The allusion to the cessation of prophecy in 13:10 refers only to the Lord's return." (*The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today* [Crossway, 2000], 219)

However, it is not only "charismatic" teachers who espouse this view. Reformed theologian J. I. Packer is recorded on the back of Dr. Grudem's book as stating: "Careful, thorough, wise, and to my mind, convincing." Likewise, Vern S. Poythress, Professor of New Testament Interpretation at Westminster Theological Seminary writes: ". . . a fresh, biblically sound, readable contribution . . . its depth of scholarship, pastoral solidity, and cautions against abuses are special strengths. Highly recommended."

In addition, David Farnell lists the following as those supporting the view that the Apostle was predicting that the gifts he listed would continue until the return of Christ:

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F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, 127-28; Robertson and Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians*, 297; C. K. Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Harper & Row, 1968), 306; F. W. Grosheide, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Eerdmans, 1953), 309-10; Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Eerdmans, 1987), 644-46; H. Conzelmann, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, *Hermeneia* (Fortress, 1975), 226. ("Is the Gift of Prophecy for Today?" Parts 1-4, *Bibliotheca Sacra* 150 [April-June 1993], 193.

We would add Anthony Thiselton (cf. 1061), D. A. Carson (*Showing the Spirit* [Baker, 1987]), and John MacArthur to this list as well. However, these authors redefine gifts like prophecy as having something considerably less than their biblical attributes and authority.

Regarding Dr. MacArthur, Dr. Compton writes:

MacArthur can also be placed within this general category, except he identifies "the perfect" as referring to the eternal state rather than the return of Christ. Furthermore, for MacArthur, the canon is closed. Prophecy and knowledge, although continuing to the eternal state, are non-revelatory. Tongues, although revelatory, ceased with the close of the apostolic age, as did the other revelatory gifts. See John F. MacArthur, Jr., *The Charismatics: A Doctrinal Perspective* (Zondervan, 1978), pp. 163-67; *idem*, *1 Corinthians*, *MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Moody Press, 1984), pp. 358-67; *idem*, *Charismatic Chaos* (Zondervan, 1992), pp. 230-32.

However, we confess that Dr. MacArthur seems rather difficult to pin down on this topic. While Dr. Compton places him in the "continuationist" view, he is actually a *historicist*. But, as noted above, professors from his Masters Seminary surprisingly hold the "maturity" view. In addition, we have noted his support of Waldron's "knowledge" view above. To confuse matters more, on his website, *Grace to You*, he seems to support our *historicist* view:

The phrase, "that which is perfect," is in the neuter gender in the Greek, hence it could not refer to a person, e.g. the Lord Jesus. The word *perfect* means mature or complete. It was the completed Word which rendered the gifts of revelation and knowledge obsolete. Scripture becomes the sole test of the authenticity of a man's message, and confirming gifts of a miraculous nature are no longer necessary to validate a man or his message (1 Corinthians 13:8-12). (While we attest to seeing this on the website, we confess to not having the location)

Finally, we will note here Calvin's view. While he was certainly leery of claims to extra-biblical revelation or the miraculous gifts (cf. section ?), he did believe that the Apostle was referring to the end of the Church Age as to when the miraculous gifts listed would cease. Accordingly, he wrote in his commentary on 1 Corinthians 13:10:

sufficiently available.<sup>199</sup>

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But when will that perfection come? It begins, indeed, at death, for then we put off, along with the body, many infirmities; but it will not be completely manifested until the day of judgment . . . Hence we infer, that the whole of this discussion is ignorantly applied to the time that is intermediate [e.g. the completion of the NT canon]. (*Commentaries* at 1 Cor 13:10, online at [www.ccel.org](http://www.ccel.org))

Evidently, Calvin would question Jonathan Edwards' intelligence, because he "ignorantly applied" the Apostle's statement to the completion of the NT revelation. See quote at?

<sup>199</sup> Not surprisingly, there are several respected Bible scholars throughout Church history who have interpreted Paul as saying that the revelatory gifts would cease with the completion of the NT revelation. In this section (A.1) we will quote Jonathan Edwards (1704-1758) and in section A.3, Chrysostom (347-407).

W. E. Vine (1873-1949), the eminent Greek scholar, wrote in his commentary on 1 Corinthians:

With the completion of apostolic testimony and the completion of the Scriptures of truth ('the faith once for all delivered to the saints,' Jude 3, R.V.), 'that which is perfect' had come, and the temporary gifts were done away. For the Scriptures provided by the Spirit of God were 'perfect.' Nothing was to be added to them, nothing taken from them. ([Zondervan, 1965], 184).

About the same time, the popular commentary series of J. P. Lange seems to indicate that this was a prevailing view up through the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Regarding the *historicist* view, he writes that it was held, "by a large portion of the Protestant church." ([Zondervan, 1957], *in loc.*)

Dr. Farnell lists several more modern NT scholars advocating the traditional *historicist* view:

Evangelicals in this century have made full play of [B. B.] Warfield's paradigm, at times supporting his theological [and historical] proof with 1 Cor 13:8-10 and interpreting *to teleion* ("that which is perfect/complete") as the full canon. Cf. e.g. R. Gromacki, *The Modern Tongues Movement* (1967, 1972); R. B. Gaffin, Jr., *Perspectives on Pentecost* (1979); V. Budgen, *The Charismatics and the Word of God* (1983). Outside of evangelicalism one may find many scholars who link the cessation of direct revelation with the assembling of the NT canon, notably A. von Harnack, *History of Dogma* (Dover, 1961), 2.52-53.

W. G. Bellshaw in an article in Dallas Theological Seminary's *Bibliotheca Sacra* theological journal writes regarding the gift of tongues:

Since the New Testament was not complete, this gift was needed to validate the message which was being preached. After the canon of the Bible was completed, this gift was no longer necessary. Such is the explicit testimony of 1 Corinthians 13. . . . With the completion of the New Testament there no longer was a need for men to be used as

A third view held by some is that **"the completed/perfect thing"** that brings about the cessation of the gifts listed is the maturity of the Church.<sup>200</sup> However, this view claims that this

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instrumentalities to give forth God's authoritative message. This is now contained in the written Word. ("The Confusion of Tongues," *BSac* 120 [April-June 1963], 145-153)

Also, Dr. Compton lists others supporting our *historicist* view of 1 Corinthians 13:8-13:

With minor variations, see John F. Walvoord, *The Holy Spirit: A Comprehensive Study of the Person and Work of the Holy Spirit*, 3rd ed. (Zondervan, 1958), pp. 173-88; Merrill F. Unger, *New Testament Teaching on Tongues* (Kregel, 1971), pp. 92-101; idem, *The Baptism and Gifts of the Holy Spirit* (Moody Press, 1974), pp. 138-45; Robert L. Reymond, "What About Continuing Revelations and Miracles in the Presbyterian Church Today?" *A Study of the Doctrine of the Sufficiency of Scripture* (Presbyterian & Reformed, 1977), pp. 30-36; Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *The Charismatic Gift of Prophecy: A Reformed Response to Wayne Grudem*, 2nd ed. (Footstool, 1989), pp. 51-60; Myron J. Houghton, "A Reexamination of 1 Corinthians 13:8-13," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 153 (July-September 1996): 344-56.

Reymond argues that "the perfect" refers to the completed New Testament revelatory process rather than to the New Testament canon *per se* [as do we], but recognizes that the New Testament canon is a corollary of the completed revelatory process (p. 32).

Also, in the last endnote of this chapter we quote the highly respected Reformed scholar Sinclair B. Ferguson as expressing our view exactly.

<sup>200</sup> Dr. Compton mentions another view above, that the "completion" Paul speaks of refers to, "the spiritual maturity of the church." This is also a view with a great deal of support from rightly respected scholars, especially those coming from John MacArthur's Master's Seminary. Dr. Compton explains:

Advocates of the maturity view take prophecy, tongues, and knowledge in 13:8 in roughly the same way as the [*historicist*] view. Prophecy and knowledge involve direct revelation from God. Tongues, although functioning primarily as a sign gift, also entails direct revelation from God when combined with the gift of interpretation. These are said to be "in part" in 13:8 in the sense that the knowledge gained from these revelatory gifts is only a portion of what can be known of God. Just as the revelation provided by these gifts is partial, so too the knowledge gained from these gifts is partial as well. . . .

Furthermore, the extent of the church's knowledge goes hand in hand with the level of its maturity. Thus, to describe the church's knowledge as "in part" is, at the same time, to describe its level of maturity as partial or limited.

Consequently, "the perfect" in 13:10 refers to the state of the church where it has attained full maturity and has full knowledge of

God. All of this will take place, proponents argue, at the rapture of the church, when the church is taken from the earth to stand in the presence of the Lord.

Dr. Compton lists the following proponents of this view:

With minor variations, see Joseph Dillow, *Speaking in Tongues: Seven Crucial Questions* (Zondervan, 1975), pp. 119–33; Farnell, "When Will the Gift of Prophecy Cease?" pp. 171–202; Thomas, *Understanding Spiritual Gifts*, pp. 77–84, 123–32, 236–40, 259–62; Donald G. McDougall, "Cessationism in 1 Cor 13:8–12," *The Master's Seminary Journal* 14 (Fall 2003): 207–13.

Robert Thomas, Professor of New Testament at the Master's Seminary has been a primary proponent of the "maturity" view. Although Dr. Thomas argues for the "completion" definition of *to teleion* as we do, he concludes that it is referring to the maturity of the Church instead of the completion of the availability of the NT revelation. He gives a respectable explanation of his view in the book, *The Master's Perspective on Difficult Passages*, pp. 209–223.

Because proponents of this view are *historicists*, but think Paul has the idea of the *parousia* in mind throughout 1 Corinthians 13:8–13, they must, in our opinion, arbitrarily insert all of these things into the text. Notice the complexity and, again, in our opinion, the confusion that results with this view when Dr. Thomas concludes:

Returning to Paul's original emphasis in 1 Corinthians 13:8–13, therefore, it is proposed that Paul allowed for a threefold temporal graduation in this key paragraph:

- (1) the period of direct revelation and special authentication which is the childhood of the body of Christ.
- (2) the entire period of the body's earthly existence corresponding to the duration of the triplet faith-hope-love. Knowledge, prophecy and tongues occupied only a portion of this period, since the canon of New Testament books has been completed before the *parousia*. [But he does not believe this can be supported by this passage]
- (3) the period following the *parousia* when, insofar as the body of Christ is concerned, neither the gifts nor faith-hope will continue. ("Tongues . . . Will Cease," *JETS* 17:2 (Spring 1974) p. 89).

We confess there seems to be a contradiction here. While such a view usually agrees that the miraculous gifts have ceased, they interpret Paul here as saying they will continue until the full maturity of the Church which will not occur until the return of Christ.

Obviously, there are some things that our *historicalist* view has in common with the "maturity" view. Perhaps its greatest weakness, in addition to the fact it makes Paul a false prophet, is that it places too much emphasis on the Apostle's analogy of a child growing into adulthood (13:11), as if this is the controlling phrase in his whole argument. On the contrary, we see the parallel between the "completion" in verse 10 and the metaphorical "talking" like an adult in verse 11 to

maturity occurs at the return of Christ, and therefore, concludes essentially the same as the first view. While we will at times address this “maturity” view, it can still be suggested that there are two general views on when the Apostle believed these miraculous gifts would cease—at the return of Christ, or the completion of the reception and distribution of the NT revelation.

The first view is commonly known as the *continuationist* interpretation, based on the claim that these gifts of divine knowledge, prophecy, and tongues were to continue throughout the Church Age until Christ returned. The second view is commonly known as the *historicist* view, referring to the claim that these gifts were to cease with the completion and availability of the NT

refer to a better mode of communication/revelation, which would keep its meaning more in line with everything else in the passage.

There may be some merit to the “maturity” view if it can be seen as referring to the “completion” of the NT revelation. This is the view in the well known Jamieson, Faucett, and Brown commentary where we read:

A primary fulfillment of St. Paul’s statement took place when the Church attained its maturity; then ‘tongues’ entirely ‘ceased,’ and ‘prophesyings’ and ‘knowledge’ so far as they were supernatural gifts of the Spirit, were superceded as no longer required when the ordinary preaching of the Word, and the Scriptures of the New Testament collected together, had become established institutions. (*in loc.*)

Likewise, Dr. Compton notes:

Some define “the perfect” [as] . . . the spiritual maturity of the church, but limit Paul’s discussion in this passage to the church’s maturity reached at the completion of the New Testament canon. . . . See Robert G. Gromacki, *The Modern Tongues Movement*, rev. ed. (Presbyterian & Reformed, 1972), pp. 122–29; Walter J. Chantry, *Signs of the Apostles: Observations on Pentecostal-ism Old and New*, 2nd ed. (Banner of Truth, 1976), pp. 49–54. Gromacki appears to combine the two definitions of “the perfect” to include both the completed canon and the maturity of the church at the end of the apostolic era.

Nonetheless, we do not believe the maturity of the Church is the over-arching theme of 1 Cor 13:8-13. Secondly, even if it was, it would still need to be decided as to what this maturity referred to and when it was to occur. The most likely conclusion is that this “maturity” would only be completed with the return of Christ. Thus, this becomes essentially another view in support of “*to teleion*” referring to the return of Christ.

All in all, then, we believe the whole debate concerning the Apostle’s view of the timing of the cessation of the miraculous gifts can be simplified into two camps: 1) at the completion of the reception and distribution of NT revelation; or 2) the return of Christ.

revelation. We prefer to label this view *historicism*, because the gifts in question did indeed cease by the fourth century.<sup>201</sup> The *historicist* view of 1 Corinthians 13:8-13 can be summed up as follows:

**[v. 8]** The reception, understanding, and communication of new divine revelation is clearly the context of the passage. If the similar and unique nature and purpose of the three gifts that Paul chooses to discuss are kept in mind, the context and meaning of the passage is established. These three gifts served to communicate and authenticate the NT revelation in the first century. The fulfillment of their unique purpose and resulting cessation was specifically to complete the NT revelation of God, not to bring about the Eternal State. Essentially, Paul is communicating in this passage that the then current methods used by God to communicate and distribute divine revelation were inferior to a superior method that God was to transition to in the future, namely, the NT Scriptures.

**[vs. 9-10]** One theme of the passage is the impending *completion* of something that was *incomplete* when Paul wrote the Corinthians. Paul's contrast between *to teleion* and *ek merous* in verses 9-10 will not support the popular idea of a thing or person with heaven-like *perfection* replacing something that is *imperfect*. Therefore, the idea that Paul is speaking of the completion of the NT revelation would seem to be a more accurate understanding of his words, rather than the Eternal State.

This interpretation also recognizes the precedent that God had already set in the process He used in the implementation of the Old Covenant. God provided divine revelation to explain the covenant, that revelation was recorded, copied, and distributed, and the revelatory gifts ceased with the Prophet Malachi. We would expect God to follow the same process with the NT revelation that accompanied the implementation of the New Covenant, and suggest that these *Scripture* and *sign gifts* ceased with the recording and distribution of the NT.

In fact, rather universal agreement on Church history confirms this is precisely what happened in the fourth century.<sup>202</sup>

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<sup>201</sup> For a fuller explanation of what we call *historicism* see endnote 1 above. For further on the historical cessation of these gifts see chapters 9.13; 11.7; and 12.13.

<sup>202</sup> For documentation of the 4<sup>th</sup> century cessation of these gifts see chapters 9.13; 11.7; and 12.13.

Accordingly, if the Apostle was predicting the cessation of these revelatory gifts at Christ's return, then he would be a false prophet because Church history records their cessation much sooner.

[vs. 11-12] The incomplete and indirect nature of the revelation provided through these gifts is illustrated in three connected metaphors. Paul wrote this at a period of time when the implementation of the New Covenant was still in its "childhood." He also understood that in the introductory stage of the implementation of a covenant, miraculous gifts are given to provide and authenticate the revelation needed to implement the covenant. However, after that revelation is sufficiently available to implement the covenant, a more "mature" and written mode of revelation replaces the gifts and remains. Thus the Apostle's contrasting child/adult metaphor to reflect the "partial" vs. "completed" mode of revelation spoken of in verse 10.

Secondly, the indirect nature of the gifts, as opposed to possessing Scripture, is illustrated by seeing someone *indirectly* in a mirror as opposed to seeing someone *directly* "face to face." The Apostle means nothing literal here, and is only illustrating the indirect way that divine revelation would come to the individual Corinthian Christian through Apostles and Prophets.

Neither of these metaphors describe something imperfect becoming perfect. An adult's communication and reasoning skills are not perfect, nor is a human's visual perception, even by direct sight. This same theme of indirect/direct then needs to guide our interpretation of the Apostle's third metaphor of knowing something indirectly and "in part," and knowing someone in a fuller and more direct way because you know them personally. This is simply the contrast between how the Corinthians might have experienced Paul indirectly and "in part" from his letters, but in a fuller and more direct way when he visited them personally.

[v. 13] Love's superiority over the gifts is based on the fact that it endures longer than they do. Paul's addition of "faith" and "hope" with "love" also communicates their superiority over these gifts. The superiority that "faith" and "hope" have over these gifts is based on the same thing that love's superiority is based on: "faith" and "hope" also endure longer than these gifts. The whole triad of virtues were to last (*meno*) longer than these passing (*katargeo*) gifts.

To make the gifts equal to "faith" and "hope" in any way (e.g. all endure until Christ's return), makes these gifts equal to love in at least some way. This seriously weakens Paul's whole argument

and we have no reason to believe that these gifts were equal to the triad of virtues in any category, including their endurance. Knowing that faith, hope, and love will last until Christ's return, the Corinthians understood that these gifts would not. Also, the clear reason that love is greater than all of them is that it lasts into eternity, which even faith and hope will not.

The purpose of this chapter is to offer evidence for the *historicist* view of 1 Corinthians 13:8-13, "An interpretation that has enjoyed support over the years."<sup>203</sup>

Nevertheless, the *continuationist* view that Paul has the return of Christ or the Eternal State in mind for the cessation of tongues, prophecy, and divine knowledge, has become the most popular view held among even some of the most respectable scholars of the Church. As noted in the endnotes above, these include John Calvin (1509-1564), D. M. Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981), F. F. Bruce (1910-1990), C. K. Barrett, J. I. Packer, John MacArthur,<sup>204</sup> and Vern Poythress of Westminster Theological Seminary. As NT scholar Craig S. Keener notes:

Evidence from the context that 'the perfect' refers to the second coming, together with the impossibility that Paul could have expected the Corinthian Christians to think he meant the canon, has left few evangelical scholars who continue to use this text to support a [present] cessation of the gifts.<sup>205</sup>

Of course, "charismatic" authors hold this view. Jack Deere claims:

[No one] can produce a specific text of Scripture that says the apostolic office has ceased or would cease during the church

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<sup>203</sup> Compton, 98.

<sup>204</sup> The reason that Dr. MacArthur can claim both, that these gifts were to continue until the eternal state, but be a *historicist* claiming the miraculous gifts of the early Church have ceased, is because he defines the gifts of prophecy and knowledge in non-miraculous, and we would claim, unbiblical ways (cf. ?). As for tongues, he thinks a change in grammar concerning its cessation separates it from Paul's discussion, and actually reveals that the Apostle thought *it would* cease before the "completion" came (cf. section B.2.g).

<sup>205</sup> Craig S. Keener, *Gift and Giver: The Holy Spirit for Today* (Baker, 2001), 106.

age. All of these arguments are based on theological deductions, not on specific statements of Scripture.<sup>206</sup>

On the contrary, we argue elsewhere that the gift of divine knowledge which Paul says will cease in 1 Corinthians 13:8, is the same revelatory gift listed at 12:8, and was virtually synonymous with the Apostles' revelatory abilities.<sup>207</sup>

J. Rodman Williams, an early and foundational theologian of *charismaticism* wrote:

The attempt on the part of some to identify *to teleion* ("completion" 1 Cor 13:10) with the completion of the canon of Scripture hardly needs comment. Such an attempt-which actually is only a device to seek invalidation of the gifts as continuing in the church-is utterly futile.<sup>208</sup>

Dallas Willard, a popular proponent of seeking extra-biblical divine revelation, writes:

There is nothing in Scripture to indicate that the biblical [i.e. miraculous] modes of God's communication with humans have been superseded or abolished by either the presence of the church or the close of the scriptural canon . . . This is simply a fact.<sup>209</sup>

Likewise, Christopher Forbes, a recognized expert in the early Church's experience with the miraculous gifts states:

It goes virtually without saying in recent scholarship that the [*historicist*] view cannot be defended on exegetical grounds. . . . [The] language [of 1 Cor 13:8-13] is so strong as to rule out anything less than an eschatological interpretation.<sup>210</sup>

Likewise, the "charismatic" theologian Max Turner writes: "This [historicist] position is exegetically indefensible, and is not held in

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<sup>206</sup> Jack Deere, *Surprised by the Power of the Spirit* (Zondervan, 1993), 247.

<sup>207</sup> For arguments that the gift of divine knowledge was tied to the revelatory Apostles see chapter 8.2.

<sup>208</sup> J. Rodman Williams, "The Greater Gifts" in *Charismatic Experiences in History*, Cecil M. Robeck ed. (Hendrickson, 1985), 57.

<sup>209</sup> Dallas Willard, *Hearing God: Developing a Conversational Relationship with God* (Intervarsity, 1999), 103.

<sup>210</sup> Christopher Forbes, *Prophecy and Inspired Speech in Early Christianity And Its Hellenistic Environment* (J. C. B. Mohr, 1995), 86, 89.

serious New Testament scholarship.”<sup>211</sup> Even the Reformed theologian, Richard Gaffin, who believes the miraculous gifts have ceased, nonetheless writes:

The coming of ‘the perfect’ (v. 10) and the ‘then’ of the believer’s full knowledge (v. 12) no doubt refer to the time of Christ’s return. The view that they describe the point at which the New Testament canon is completed cannot be made credible exegetically.<sup>212</sup>

Finally, the venerable D. M. Lloyd-Jones said of the *historicists* view of 1 Corinthians 13:8-13: “Indeed, there is only one word to describe such a view, it is nonsense.”<sup>213</sup>

However, what the above authors call “futile,” against simple “fact,” “exegetically indefensible,” and “nonsense,” is the very view that one of the brightest minds in Church history put forth as the proper interpretation of the Apostle’s prediction. In a sermon series now entitled *Charity and Its Fruits*, Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) wrote what will suffice as a summary introduction to the view argued for in this chapter:

It is this miraculous gift [of divine knowledge] which the Apostle here says shall vanish away, together with the other miraculous gifts of which he speaks, such as prophecy, and the gift of tongues, etc. All these were extraordinary gifts bestowed for a season for the introduction and establishment of Christianity in the world, and when this their end was gained, they were all to fail and cease. . . .

These gifts are not fruits of the Spirit that were given to be continued to the church throughout all ages. They were continued in the church, or at least were granted from time to time, though not without some considerable intermissions, from the beginning of the world till the canon of the Scriptures was completed. . . .

[T]he first hundred years of the Christian era, or the first century, was the era of miracles [more correctly human miracle working]. But soon after that, the canon of Scripture being completed when the Apostle John had written the book

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<sup>211</sup> Max Turner, *The Holy Spirit and Spiritual Gifts* (Hendrickson, 1998), 294

<sup>212</sup> Robert Gaffin, *Perspectives on Pentecost: Studies in New Testament Teaching on the Gifts of the Holy Spirit* (Presbyterian & Reformed, 1979), 109.

<sup>213</sup> Lloyd-Jones, *Spirit*, 31-2.

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.

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<sup>214</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Charity and its Fruits*; online at [www.graphebooks.org/chanditfrjed.html](http://www.graphebooks.org/chanditfrjed.html), 158, 160, 161. More specifically, Edwards believed that there was a two-fold meaning to the Apostle's reference to "completion." One was the near future cessation of the miraculous gifts when the NT canon was completed, and the other was the further future cessation of even the non-miraculous gifts in Heaven. Edwards writes:

There is a twofold *imperfect*, and so a twofold *perfect* state of the Christian church. The church in its beginning, or in its first stage, before it was strongly established in the world, and settled in its New Testament state, and before the canon of Scripture was completed, was in an imperfect state — a state, as it were, of childhood, in comparison with what it was to be in its elder and later ages, when it should have reached its state of manhood, or of comparative earthly perfection. And so, again, this comparatively perfect church of Christ, so long as it remains in its militant state, that is, down to the end of time, will still be in an imperfect, and, as it were, in a childish state, in comparison with what it will be in its heavenly state, in which latter it is comparatively in its state of manhood or perfection.

And so there is a twofold failing of these miraculous gifts of the Spirit here mentioned. One was at the end of the first or infant age of the church, when the canon of Scripture was completed, and so there was to be no need of such gifts for the church in its latter ages, when it should have put away childish things, and come to a state of manhood before the end of the world, and when the Spirit of God should most gloriously be poured out and manifested in that love or charity, which is its greatest and everlasting fruit.

And the other will be, when all the common fruits of the Spirit cease with respect to particular persons at death, and with respect to the whole church at the end of the world, while charity shall still

Accordingly, those who believe they have rather easily and dogmatically dismissed the traditional *historicist* interpretation of 1 Corinthians 13:8-13 should heed the following:

Those who reject the possibility of establishing any argument [for *historicism*] from I Corinthians 13 on exegetical grounds should not be too quick to dismiss the principles produced by Edwards on that matter. There is a fundamental difference between ministering to a local church which possesses the whole Bible in writing [as was widely available by the fourth century], and by contrast, a pioneering situation in which the Scriptures have yet to be translated and published in the language of the people concerned [as existed when Paul wrote 1 Corinthians].

Edwards reasons well and powerfully when he contrasts the imperfect and infantile with the perfect and mature, supporting this further by a comparison of the present state with that which will be perfect in the consummate sense. Those who contemptuously dismiss Edwards with a wave of the hand tell us more about themselves than about Edwards!

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Therefore, while in many Christian circles the correct interpretation of 1 Corinthians 13:8-13 is not even debatable, we believe that the support of the *historicist* view by Edwards and other respected scholars,<sup>216</sup> suggests the issue is at least worth careful study. And we believe the arguments below will bear that out as well.

## **A.2) The Revelational Context:**

*Divine knowledge, prophecy, & tongues were miraculous gifts for receiving and authenticating new divine revelation with the authority of Scripture*

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remain in heaven, and there the Spirit of God shall be poured forth and manifested in perfect love in every heart to all eternity. (167)

Edwards' view is intriguing (as usual) in that it reflects the near/far, partial/full fulfillment typical of much of biblical prophecy, of which Paul's prediction is an example.

<sup>215</sup> Erroll Hulse, "The Charismatic Experience" online at [http://www.the-highway.com/charismatic1\\_Hulse.html](http://www.the-highway.com/charismatic1_Hulse.html)

<sup>216</sup> See endnote above for others who support a *historicist* view of 1 Corinthians 13:8-13.

The claim that the gifts of divine knowledge, prophecy, and tongues were to continue throughout the Church Age is a serious one. These gifts served the purpose of providing and authenticating new divine revelation that was to be believed and obeyed as the word of God. Accordingly, those claiming that the Apostle was referring to the return of Christ as the cessation point for these gifts are in danger of holding the rather heretical position that God is still providing Scripture-quality revelation.

This is why, of course, that many who advocate the *continuationist* interpretation of 1 Corinthians 13:8-13 are forced to redefine the gifts of divine knowledge, prophecy, and tongues into something less than miraculous abilities that produced and authenticated reliable divine revelation. But this is the weakest aspect of the whole *continuationist* argument. Scripture is crystal clear that these gifts operated in the NT age in a miraculous way to provide and authenticate new divine revelation that was to be believed and obeyed as Scripture itself, in the absence of Scripture.

This is why our *historicist* position is not fundamentally based on a particular interpretation of 1 Corinthians 13:8-13. As noted elsewhere, several scholars hold a *historicist* position concerning these gifts, but do not share a *historicist* interpretation of this passage.<sup>217</sup> Accordingly, the clearest evidence that *continuationism* is in error is the fact that the modern versions of the gifts of divine knowledge, prophecy, tongues, and miracle working do not match the biblical attributes of these gifts, and are therefore modern day counterfeits.<sup>218</sup>

We will not rehash the demonstration of this biblical fact here, as we have written whole chapters elsewhere to do so.<sup>219</sup> And if there is any doubt that these gifts are appropriately referred to as *Scripture* and *sign gifts*, then these chapters should be read and evaluated by the reader. However, if the three gifts listed by the Apostle in 1 Corinthians 13:8-13 did in fact provide and authenticate reliable new divine revelation, then the debate as to when the Apostle thought these gifts would cease is over. No one, who wants to be held as an orthodox Christian, will claim that God is still providing reliable new divine revelation today. Therefore, if it

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<sup>217</sup> This would include John MacArthur (see endnote 5 above), and those described in endnote 4 above.

<sup>218</sup> For further in-depth discussion of the biblical attributes of these gifts see the appropriate books in *Knowing Our God*.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid*

was agreed that this was the purpose of these gifts, then we would agree that the Apostle believed and taught that they would cease with the completion and availability of the NT revelation.

### **A.3) The Canonical Context:** *prophecy ceased with completion of OT revelation*

We are claiming that the Apostle's reference to the cessation of revelatory gifts, at the time of a "**completion** [*to teleion*]" (1 Cor 13:10), was referring to the completion of the reception, recognition, and distribution of the NT revelation. Our claim is given considerable support by the fact that this is precisely what occurred in relation to the OT revelation.

Elsewhere, we have noted the historical consensus among the Jews that after the Prophet Malachi, God did not provide His people with anymore such gifted men until John the Baptist and the dawn of NT revelation.<sup>220</sup> In other words, with the completion of the OT revelation, the biblical gift of prophecy, and all miraculous revelatory gifts ceased among God's people. Why then would we be so surprised that the same thing would occur in relation to the NT revelation?<sup>221</sup>

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<sup>220</sup> Regarding the cessation of the gift of prophecy after Malachi see section 9.13.B.

<sup>221</sup> Nonetheless, many have doubted the "canonical" context of 1 Corinthians 13:8-13. For example, Dr. Fee comments:

Others see "the perfect" [of 1 Cor. 13:10] as referring to the full revelation given in the NT itself, which when it would come to completion would do away with the "partial" forms of charismatic revelation. Given its classical exposition by B. B. Warfield, this view has been taken over in a variety of ways by contemporary Reformed and Dispensationalist theologies. It is an impossible view, of course, since Paul himself could not have articulated it. [Why not?] What neither Paul himself nor the Corinthians could have understood cannot possibly be the meaning of the text. (*The First Epistle to the Corinthians* [Eerdmans, 1987], 645, n. 23).

The characteristically clear and thorough Dr. Fee is neither here. To presume to know what Paul could or could not have known is unwise considering the revelatory gifts and experiences Paul had. Who has ever received more divine revelation than Paul? It would seem Dr. Fee carelessly assumes too much.

Dr. MacArthur's view would seem equally invalid: "Some Christians believe the perfect has already come in the completion of Scripture. But that idea would have been meaningless to the Corinthians" (1 Cor., 364). How does Dr. MacArthur know that? No doubt the Corinthians

It is important in order to properly understand Paul in 1 Corinthians 13:8-13 that he had a "canon consciousness" about divine revelation. He and the early Christians understood that the gift of prophecy operating under the Old Covenant had produced a limited, recognized, uniquely authoritative, and infinitely valuable set of "**God-breathed**" "**Scripture**" (2 Tim 3:16). Accordingly, the British NT scholar William Sanday (1843–1920) remarked:

The conception of a Canon, of an inspired volume, was first formed for the Old Testament, and only extended from it to the New. . . . It was not that any new . . . idea of Canonicity had to be constructed. The idea was already there, complete in all its parts.<sup>222</sup>

Likewise, his counterpart in America, B. B. Warfield (1851–1921) wrote:

The Christian church did not require to form for itself the idea of a "canon," -or, as we should more commonly call it, of a "Bible," -that is, of a collection of books given of God to be the authoritative rule of faith and practice. It inherited this idea from the Jewish church, along with the thing itself, the Jewish Scriptures, or the "Canon of the Old Testament."<sup>223</sup>

More recently, the noted Methodist theologian, William Abraham notes that in the early Church:

The idea of a list or canon of books was not alien to the early Christians; on the contrary, it is likely that the idea of canon played a very significant role in the development of the Christian tradition.<sup>224</sup>

Accordingly, our interpretation of 1 Corinthians 13:8-13 recognizes the precedent that God had already set in the process He used in the implementation of the Old Covenant. God provided

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understood more than many are willing to give them credit for. Knowledge of the OT precedent would have been available to them. Unfortunately, neither Dr. Fee nor the others who espouse this criticism demonstrate why a "canon consciousness" would have been foreign to Paul's or the Corinthian's thinking.

<sup>222</sup> William Sanday, *Inspiration* (Green & Co., 1903), 70-1.

<sup>223</sup> B. B. Warfield, "The Formation Of The Canon Of The New Testament", *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield*, Vol. 1 (Baker, 2000).

<sup>224</sup> William J. Abraham, *Canon and Criterion in Christian Theology: From the Fathers to Feminism* (Clarendon Press, 1998), 32.

divine revelation to explain the covenant, that revelation was recorded, copied and distributed, and the revelatory gifts ceased with the Prophet Malachi. We would expect God to follow the same process with the NT revelation that accompanied the implementation of the New Covenant, and suggest that these *Scripture* and *Sign* gifts ceased with the recording and distribution of the NT.

It is important to remember the revelatory state of things in Corinth when the Apostle wrote 1 Corinthians c. 51 A.D. There was no written record to the revelation needed to implement the New Covenant. This letter was written relatively early in the process of New Covenant revelation. Accordingly, it would be approximately 40 years later that the Apostle John would record the last part of this revelation. Then it would take at least another 200 years for this complete NT revelation to be copied, recognized, and sufficiently distributed.

The Apostle knew from OT precedent that God's standard operating procedure was to initiate and implement a covenant through supernaturally taught and authenticated messengers, and then to have that message recorded, copied, and distributed so that such supernatural messengers were no longer necessary. This is precisely what he is describing in 1 Corinthians 13:8-13, as also evidenced by his last instructions to Timothy to preach, preserve, and pass on the NT revelation already given, not to expect more divine revelation.<sup>225</sup>

The Apostle not only seemed to claim that revelatory gifts such as a divine knowledge and prophecy would cease with the completed production and authentication of Scripture, but that these temporary modes of revelation were inferior to the means that the Holy Spirit uses now through the written word of God (cf. 1 Cor 13:8-12). Scripture producing and confirming gifts were "**partial**" (v. 9), only allowing the people of God to "**see (as if) in a mirror dimly**" (v. 12) and not providing the full revelation that we have in Scripture.

When such gifts operated among God's people, they could only receive revelation from God if they possessed these unique gifts themselves, or were in the presence of someone who did. Now, however, the direct revelation of God is available to all Christians at any time and in any place because we possess something better than those temporary methods of revelation: the written word of God. Indeed, not all methods of divine revelation are to continue

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<sup>225</sup> For further evidence of the cessation of miraculous gifts in the NT see chapter 11.7.

their use indefinitely, and Scripture is the intended goal, traditional terminator, and crowning method of all other methods of divine communication.

Along these lines we have written elsewhere:

In general, *miraculous means of communication cease when a method of revelation that God deems superior is implemented*. This is clearly illustrated in the ministry of the King when we notice the conspicuous absence of people seeing angels or visions or other means of *miraculous communication* during His ministry on Earth. This principle can also be demonstrated by the fact that in biblical history, when the Prophets arrived (e. g. Samuel), theophanies ceased. Likewise, when either the OT or NT revelation was complete and available, gifts of miraculous communication such as prophecy and divine knowledge ceased as well.<sup>226</sup> This is because Scripture is deemed by God as a superior revelation.<sup>227</sup>

Along the same lines, as we have written at length elsewhere, the end goal of virtually all *personal divine revelation*, including the miraculous kind, is covenant making. And God's plan has been for such covenant revelation to be completed and recorded in Scripture, upon which other methods of divine revelation virtually cease. Accordingly, we have written elsewhere:

[T]he cessation of Apostles, Prophets, and miracle workers was the universal testimony and conviction of the Christian Church for over 1600 years, reflecting God's own withdrawal of them. What else would we expect when there has been no new covenant implemented?

We would expect such unique things to happen at the *beginning* of the implementation of a new covenant between God and man. Indeed, there were "fireworks" over Mt. Sinai at the implementation of the Old Covenant (Exod. 19), a special manifestation of God Himself to all the people, but such manifestations did not indefinitely continue for the Israelites, and eventually only the OT Scriptures remained.

Likewise, there were "fireworks" at the very beginning of the implementation of the New Covenant in which God

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<sup>226</sup> For a history of the cessation of the gift of divine knowledge see chapter 8.5. For the cessation of prophecy see chapter 9.13.

<sup>227</sup> For further discussion of our claim that Scripture is a superior means of revelation to the means of *miraculous communication* see chapter 7.8.D.

uniquely revealed Himself. But like the experience of those who entered the Old Covenant, the initial “fireworks” were not to continue, but rather God has granted other “signs” of His continuing commitment such as the new birth, the fruits of the Holy Spirit, and the NT Scriptures.<sup>228</sup>

Accordingly, the reason these miraculous gifts ceased twice in the history of God’s people, was that both times were a completion stage of the reception and authentication of biblical revelation, which is the very purpose of these miraculous revelatory gifts. We have clearly demonstrated these purposes regarding the gifts of divine knowledge, prophecy, and tongues elsewhere.<sup>229</sup>

Therefore, if God’s purpose for these gifts was the reception and authentication of new divine revelation that was to be recorded, copied, and distributed to exercise authority over all of God’s people, then we must interpret the Apostle in the context of this very thing. These gifts were not designed to bring about the second coming of Christ and have no reason to continue until then. Their purpose was producing both the OT and NT and when they did, they ceased.<sup>230</sup>

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<sup>228</sup> Excerpt from 10.7.C For further discussion of the relationship between divine/human covenants and the cessation of the *Scripture gifts* see sections 7.3.C and 10.7.C.

<sup>229</sup> We have clearly demonstrated these purposes regarding the gifts of divine knowledge, prophecy, and tongues elsewhere. See applicable parts of the Books devoted to them.

<sup>230</sup> On the “canonical” context of 1 Corinthians 13:8-13 Dr. Compton writes:  
[T]here are several references in the Jewish literature of the intertestamental period and the first century that speak of the closing of the Old Testament canon as a self-contained body of direct revelation from God. This literature refers to the Old Testament as the product of prophetic revelation. Those writing note that true prophecy had ceased, and that God was not adding to what He had already revealed through His Prophets. They say this in spite of the fact that Jewish literature flourished throughout this period. Furthermore, these same writers also note that God had promised in the future to revive once again the voice of prophecy, but that He had not yet done so.

In other words, these Jewish authors recognized that God had authored an authoritative body of revelation, that this body was a self-contained identifiable entity, and that this body of revelation had been closed in the sense that nothing further was being added to it. That being the case, there is no reason why believers in the first century would have struggled with the concept of a biblical canon as

#### **A.4) The Historical Context:** *Paul's prophecy was fulfilled in the fourth century*

The genre, so to speak, of this passage is prophecy. The Apostle is making a prediction of something that will occur in the future based on divine revelation he had received from God. It is not always clear what event a biblical prophecy is referring to, until, in hindsight, we can confidently recognize its fulfillment (cf. 1 Pet 1:10-11). In fact, it is possible, like other biblical Prophets, that the Apostle did not know what event he was referring to, but was simply communicating the prophecy in the language God had revealed to him. However, even Paul knew the purpose of the gifts he lists were revelatory in nature and it would seem he would know the completion of the NT revelation was in mind.

Nevertheless, the question to ask regarding the meaning of a biblical prophecy is this: Has there been a historical event that

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an identifiable body of direct revelation given by God or with the concept of a completed canon.

Furthermore, the New Testament authors also speak of this revelation as an identifiable, self-contained entity, referred to as "the faith" or as "the traditions" which the Apostles and others were handing down to the church. Lastly, they also speak of this revelation metaphorically as a foundation upon which the church would be built. The very concept of a foundation lends itself to the ideas of a fixed body of revelation and one that, once established, would have no more additions (e.g., 1 Cor 11:2; 2 Thess 2:15; Jude 3).

Jude exhorts his readers to "contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints." For a defense that Jude is referring to an objective body of truth representing the apostolic teachings or traditions handed down to believers, see the discussion in Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, New American Commentary (Broadman & Holman, 2003), pp. 435-36.

All of this forcefully argues that Paul and his audience would have been familiar with the concept of "the perfect" as referring to a completed body of revelation for the church.

Interestingly enough, those who deny that Paul could have understood the concept of a completed canon in 1 Cor 13:10 often see a reference to the canon in Paul's discussion of the foundation in Eph 2:20. Compare, for example, Wallace's discussion on 1 Cor 13:10, denying that Paul could have understood the concept of a completed canon, with his comments on Eph 2:20, where he associates the "foundation" with the NT (*Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, pp. 284-86, 295, n. 6). (Compton, 125-6)

would reasonably suffice to fulfill the prediction? Concerning Paul's prophecy of the cessation of the gifts of divine knowledge, prophecy, and tongues, the answer is a clear, well-documented, and virtually universally agreed upon "Yes."

Historically speaking, these gifts did cease in the early history of the Church, just at the time that the NT revelation had been widely canonized and distributed, as we have thoroughly documented elsewhere.<sup>231</sup> For example, regarding the cessation of the gift of tongues, Augustine (354-430), the preeminent leader of the Western Church in the fourth century wrote:

In the earliest time, "the Holy Ghost fell upon them that believed; and they spoke with tongues," which they had not learned, "as the Spirit gave them utterance." These were the Sign adapted to the time. For it was appropriate to have evidence of the Holy Spirit in all tongues, to show that the Gospel of God was to run through all tongues over the whole earth. That thing was done for a sign, and it passed away.<sup>232</sup>

Likewise, Bishop Chrysostom (c. 347-407), a preeminent leader of the Eastern Church at the time, wrote in the context of teaching on the gifts discussed in 1 Corinthians 12-14:

This whole place 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.<sup>233</sup>

Elsewhere, Chrysostom viewed the historical cessation of these gifts *in his day* as a fulfillment of the Apostle Paul's prophecy, not the future return of Christ. He taught:

Now then after [Paul] in every way had shown her [the Church] to be very exceedingly great, he does so again from another most important head, by a fresh comparison exalting her dignity, and saying; "but whether there be prophecies,

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<sup>231</sup> Historically speaking, these gifts did cease in the early history of the Church, just at the time that the NT revelation had been widely canonized and distributed, as we have thoroughly documented elsewhere. See esp. section 11.7.D.

<sup>232</sup> Augustine, *Ten Homilies on the First Epistle of John*, Vol. VII of *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Philip Schaff, (The Christian Literature Co., 1888), VI. 10; Underlining added for emphasis.

<sup>233</sup> John Chrysostom, *Homily on 1 Corinthians*, 29; online at [www.ccel.org](http://www.ccel.org).

they shall be done away; whether there be tongues, they shall cease."

For if both these [gifts of prophecy and tongues] were brought in for the sake of the faith; when that is every where sown abroad, the use of these is henceforth superfluous. . . . It is no marvel that prophecies and tongues should be done away.<sup>234</sup>

Augustine and Chrysostom were not some fringe, obscure Church leaders, but knowledgeable of, and respected by, vast regions of the Church in their day. And it wasn't because they wanted these miraculous gifts to pass away that they wrote such things, but they were simply reporting the facts about 1600 years ago. And throughout that 1600 years, the Church universally

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<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.2. One commentator has noted:

Some modern writers have indicated that it is only since the modern charismatic movement started around the turn of the twentieth century that men began to hedge on the meaning of the word "teleion" in I Cor. 13:8, and sought for some other meaning other than the perfect state of the believer in heaven. . . . It is of interest then to note that none other than Chrysostom who died around the turn of the fifth century, did not believe that teleion meant the perfect state. He understood the "future tenses here" to refer to a time when faith having spread abroad, these special gifts would then be no longer necessary. (ref. unavailable)

In light of the authority and influence that Chrysostom exercised in the early Church, Gary Shogren is at best exaggerating when he claims: "The consensus understanding of the Early Church Fathers on 1 Cor 13:8-12 was that "prophecy will continue in all the Church until the end" ("Christian Prophecy and Canon in the Second Century: A Response to B B Warfield" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* (40:D 1997), 609-626). Likewise, C. Forbes comments that this view "was also the view held by the Patristic writers who discuss the passage" and he erroneously includes Chrysostom.

Nonetheless, Dr. Forbes writes:

See, for example, the anonymous writer against Montanism quoted with approval in Eusebius, H.E. 5.17: "the Apostle grants that the prophetic gift shall be in all the church until the final coming." See also Irenaeus, [*Against Heresies*] 2,28,7, 5.7.2 - 5.8.1, Clement of Alexandria, *Quis dives salvetur*, 38; Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 6.20; *de Oratione*, 25.2; and Tertullian, *de Patientia*, 12.10; and *Adversus Marcion*, 5.15.6. (86)

One characteristic of these authors is that they wrote *before* the gifts had ceased in the fourth century with the wide spread distribution of the written NT revelation. One wonders if their interpretation would have resembled Chrysostom's more if they had written in his day.

considered claims that those gifts had been restored, to be fanatical and on the fringe of orthodox Christianity.<sup>235</sup>

Here, then, is the importance of understanding that the Apostle was revealing a prophetic prediction here. If he was referring to the completion of the reception, canonization, and distribution of the NT revelation, then we can continue to regard the Apostle as a true Prophet of God, because historically his prediction came true.

On the other hand, if the Apostle was predicting the continuation of the gifts of tongues, prophecy, and divine knowledge until the return of Christ, *then he was a false prophet*, because his prediction did not come true. This is a difficulty that is rarely, if ever dealt with by those who want to interpret the Apostle as predicting the cessation of these gifts at the return of Christ.

#### **A.5) The Corinthian Context:** *virtues more valuable & enduring than revelatory gifts*

As we have argued elsewhere, Paul's purpose throughout 1 Corinthians 12-14 is to help the tongues hungry Corinthians to put this gift in perspective.<sup>236</sup> Specifically in chapter 13 he is arguing that the virtue of love is more important than the miraculous gifts. Accordingly, the Apostle writes:

**If I speak** [with the gift of] **tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.** <sup>2</sup> **If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a** [gift of miraculous] **faith** [cf. 12:9<sup>237</sup>] **that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.** <sup>3</sup> **If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the**

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<sup>235</sup> And throughout that 1600 years, the Church universally considered claims that those gifts had been restored, to be fanatical and on the fringe of orthodox Christianity.

<sup>236</sup> As we have argued elsewhere, Paul's purpose throughout 1 Corinthians 12-14 is to help the tongues hungry Corinthians to put this gift in perspective. See chapters 12.6-12.

<sup>237</sup> For further discussion of the gift of miracle faith which the Apostle is referring to here see chapters 11.4-5.

**flames,** <sup>238</sup> **but have not love, I gain nothing.** (1 Cor 13:1-3)

Even the most miraculous gifts are worthless, and even harmful, if not exercised with love.

In order to further argue that love is superior to even these miraculous gifts, he then argues that, while love will endure forever, these miraculous gifts will cease. Accordingly, he writes: "**Love never fails** [*piptei*: literally "fall" meaning collapsing <sup>239</sup>]; **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.** (1 Cor 13:8 NASB). The Apostle says that love will never cease, but these miraculous gifts will.

In fact, as we will argue below, the Apostle makes the virtues of faith and hope equal to love in the sense that, "**now** [in the Church Age] **these three remain** [*menei*: endure]: **faith, hope and love**" (v. 13). Accordingly, even "**faith**" and "**hope**" are superior to these miraculous gifts because they will "**remain**," but the gifts listed will cease.

The fact that the whole point of Paul's argument here is to stress the temporary nature of these gifts of divine revelation, and the fact that he attaches *menei* (endurance, continuance) to faith, hope, and love, makes it clear that *he is arguing that the triad of virtues is greater than the triad of gifts simply because they last longer*. The fact that Paul compares the temporary nature of these gifts with the more enduring nature of faith, hope and love is intended to strengthen his argument regarding the inferior value of these gifts, especially tongues, compared to these virtues.

Accordingly, *those who would claim that these gifts were to endure as long as faith and hope (i.e. the return of Christ), make these gifts in some way equal to love which now accompanies faith and hope*. This is a conclusion which is completely contrary to everything Paul is saying here. He wanted the Corinthians to understand that the virtues of faith, hope, and love were superior to the gifts of divine knowledge, prophecy, and especially tongues,

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<sup>238</sup> We believe the Apostle is also referring to miraculous gifts here, which could be referred to as voluntary poverty and martyrdom. Certainly the descriptions of Christians singing and praying while being burned at the stake suggest a supernatural gift of God's grace. For further discussion on the gift of martyrdom see section 10.5.A.5.

<sup>239</sup> Dr. Thiselton notes: "The established reading *piptei* means *falls to the ground* in a literal and metaphorical sense, often with the added force of *collapsing* or falling apart (*BAGD*, 659-60) (1060-61).

because the virtues will “**remain**,” until the Lord’s return (cf. Rom. 8:24-25, 2 Cor. 4:18, 5:7, Heb. 11:1), but the gifts will “**cease**” before that.

Now that we have covered several important contexts for understanding the issues addressed in 1 Corinthians 13:8-13, we are ready to take a closer look at the text and meaning of each verse.

## B) Interpretation of Verse 8

In light of the difficulties presented in correctly interpreting this text, it would seem helpful to provide an “expanded,” although accurate translation of it. Provided below are three different renderings of each portion of this passage. The first is simply the NASB translation by itself. It is suggested that one refers to this in order to follow the flow of argument that Paul presents here. Secondly, the NASB translation is provided with transliterated Greek words where it is thought helpful. Finally, in bold text, is an expanded translation which reflects both the flow of argument and the definitions of the Greek words in the passage.

Notes for justifying the expanded translation will follow it. Then the impact that the verse has on deciding which of the two major views reflects Paul’s intention best will be presented. Some of the discussion will be quite detailed and it will become readily apparent why its meaning is relatively difficult to discern. But the implications of its proper interpretation are important, not to mention it is the word of God. So it would seem worth the effort to understand it.

### B.1) Text & Translation

**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.** (1 Cor 13:8 NASB)

**Love never fails** [*oudepote piptei*]; **but if** [*eite*] **there are gifts** [supplied by NASB] **of prophecy** [*propheteia*], **they will be done away** [*katargeo*], **if there are tongues** [*glossais*], **they will cease** [*pausontai*]; **if there is knowledge, it will be done away** [*katargeo*].

**Love lasts forever [a]. But unlike love, wherever [b] God has provided [c] the temporary method of receiving the NT revelation through the gift of prophecy [d], that method of divine revelation will be abolished [e]. Wherever God has provided the temporary method of authenticating the NT revelation, particularly to the Jews, through the gift of miraculously speaking in foreign languages [f], that method of divine authentication will cease to function [g]. Wherever God has provided the temporary method of receiving and communicating the NT revelation through the gift of divine knowledge [h], that method of divine revelation will also be abolished.**

- [a] **lasts forever** (*oudepote piptei*): The Greek literally means “never falls.” The same Greek word is used in Luke 16:17 to refer to the Law that Christ said will never pass away. This translation is reflected best in the NLT, RSV, NEB, JB, TEV, NCV.
- [b] **wherever** (*eite*): The Greek is rendered “if” in the NASB. It is important to notice why Paul says “**if there are prophecies.**” The most obvious reason is that although these gifts were operating in some churches, they were not present in all churches and at all times.<sup>240</sup>
- [c] **God has provided**: Reflects the idea of “*gifts*” as supplied in the NASB, NIV, JB, and NCV, although it is not in the original Greek text. However, the insertion is appropriate because prophecy, tongues, and knowledge have all been described by Paul as spiritual gifts (*charismata*) that God had provided to the body of Christ. (cf. 1 Cor 12:4, 31)
- [d] **temporary method of receiving the NT revelation**: Paul is clearly referring to the NT gift of prophecy and its description here reflects the definition established elsewhere in *KOG*.<sup>241</sup> Accordingly, in Ephesians Paul clearly describes the NT gift of prophecy as a means of biblical revelation equal in authority to apostleship when he writes that “**God’s household [is] built**

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<sup>240</sup> For arguments against the *prophetist* idea that the gift of prophecy was rather common in the early Church see section 9.4.B.

<sup>241</sup> For a biblical definition of the gift of prophecy see section 9.1.B.

**on the [revelatory] foundation of the Apostles and [NT <sup>242</sup>] Prophets, with Christ Jesus Himself as the chief cornerstone”** (Eph 2:19-20).

Likewise, he describes the NT gift of prophecy as having the purpose of receiving the NT revelation along with Apostles when he writes:

**Surely you have heard about the administration of God’s grace [gift of Apostleship/divine knowledge] that was given to me for you, <sup>3</sup> that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. <sup>4</sup> In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the [NT revelation of the] mystery of Christ, <sup>5</sup> which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God’s holy Apostles and [NT] Prophets.**

Paul described the NT gift of prophecy as an instrument of Scripture-quality revelation, like the gift of apostleship. Therefore, it was a temporary gift in the same way, for the same reason, and at the same time as the gift of apostleship. Accordingly, like the gift of apostleship, the gift of prophecy was understood by Paul to be a **temporary method of receiving the NT revelation.**

[e] **abolished** (*katargēthēsontai*): The word is from the root word *katargeō*. The NASB variously interprets it: abolish, bring to an end, do away, nullify, remove, render powerless. Paul uses it again at the end of verse 8 for “knowledge” as well. This is a strong word in the Greek, suggesting something that will be intentionally obliterated.

[f] **the temporary method of authenticating the NT revelation, particularly to the Jews, through the gift of miraculously speaking in foreign languages** (*glossais*): Paul is referring to the *sign gift* of tongues and the translation reflects how the authentic gift was described in Acts 2:5-12 and 1 Corinthians 14:22, “**Tongues are a [miraculous] sign, not for believers, but for unbelievers.**” For further biblical and historical arguments for the fact that the purpose of the gift of

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<sup>242</sup> The claim that Paul is referring to Christian NT Prophets in Ephesians 2:20 is supported by the fact that he is certainly referring to them at 3:5 and 4:11. For further discussion see section 9.6.C.1.

tongues was to be a miraculous authentication of new divine revelation see elsewhere.<sup>243</sup>

[g] **cease to function** (*pausontai*): The word literally means to “stop, cease.” The word is not significantly different than *katargeo* used to describe the cessation of prophecy and knowledge.<sup>244</sup>

<sup>243</sup> For further biblical and historical arguments for the fact that the purpose of the gift of tongues was to be a miraculous authentication of new divine revelation see section 12.3.B.

<sup>244</sup> Some see a significant difference between Paul’s use of *katargeō* to describe the cessation of prophecy and knowledge, but *pausontai* for tongues. Dr. Compton lists the following:

Toussaint, “First Corinthians Thirteen and the Tongues Question,” pp. 314–15; Gromacki, *The Modern Tongues Movement*, pp. 128–29; MacArthur, *The Charismatics*, p. 165; idem, *1 Corinthians*, p. 359; idem, *Charismatic Chaos*, pp. 230–31; Edgar, *Miraculous Gifts*, pp. 336–37; Thomas, *Understanding Spiritual Gifts*, p. 78. For a recent defense, distinguishing between the meaning of the two verbs on grammatical and lexical grounds without embracing the same conclusions, see McDougall, “Cessationism in 1 Cor 13:8–12,” pp. 195–200. On the use of the verbs as synonyms, see Ceslaus Spicq, *Agape in the New Testament*, 2 vols., trans. Marie A. McNamara and Mary H. Richter (St. Louis: Herder, 1965), 2:160–61.

For example, Dr. MacArthur claims that Paul’s switch to this verb indicates that the gift of tongues would stop *before* the gifts of prophecy and divine knowledge (*1 Cor.*, 359). He primarily bases his claim on the fact that the verb here is in the middle voice indicating that the cause of its ceasing comes from within and of itself. This is compared then to *katargeo* which Paul uses to describe the cessation of prophecy and knowledge, and which, it is claimed, indicates the source of their ceasing is from an outside force.

The point in all this is to justify Dr. MacArthur’s claim that the gift of tongues ceased of itself in the first century, while the gifts of prophecy and divine knowledge are operating today until Christ stops them with His return (cf. Stanley Toussaint, “First Corinthians Thirteen and the Tongues Question” in *Bsac*, Vol. 120, Oct-Dec. 1963, 311-16).

First, such an interpretation completely ignores the biblical definitions of the gifts of divine knowledge and prophecy. These Scripture producing gifts are no longer needed, nor operating today. Secondly, Dr. MacArthur’s view completely ignores the historical fact that the gift of tongues and prophecy *did* cease at relatively the same time in the fourth century or before, with the completion of the reception and distribution of the NT revelation.

Thirdly, this interpretation would also seem to be reading far too much into the often debatable effect that the middle voice has on a Greek verb. Dr. Fee explains, “The change in verbs is purely rhetorical; to make it

[h] **the temporary method of receiving and communicating the NT revelation through the gift of divine knowledge:**

The context is spiritual gifts and clearly what Paul is referring to is the supernatural gift of divine knowledge that he speaks of earlier in 12:8 and 13:2, and has been discussed and biblically defined elsewhere.<sup>245</sup>

**B.2) Interpretation: *Why these gifts?***

The question must be asked and answered as to why Paul singles out the revelatory gifts of prophecy, divine knowledge, and tongues as the subject of this passage? Why didn't he include the gift of teaching or serving, or leadership, if in fact he had in mind gifts that were going to last until Christ's return?

Some have claimed that Paul's choice of what gifts to include in this passage are not significant or that the reasons are *unrelated*.

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otherwise is to elevate to significance something in which Paul shows no interest at all" (1 Cor., 644, n. 17).

More specifically, Dr. Carson comments:

This view [MacArthur's] assumes without warrant that the switch to this verb is more than a stylistic variation. Worse, it interprets the middle voice irresponsibly. In Hellenistic Greek, the middle voice affects the meaning of the verb in a variety of ways . . . the middle *form* may be used while the active *force* is preserved . . . In the New Testament, this verb [*pauo*] prefers the middle; but that does not mean the subject "stops" under its own power. For instance, when Jesus rebukes the wind and raging waters, the storm *stops* (same verb, middle voice in Luke 8:24)—and certainly not under its own power. (*Spirit*, 66-67, italics in the original).

Likewise, in *Exegetical Fallacies*, 2nd ed. (Baker, 1996), Dr. Carson states:

When we examine the use of the verb (*pauo*) in the New Testament, we discover that it regularly appears in middle form. In the active voice, its lexical meaning is 'to stop, to cause to stop, to relieve'; in the middle, either 'to stop oneself' (reflexive usage), or 'to cease' (i.e., it becomes equivalent to a deponent with intransitive force). It never unambiguously bears the meaning 'to cease of itself' (i.e., because of something intrinsic in the nature of the subject). (77)

<sup>245</sup> The context is spiritual gifts and clearly what Paul is referring to is the supernatural gift of divine knowledge that he speaks of earlier in 12:8 and 13:2, and has been discussed and biblically defined in chapter 8.2

<sup>246</sup> Others suggest they had particular relevance to the issues in the Corinthian congregation. Indeed, if Paul had only chosen tongues and prophecy to discuss here, then this would be a legitimate claim. However, the Apostle's inclusion of the gift of divine knowledge possessed by the Apostles for the reception of divine revelation, broadens the scope of Paul's discussion beyond the Corinthian issues. Clearly the choice of these gifts is significant and a superior answer will be one that will explain Paul's use of the three gifts as a *related* group. <sup>247</sup>

It would seem the most obvious reason then is that all three of the gifts Paul speaks of in this passage are *Scripture* and *sign gifts* that were related to the receiving, understanding, communicating, and authenticating of NT revelation in the absence of NT Scripture. As discussed above, the clear context of this passage is methods of divine revelation, or how God communicates truth and increases knowledge of Himself to His people. <sup>248</sup> It is suggested here that if this is true then the debate as to when these gifts were to cease is essentially settled in this very first verse. If the gifts of prophecy, divine knowledge, and tongues were, in fact, given specifically to empower and authenticate a messenger of new, Scripture-quality revelation from God in the absence of Scripture, then Paul certainly has in mind the completion of the written NT Scriptures as the cause of their cessation.

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<sup>246</sup> Dr. Fee comments concerning Paul's conspicuous choice of these gifts, "If there is any significance to his choice of gifts, it lies with the fact that the first, "prophecies," is his own preference for edification in the community, while the other two are Corinthian favorites" (*1 Cor.*, 643). It seems too convenient to suggest *unrelated* reasons for Paul's choice of these gifts. A *related* reason is a superior one. In addition, it would seem that Dr. Fee completely ignores 1) the unique revelatory and authenticating properties of these gifts and 2) the other aspects of this passage that make the context methods of revelation from God to man.

<sup>247</sup> Dr. Compton adds a legitimate but secondary reason why these three gifts are listed by the Apostle. And then in the final sentence, adds the most important reason.

Paul divides the gifts in 12:8-10 into three groupings by using a different word for "another" before the third ("faith") and eighth ("tongues") items. The three gifts in 13:8 are taken from the three divisions in 12:8-10, one from each division. As such, the three gifts are intended to represent the entire list. The common denominator among the miraculous gifts is that all involve either the giving of divine revelation or the authenticating of divine revelation. (109)

<sup>248</sup> For further on this point see sections A.2-3 above.

Already we see some evidence that would favor the view that what Paul has in mind is the completion of the NT Scriptures. Whatever the **"completed thing"** (v. 10) is, its arrival will make the *Scripture* and *Sign gifts* Paul mentions obsolete, and it will cause their extinction. Did the return of Christ cause the cessation of these gifts? For those who see no evidence that authentic NT gifts of prophecy, divine knowledge, and tongues are operating today, the obvious answer is no. Something has occurred before the return of Christ to stop these methods of divine revelation and change to a different method. That **"completed thing"** would seem best interpreted as the completion and distribution of the NT Scriptures. And Church history proves that.<sup>249</sup>

## C) Interpretation of Verse 9

### C.1) Text & Translation

**For we know in part, and we prophesy in part** (1 Cor 13:9 NASB)<sup>250</sup>

<sup>249</sup> For a review of the history of the cessation of tongues see chapter 12.13. For the gift of prophecy chapter 9.13.

<sup>250</sup> Some have seen significance in the fact that Paul does not explicitly mention the gift of tongues in verse 9 as he does divine knowledge and prophecy. Dr. MacArthur, for example, would seem to use this fact to support the claim that the gifts of divine knowledge and prophecy "are less temporary than tongues" and for further evidence he claims that tongues "is not mentioned after verse 8" (*1 Cor.*, 362). However, Dr. Fee's comment regarding Paul's deletion of tongues in verse 9 would seem superior to Dr. MacArthur's:

Partly this is due to style, partly to the fact that "tongues" does not lend itself easily to the way these sentences are expressed. "We speak in tongues in part" is not particularly meaningful; but tongues . . . are to be understood as included in the argument. (*1 Cor.*, 644, n. 21).

In addition, it has been pointed out that the context of this passage is how God communicates to His people. The gifts of prophecy and knowledge were essential in this before the NT Scriptures were completed, the gift of tongues was not. This would be another reason why Paul may not have repeated it.

In answer to Dr. MacArthur's second claim that tongues is not mentioned after v. 8, there are reasons to see a clear reference to it in Paul's metaphorical statement in verse 11 concerning speaking like a child. First of all, the verb **"speak"** (*laleo*) is also used in both 13:1 and

**For (*gar*) we know in part (*ek merous*), and we prophesy in part (*ek merous*)**

**These temporary methods of divine revelation will be abolished because [a] currently [b] the gift of divine knowledge [c] operates in pieces [d] through separate individuals in isolated cases [e], therefore providing us with only a partial and fragmented reception, understanding, and communication [f] of the whole NT revelation [g]. Likewise, currently the gift of prophecy operates in pieces through separate individuals in isolated cases, therefore providing us with only a partial and fragmented reception, understanding, and communication of the whole NT revelation [h].**

- [a] **because (*gar*):** Paul's use of *gar* ("because") here is significant in that it is "a conjunction used to express cause, explanation, inference or continuation."<sup>251</sup> In verse 9 he is explaining the *reason* that he said the revelatory gifts in verse 8 will stop.
- [b] **currently:** Paul's words are clearly in the present tense and can only be automatically applied to the time he penned this letter, not to the 20th century.
- [c] **gift of divine knowledge:** When Paul says "we know" and "we prophesy", he is referring to the gifts of divine knowledge and prophecy that he introduced this passage with in verse 8.
- [d] **operates in pieces (*ek merous*):** literally "in part." The meaning of this Greek phrase is important to establish, as it helps define what "comes" in verse 10.<sup>252</sup> *Vine's* defines *ek merous* generally as

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11, the first occurrence clearly referring to speaking in tongues. Secondly, it is suggested that like 13:11, Paul uses the metaphor of acting like a child later in 14:20 to specifically refer to speaking in tongues.

Finally, Paul intentionally introduced his arguments here with the mention of the gift of tongues (v. 8). Dr. MacArthur implies that immediately after mentioning it, Paul intends to exclude it from his arguments. This completely ignores Paul's explicit and intentional inclusion of it, not only in 13:8-13, but obviously throughout chapter 14.

<sup>251</sup> *NAS Hebrew & Greek Dictionaries*, Robert L. Thomas gen. ed., Electronic Edition, Parsons Technology (Lockman Foundation, 1998), #1063.

<sup>252</sup> This is one place which we would disagree with Dr. Compton:

"a part, portion, of the whole".<sup>253</sup> The *NIDNTT* translates it here at 1 Corinthians 13:9, 10, 12 as describing something that is "incomplete, fragmentary".<sup>254</sup> Anthony Thiselton in the *New International Greek Testament Commentary* writes of *ek merous* as used in this passage:

The idiom has the force of *piece by piece, bit by bit*, or part by part in many contexts, including here. . . *imperfectly* (NJB) fails to convey the process described here adequately. . . Paul conveys the pictorial image of "building up" knowledge by trying to fit together bits and pieces a part at a time. Luther uses the word *patchwork* (*das Stückwerk*). . . . For stylistic reasons we translate the first *ek merous* [v. 9] as "in fragmentary ways," and the second *ek merous* [v.10] as "part by part."<sup>255</sup>

Accordingly, Dr. Thiselton translates the Greek in verses 9-10: **"For we know in fragmentary ways, and we prophesy part by part. But when the completed whole comes, what is piece by piece shall be done away"**<sup>256</sup>

If contemporary English is the goal, then there is no doubt that *ek merous* is best translated as "partial" or "incomplete" as it is in the PME and the NEB respectively.<sup>257</sup> The RSV, JB, and NCV

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To a certain extent, the definition of "in part" is dependent on the meaning of the expression "the perfect" in 13:10 in that "the perfect" is presented in 13:10 as the opposite or antithesis of that which is "in part." As such, the definition of "in part" must wait for the discussion of "the perfect" in 13:10. (122)

While this is true, there are many more possible definitions for *to teleion* than *ek merous*. Therefore, the narrower meaning of the latter is most helpful in determining the meaning of the other.

<sup>253</sup> W. E. Vine, *Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Thomas Nelson, 1996), 458 (underlining added for emphasis).

<sup>254</sup> Colin Brown, *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (*NIDNTT*) 4 vols., (Zondervan, 1986), 2:304; underlining added for emphasis.

<sup>255</sup> Thiselton, 1064.

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid.*, 1027.

<sup>257</sup> Dr. Compton adds regarding the meaning of *ek merous*:

[T]he evidence for defining "in part" based on the use of this phrase and its cognates elsewhere supports the quantitative definition of "partial" or "incomplete." . . . . The exact phrase is found only five times in the New Testament. Four of these occur in the immediate passage and appear to be used in the same way. The other use is in the

rendering of “imperfect” does not reflect the word’s usage in its 38 occurrences in the NT outside of 1 Corinthians 13. Neither is the idea of “immaturity” within the possible meanings of this word as some have suggested.

[e] **through separate individuals in isolated cases:** This is practically why the divine knowledge was received and understood “**in pieces.**” Paul has said earlier, “**if there are prophecies**” because this gift did not operate consistently in every congregation. Translating *ek merous* as “**separate individuals**” is also supported by the NASB rendering of *ek merous* in 12:27 as “**individually** (*ek merous*) **members.**”

[f] **partial and fragmented reception, understanding, and communication:** Although Paul applies *ek merous* (partial, fragmentary) directly to how these gifts were operating, the product of these gifts would be *ek merous* as well. Thus, “**partial and fragmented reception, understanding, and communication**” will be the product of revelatory gifts operating “**in pieces.**”

It is important to notice what Paul said was *ek merous* (“partial” or “fragmentary”): the gifts of divine knowledge and prophecy. The literal Greek is somewhat awkward as it is not readily apparent how a spiritual gift itself (not just its results) could be partial or fragmentary. However, when we visualize the early Church with no NT, it becomes obvious that Paul is describing their current experience regarding the reception, understanding, and communication of the NT revelation: it was “partial” and “fragmentary.”

[g] **the whole NT revelation:** This rendering obviously assumes that Paul envisioned a limit to the revelation that was to accompany the implementation of the New Covenant. Did Paul understand that God was revealing and authenticating a new divine revelation through these gifts, in order to accompany and facilitate the implementation of the New Covenant? Did Paul envision a

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preceding chapter, 12:27, where it has the sense of “individually,” a meaning that does not make sense in 13:9. Although not used extensively, there is a parallel construction that is consistently employed in the New Testament in a quantitative sense (*apo merous*”; cf. Rom 11:25 [“in part”]; 15:15 [“some”], 24 [“a while”]; 2 Cor 1:4 [sic *merous* not in text]; 2:5 [“some degree”]). While not conclusive, the meaning of the parallel construction supports a similar force for the phrase in 13:9. (122-23)

completed revelation? We have rather thoroughly argued “yes” above.<sup>258</sup>

**[h] Likewise, currently the gift of prophecy operates in pieces through separate individuals in isolated cases, therefore providing us with only a partial and fragmented reception, understanding, and communication of the whole NT revelation:** This is merely a reflection of the translation of “we know in part” above.

### **C.2) Interpretation:** *revelatory gifts are piecemeal*

Clearly, the best translation of the Greek here is that Paul is speaking of miraculous gifts of divine revelation that operate in a “piecemeal” or “partial” fashion. As we noted above, when we visualize the early Church with no NT, it becomes obvious that Paul is describing their current experience regarding the reception, understanding, and communication of the NT revelation. “Partial” and “fragmentary” aptly describes how the NT revelation was distributed in the Church for at least the first 200 years of its existence. It was received, understood, and communicated by the relatively few Apostles and Prophets scattered throughout the known world. And no Apostle or Prophet possessed the complete NT revelation themselves, as even Paul’s knowledge of the whole NT revelation at this time was not complete without John’s Revelation that was received and recorded approximately 40 years later.

Along these lines, Raymond F. Collins, in his well regarded *Sacra Pagina Commentary* notes that just as Paul uses Greek verbs for “pass away” four times to emphasize these gifts are temporary, Paul likewise uses *ek merous* four times in this passage to “underscore their limited character.”<sup>259</sup>

Accordingly, the eminent Moody Bible scholar Merrill F. Unger (1909-1980) commented on these verses:

The apostolic gift of knowledge by direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit was limited because it received truth only partially and

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<sup>258</sup> For the important “revelational context” of 1 Corinthians 13:8-13 see section A.2 above.

<sup>259</sup> Raymond F. Collins, *1 Corinthians* (Glazier/Liturgical Press, 1999), 486, n. 9.

piecemeal--here in this assembly a little, there in that assembly a little.<sup>260</sup>

Along these lines, NT scholar D. A. Carson writes in the context of saying that understanding the NT revelation is something like putting a jigsaw puzzle together, and that we understand it better than the NT writers, adds, "This is . . . an acknowledgment that with greater numbers of pieces of the jigsaw puzzle provided, the individual pieces and clusters of pieces are seen in new relationships not visible before."<sup>261</sup> While Dr. Carson does not share our interpretation of 1 Corinthians 13:8-13, his analogy of the NT revelation as pieces of a jigsaw puzzle fits nicely with our interpretation.

In a similar context, NT scholar Paul Wooley notes:

The original writer [of a NT document], as indicated above, may not in every case have known as much concerning the divinely-intended meaning as does the modern Christian who can compare Scripture passage with Scripture passage and thus reach a unified conception of the divine intention.<sup>262</sup>

Accordingly, the author of Hebrews begins his epistle with: "**God . . . spoke long ago to the fathers in the Prophets in many portions** [*polumerōs*: "many parts"] **and in many ways**" (Heb 1:1 NASB).<sup>263</sup> Here again is reflected the "piecemeal" and "partial" way that divine revelation is received, understood, and communicated apart from a completed collection of Scripture. Accordingly, J. I. Packer comments on Hebrews 1:1:

Here is implied , not only a climax, but also a contrast between a revelation, or series of revelations, that was partial and incomplete, a thing of bits and pieces, not fully integrated,

<sup>260</sup> Merrill Unger, *NT Teaching on Tongues* (Kregel, 1971), 95.

<sup>261</sup> D. A. Carson, *Scripture & Truth* (Baker, 1992), 91.

<sup>262</sup> Paul Wooley, in *The Infallible Word*, Ned B. Stonehouse, ed. (Presbyterian and Reformed, 1946), 215.

<sup>263</sup> The NIV, NCV, ESV, KJV, NKJV, and NLT translate *polumerōs* as "many times." F. F. Bruce translates it as "various days" (*The Epistle to the Hebrews* [Eerdmans, 1990], 44). The RSV, NRSV, and Donald Guthrie seem to ignore the literal Greek and translate it as "in various and many ways" (*The Letter to the Hebrews* [Eerdmans, 1983, repr. 1999], 62). Nonetheless, Dr. Bruce notes that the Greek literally means: "in many parts and in many ways" (*Ibid.*). In addition, even if it is translated "many times" these translations ultimately mean the same thing. If the revelation came at many different times than it also came in many different parts.

and a revelation that was comprehensive, unified, and final. . .

The Bible appears like a symphony orchestra, with the Holy Ghost as its Toscanini; each instrumentalist has been brought willingly, spontaneously, creatively, to play his notes just as the great conductor desired, though none of them could ever hear the music as a whole. Not only the Prophets who foretold Christ (cf. 1 Pet. 1:10-12), but all the writers of both Testaments, are constantly telling us more than ever they themselves knew. The point of each part only becomes fully clear when seen in relation to all the rest.<sup>264</sup>

Elsewhere, Dr. Packer writes:

There is. . . a sense in which every New Testament writer communicates to Christians today more than he knew he was communicating, simply because Christians can now read his work as part of the completed New Testament canon.<sup>265</sup>

Accordingly, because Paul understands that these gifts of direct and divine revelation were to be temporary, he knew that the period of this kind of revelation would come to an end and be replaced by something else. It would seem too that he understood the operation of these gifts would eventually lead to a completed revelation of all that God intended to provide, in order to accompany and assist the implementation of the New Covenant. Finally, Paul knew, if not by divine revelation, then from the precedent of the completion of the OT revelation, that when the revelation was completed it would result in a completed set of written, canonized, and distributed Scriptures. All of which leads to his next statement.

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<sup>264</sup> J. I. Packer, *God Speaks to Man: Revelation and the Bible* (Westminster Press, 1965), 58, 74.

<sup>265</sup> J. I. Packer, "Preaching as Biblical Interpretation," in *Inerrancy and Common Sense*, Roger R. Nicole and J. Ramsey Michaels eds. (Baker, 1980), 198.

## D) Interpretation of Verse 10

### D.1) Text & Translation

**but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away** (1 Cor 13:10 NASB)

**but when the perfect** (*to teleion*) **comes** (*elthe*), **the partial** (*ek merous*) **will be done away** (*karteggio*)

**But when these fragmentary and temporary methods of revelation have fulfilled their purpose, God will provide [a] the completed [b] method of receiving, understanding, and communicating the whole NT revelation [c], and these fragmentary and temporary methods [d] will become obsolete [e]**

[a] **God will provide** (*elthe*): This word is derived from *erchomai* "to come." The substitution of "**God will provide**" for the more literal NASB "**comes**" is supported by the fact that Paul is not talking about something only arriving, but rather becoming present and making a significant improvement on the partial and fragmentary revelation that he and the Corinthians were currently experiencing. In addition, it is clear that it is God who has provided the gifts which are *ek merous*, and therefore it would seem clear that it was to be God who provided what was *to teleion*.

[b] **the completed** (*to teleion*): This adjectival noun is derived from the noun *telos*, which has a significant diversity in meaning including: "end, goal, maturity, perfection, fulfillment, completion." The *NIDNTT* notes that the noun is:

[D]erived from a root *tel-*, which means to turn [a]round. Originally [in classical Greek] it meant the turning point, hinge, the culminating point at which one stage ends and another begins; later [it meant] the goal, the end."

The verb forms, *teleo* and *teleioo*, mean "bring to an end, carry out, bring to completion, complete, accomplish, finish, fulfill, make perfect." The literal meanings of the adjectival forms, including *teleion* used here by Paul, include "complete, perfect."<sup>266</sup>

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<sup>266</sup> R. Schippers, *NIDNTT*, 2:59.

*Vine's* defines the adjective as "having reached its end (*telos*), "finished, complete, perfect."<sup>267</sup> The adjective form *teleios* is used in the LXX to translate the Hebrew word *tamim*, meaning "entire, whole . . . complete in the sense of the whole thing."<sup>268</sup>

With this survey of possible meanings, it becomes obvious that the word has a variety of meanings. However, these meanings can essentially be divided into three: 1) maturity from something immature, 2) absolute perfection from something flawed, or 3) completion from something incomplete. Not surprisingly, these definitions coincide with the three major interpretations of what Paul is talking about in this passage 1) the maturity of the Church,<sup>269</sup> 2) the return of Christ or the Eternal State,<sup>270</sup> or 3) the completion of the NT revelation and Scriptures.

As in all cases like this, the context must eventually control the meaning of the Greek. More specifically, the meaning of *to teleion* here will be the opposite of *ek merous* which it is being compared to in the verse. As the NASB has it: "**when the perfect [to teleion] comes, the partial [ek merous] will be done away** (1 Cor 13:10 NASB).

However, we can even see in this translation that "**perfect**" is not a good counterpart to "**partial**." While *to teleion* may have several possible meanings, the clear meaning of *ek merous* is "in pieces," "fragmentary," "incomplete." Therefore, the proper translation of *to teleion* here is something like "**complete**."

Accordingly, the Apostle Paul uses this very same contrast with these very same Greek words in the letter that followed this one to the Corinthians. In chapter one he writes:

**For we do not write you anything you cannot read or understand. And I hope that, as you have understood us in part [apo merous], you will come to understand fully [eōs telous] that you can boast of us just as we will boast of you in the day of the Lord Jesus** (2 Cor 1:13-14).

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<sup>267</sup> *Vine's*, 466.

<sup>268</sup> *Ibid.*, 176.

<sup>269</sup> For further discussion of the "maturity" view see endnote 8 above

<sup>270</sup> MacArthur's view is that τὸ τέλειον refers to the eternal state. He gives two reasons for this. First, "in the millennial kingdom there will be prophesying and teaching resulting in knowledge" (Isa 11:9; 30:20-21; 32:3-4; Jer 3:14-15; 23:1-4; Joel 2:28-32; Rev 11:1-12)

Again, the Apostle is speaking of a partial, incomplete understanding that he hopes will turn into a complete understanding, not a perfect understanding.<sup>271</sup>

Accordingly, as noted above, Dr. Thiselton has translated the Greek of verses 9-10: **"For we know in fragmentary ways, and we prophesy part by part. But when the completed whole [to**

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<sup>271</sup> Some suggest that *telous* here could be translated as meaning that the Corinthians will understand "in the end" at the day of Christ, that Paul was sincere. Accordingly, Paul Barnett writes:

There may be a double entendre here. "Understand fully" can mean both "in full" (i.e., as distinct from "in part") and, in "the day of the Lord Jesus" (at the "end") as distinct from at present ("now"). (*The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* [Eerdmans, 1997], 97; cf. C. K. Barrett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, [Hendrickson, 1973], 73; Colin Kruse, *2 Corinthians* [Eerdmans, 1987, repr. 1997], 72)

There are several problems with this. First, once again, the meaning of *merous* (in part) must dictate the meaning of *telous* which it is being contrasted with. Accordingly, "knowing fully" is a much more compatible contrast to "knowing partially" than "knowing in the end."

Secondly, even the translations that render *eōs telous* in 2 Cor 1:14 as referring to an "end" (cf. NASB, NRSV, KJV, NKJV), translate the phrase correctly as *until the end*, implying that something has been happening before the end. *Eōs* does not mean "in" or "at" as in "at the day of Christ" as Dr. Barnett implies. Accordingly, *BAGD* has its possible meanings as: *till, until, as long as, while, as far as, to, up to, to the point of* (*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Early Christian Literature* (BAGD) F. W. Danker, ed., 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. [University Of Chicago Press, 2001]).

Thirdly, as Paul's use of *eōs* clearly implies here, the Apostle certainly hoped the Corinthians would have full confidence in him before the return of Christ. Thus Calvin interpreted the Apostle here:

As the Corinthians had not yet perfectly returned to a sound mind, so as to be prepared to weigh his fidelity in a just and even balance, but at the same time had begun to abate somewhat of their perverse and malignant judgment respecting him, he intimates, that he hopes better as to the future. "You have already," says he, "to some extent acknowledged me. I hope that you will acknowledge more and more what I have been among you, and in what manner I have conducted myself."

While Albert Barnes (*Barnes' Notes on the New Testament*, online at [www.ccel.org](http://www.ccel.org)) and Charles Hodge (*Ibid.*) emphasize the knowledge of Paul's actions that will come at the return of Christ, it is unclear to us as to whether they rejected Paul's meaning as including a full knowledge that would occur before that.

*teleion*] **comes, what is piece by piece** [*ek merous*] **shall be done away.**" <sup>272</sup> He adds:

The climactic *to teleion* includes the double meaning "the complete" (NRSV) and "wholeness" (REB). . . . Hence it combines the two related notions of *fulfillment* or *goal* and the *completed whole*. No English word alone can fully convey the meaning in this context. <sup>273</sup>

Likewise, NT scholar C. K. Barrett writes in regard to the use of *to teleion* here:

The adjective (in the neuter gender, and with the article *to* "the") rendered *totality* is fairly common in Paul; see [1 Cor 2:6; 14:20]. It takes its precise meaning from the context, and here, in contrast with *in part* (*ek merous*) it means not perfection (in quality) but *totality*--- in particular the whole truth about God. <sup>274</sup>

Along the same lines, F. David Farnell, Professor of NT at Masters Seminary, notes: "The contrast with ἐκ μέρους ("in part") requires a quantitative idea (i.e., "complete") rather than a qualitative idea ("perfect"). <sup>275</sup>

Accordingly, Pentecostal NT scholar Gordon Fee concludes:

The meaning [of *to teleion*] in the present instance [1 Cor. 13:10] is determined by its final goal of what is *ek merous*, "partial." Thus its root sense of "having attained the end or purpose" (BAGD), hence "complete," seems to be the nuance here. . . . Paul's distinctions are between "now" and "then," between what is incomplete and what is complete. <sup>276</sup>

Gerhard Delling, in the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, discussing the use of the adjective in the NT, states, "In the Pauline corpus the meaning 'whole' is suggested at 1 C. 13:10

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<sup>272</sup> Thiselton, 1027.

<sup>273</sup> Ibid., 1065.

<sup>274</sup> Barrett, 306.

<sup>275</sup> Farnell, 193. Cf. Thomas, *Gifts*, 203.

<sup>276</sup> Fee, *1 Cor.*, 644, n. 22, 655.

by the antithesis to *ek merous*." <sup>277</sup> NT scholar Robert Thomas, Professor and the Master's Seminary, even though he argues for the "maturity" theme on this passage, nonetheless admits concerning the meaning of *to teleion* here:

The meaning "whole" or "complete" [not "mature"] for the adjective is well attested in Paul's usage as well as throughout the New Testament. This notion of *teleios* receives even greater impetus in its antithetical expression of I Corinthians 13:10. The idiom *ek merous* is specifically quantitative in character, presenting the concept of "partial" [not "mature"]. What better opposite to partial is there than "completeness"?  
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Douglas Judisch has also commented:

"Complete" and "piecemeal" [should be] used to translate the [Greek] words that traditional English versions render "perfect" and "imperfect" . . . the latter terms are acceptable translations if properly understood (as meaning "complete" and "piecemeal", respectively); but in contemporary English *perfect* and *imperfect* usually carry a moral connotation that is alien to the passage under consideration. . . .

This interpretation destroys the contrast between "the complete thing" and "the piecemeal thing" in verse 10. For the contrast does not seem to be a qualitative one (as between this life and the life to come), but a quantitative one (between a whole and its individual parts or some of those parts)." <sup>279</sup>

Finally, one commentator notes:

It is of interest also to note how the word *teleion* is used in the Septuagint [ancient Greek translation of the OT]. It speaks of Solomon "finishing" the temple. So the word here does not mean that a perfect state was reached, but rather that a work was finished. When a work is finished, then that

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<sup>277</sup> Gerhard Delling, "*teleios*," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (TDNT)* G. Kittel and G. Friedrich, , eds., trans. G. W. Bromiley 10 vols. (Eerdmans, 1964-76), 8:75. See also, Paul Johannes du Plessis, *TELEIOS, the Idea of Perfection in the N.T.*, 1959, 204.

<sup>278</sup> Robert Thomas, "*Tongues...Will Cease*," *JETS* 17 (Spring 1974): 83-85.

<sup>279</sup> Douglas Judisch, *An Evaluation of Claims to the Charismatic Gifts* (Baker, 1978), 45-48.

which is unfinished by the very nature of the case ceases to be. The unfinished gives place to the finished product.

The word also in Ephesians 2:20 carries the same thought of a building being finished. It is surely instructive to notice that the Apostles and Prophets were part of the foundation. The foundation in any building once completed is never laid again. So it is a good Scriptural inference, and not nonsense, to say that the foundation gifts along with the foundation men all ceased when the foundation was completed.<sup>280</sup>

Nonetheless, the contrast with *ek merous* "**partial**" is often ignored or not deemed valuable by most others.<sup>281</sup> Dr. Forbes suggests that the intended contrast between *ek merous* and *to teleion* "may be asking a little too much precision from Paul."<sup>282</sup> That seems rather convenient for someone who wants to find the idea of perfection here.

One proposed translation is the idea of maturity. This is understandable as Paul uses *teleiois* in this very letter to convey that meaning: "**we do speak wisdom among those who are mature (*teleiois*)**" (2:6). And in fact the idea of maturity is the most common use of the word in Paul's writings.<sup>283</sup>

However, such a meaning here ignores the fact that Paul intended the meaning of *to teleion* to be the opposite or the fulfillment of what is *ek merous*. As pointed out in section C above, *ek merous* cannot, and does not have the meaning of "immaturity" in the NT, but rather "partial, fragmentary," making the idea of something becoming mature not necessarily the best contrast to something that is in pieces. Even Dr. Thomas, a foremost promoter of the idea that the Apostle is speaking of the maturity of the Church in this passage, admits:

Admittedly this understanding of *to teleios* is not immune to objection, most notably a disruption of the antithesis with *ek*

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<sup>280</sup> Ref not available

<sup>281</sup> Unfortunately, Leon Morris gives no consideration to this. (*1 Corinthians* [Eerdmans, 1985], 182-3). Neither does Calvin, who actually implies *ek merous* in the context means "imperfection" (*in loc.*). Albert Barnes ignores it as well (*in loc.*).

<sup>282</sup> Forbes, 87.

<sup>283</sup> For other uses of *teleion* in reference to maturity see 1 Cor 14:20; Php 3:15; Eph 4:13; Col 1:28; 4:12.

*merous*. Pitting a quantitative idea [maturity] against a qualitative one [partial] is quite unsatisfactory.<sup>284</sup>

Dr. Thomas adds elsewhere:

Completion is in the context. Note the four occurrences of *ek merous* that require an opposite—"completion": 13:9 (twice), 13:10, and 13:12. It is not a matter of completion's not being in the context; it is rather a question of the completion of what.

The completion spoken of in verse 12 is unobscured cognitive sight to replace the limited prophetic revelations and unlimited knowledge to replace partial revelations through the gift of knowledge. Those partial revelatory gifts were the means used by the Spirit in bringing the NT Scriptures—among other revelations—to the church. So a termination of revelatory gifts coincided with the completion of the NT.<sup>285</sup>

Secondly, *teleion* here is in the neuter form strongly indicating that Paul is referring to a thing, not a person. In all the instances where the NT uses this adjective to describe maturity, it is always in the context of a person, never a thing. "Things" do not become mature.

Thirdly, the idea of maturity would not best fit the overall context of this passage which, as argued above,<sup>286</sup> is *methods* of divine revelation, not the Church or Christians per se.

Most others want to translate *to teleion* here as "**the perfect**" as it is in most translations of the Bible. Of course, even the English word "perfect" has a wide variety of meanings, including "mature" and "complete."<sup>287</sup> However, most expositors who wish to translate *to teleion* here are referring to a state of absolute, flawless perfection as will occur in the Eternal State.

Absolute perfection is a possible meaning of *teleion*, as in Matthew 5:48, "**be perfect (teleioi), as your heavenly Father is perfect (teleiois)**". And it is used to convey the idea of perfection

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<sup>284</sup> Thomas, "Tongues," 87

<sup>285</sup> Robert L. Thomas ed., *The Master's Perspective on Difficult Passages* (Kregel, 1998), 216.

<sup>286</sup> For further discussion of the "revelational" context of 1 Corinthians 13:8-13 see section A.2 above.

<sup>287</sup> *Webster's* at <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/perfect>. See definition 4 and 5.

elsewhere in the NT.<sup>288</sup> In fact, Paul uses cognates of this word to refer to the end of the Church Age or the perfected state in 1 Corinthians (cf. 1:8; 15:24). Therefore, translating *to teleion* here as “**the** [absolute] **perfect** [thing]” might suffice, except for several things.

First, *to teleion* is never specifically used by Paul or other NT writers to refer to the return of Christ. Dr. Thomas writes concerning this view:

[T]his understanding presents a meaning of *teleios* which is unparalleled in Paul’s usage, if not in the New Testament as a whole. The rendering “perfect” apparently portrays a meaning that was more in vogue with the world of Greek philosophy than with the writers of Scripture.<sup>289</sup>

Secondly, and more importantly, as with the idea of maturity, the idea of absolute perfection here would not seem the best contrast to that which is “partial” or “incomplete.” As pointed out above in section C, *ek merous* does not have the meaning of “imperfect” or “flawed.” The fact that there are literal and legitimate definitions for *teleion* that reflect a contrast with something “in pieces”, “partial” or “incomplete” better than absolute perfection suggests it is not the best translation here.

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<sup>288</sup> For other references to *teleion* as referring to the idea of absolute perfection see Matt 19:21; Rom 12:2; Heb 2:10; 5:9; 7:19; 7:28; 9:11; 10:1; 12:23; Jms 1:17, 25.

Those arguing for the “maturity” view attempt to claim that this could not be in Paul’s mind. Dr. Thomas says, “No other use of *teleios* in Paul can possibly mean “perfection” in the sense of the absence of all imperfection.” (*Understanding*). Likewise, Dr. Farnell writes:

Pauline usage of τέλειος never conveys the idea of absolute perfection, and such a philosophical meaning is also questionable in the rest of the New Testament. For further information on this point see *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, s.v. “τέλειος,” by Gerhard Delling, 8:69–77; Thomas, “Tongues...Will Cease,” 83; idem, *Exegetical Digest of 1 Corinthians 12–14*, 96–97. While classical Greek usage may convey the idea of “perfection” (Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon*, rev. Henry Stuart Jones, 9th ed. [Oxford: Clarendon, 1940], 1769–70), Paul never used this word in that sense (193).

However, neither writer explains their exclusion of the Apostles reference to the “**perfect**” (*teleion*) will of God in Romans 12:2, and it would seem it should not be excluded from the idea of absolute perfection.

<sup>289</sup> Thomas, “Tongues,” 83. Quotes Delling in the *TDNT*.

Thirdly, the idea of perfection does not fit Paul's analogies very well. Paul says the difference between the current fragmentary and partial methods of NT revelation and the method of revelation that will replace them is like the difference between the cognitive and communication abilities of a child and an adult (cf. v. 11). Although an adult's cognitive and communication abilities are obviously *better* than a child's, they are not perfect in the sense of flawless. If Paul wanted to convey the idea of perfection, it would seem he would have chosen a different metaphor. Likewise, to see someone directly is a *better* mode of perceiving them, but not a perfect one. Even if we see someone "**face to face**" (v. 12) we do not know them perfectly. Again, Paul's analogies do not convey the idea of perfection.

Unfortunately, this obvious comparison that Paul is making between *to teleion* and *ek merous* is not reflected in many modern translations. For example, the NIV has "**For we know in part (*ek merous*) and we prophesy in part (*ek merous*), but when perfection (*to teleion*) comes, the imperfect (*ek merous*) disappears**" (vs. 9-10). Only here in verse 10, out of 41 other occurrences, does the NIV translate *ek merous* as "imperfect," even though it translates the same word as "**in part**" twice in the phrase that precedes it. And it is again suggested that if *ek merous* cannot be translated as "imperfect;" than *to teleion* should not be translated in contemporary English as "perfection" as it is here in the NIV, and in the NCV, and JB. Even the *NIV Study Bible* notes on this passage: "The Greek for this word [*to teleion*] can mean "end", "fulfillment", "completeness" or maturity" [not "perfect" as in flawless]. In this context the contrast is between the partial and the complete."

This is why most reputable scholars will *not* translate it this way, including Drs. Barrett ("totality"), Thiselton ("completed whole"), and Fee ("complete"), who adds that the NIV "tends to mislead."<sup>290</sup>

Nor should *to teleion* here be rendered as "the perfect (thing)" as it is in the NASB, RSV, NKJV, CEV, and TEV; which wrongly demands the idea of being flawless rather than simply finished. The NEB and the PME would seem to be the best and most consistent translations here. The former reads, "**For our knowledge and our prophecy alike are partial, and the partial vanishes when wholeness comes.**" The PME has it: "**For our knowledge is always incomplete, and our prophecy is always incomplete, and when the complete comes, that is the end of the incomplete.**"

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<sup>290</sup> Fee, *1 Cor.*, 641.

On the surface, the distinction between perfection and completion may not seem important. However, many use the supposed idea of perfection in this passage to support their claim that Paul is speaking of the return of Christ or the Eternal State. John MacArthur, for example, comments on this passage and says:

Not until our minds are perfected will we be able "to know fully just as [we] also have been fully known" (1 Cor. 13:12). So we wait for the time and experience of perfection . . . The Corinthians would have taken Paul's meaning in the plainest and simplest way: as a reference to spiritual and moral perfection.<sup>291</sup>

First, Dr. MacArthur's debatable interpretation of verse 12 will be taken up below. Secondly, Dr. MacArthur offers no arguments against translating *to teleion* as "the completed thing" and no arguments to support his translation of *to teleion* as "the perfect thing." Again, it is suggested that interpreting *to teleion* as "faultless heavenly perfection" instead of "the completed thing" ignores Paul's use of *ek merous* which never means "imperfect" or "flawed" but rather "partial," "in pieces," and "incomplete." The Corinthians would *not* have understood *to teleion* as "heaven" in the context of contrasting it with *ek merous*, as Dr. MacArthur claims. They *would* have understood it as referring to something partial and in pieces being completed.

Thirdly, the context of the passage is not the accomplishment of "spiritual and moral" perfection as Dr. MacArthur suggests, but rather, the completion of the NT revelation that was to accompany and facilitate the implementation of the New Covenant. Finally, Dr. MacArthur's view leaves the supernatural revelatory gifts of prophecy and divine knowledge still operating, which, in our opinion, reveals a significant misunderstanding of their purpose and nature. There is no doubt that if the purpose and nature of these gifts was providing new divine revelation in the absence of Scripture, as we have argued at length elsewhere, then Dr. MacArthur's view that the "**completed thing**" is the Eternal State is improbable.

The rightly respected NT scholar D. A. Carson would seem to make similar mistakes when commenting on this passage:

When "perfection" comes, the "imperfect" disappears: what is the connection between these two categories? . . . when does this perfection come, and in what does it consist? There are three groups of theories.

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<sup>291</sup> MacArthur, *1 Cor.*, 364.

It has been strongly argued that "perfection" refers to the maturity of the church. . . . It has also been strongly argued that the "perfection" is the completed canon itself. . . . The third . . . interpretation is that "perfection" is related to the parousia. . . .

The outcome of the debate over these positions is very important, because Paul writes that the imperfect disappears *when perfection comes*. In other words, the gifts of prophecy, knowledge, and tongues . . . will pass away at some point future to Paul's writing, designated by him "perfection" . . . .

In my judgment, [the] third position [that "perfection" is related to the parousia] has powerful evidence in its defense. . . . It is difficult to believe that Paul could have expected the Corinthians to think that by "perfection" he was alluding to the cessation of the writing of Scripture.<sup>292</sup>

Like Dr. MacArthur, nowhere does Dr. Carson offer any support for translating *to teleion* as "perfection" and *ek merous* as "imperfect." Contrary to Dr. Carson, Paul intentionally pairs these terms to convey the idea of something that is "incomplete/complete," "partial/whole," "unfinished/finished," rather than "imperfect/perfect" as Dr. Carson would have us assume.

But such a translation obviously lends itself to his interpretation. For example, notice the effect on Dr. Carson's statement if liberty is taken to substitute his "perfection" theme with the definitions of *to teleion* and *ek merous* established above:

When "completion" comes, the "incomplete" disappears: what is the connection between these two categories? . . . The outcome of the debate over these positions is very important, because Paul writes that the incomplete disappears *when completion comes*. In other words, the [revelatory] gifts of prophecy, knowledge, and tongues . . . will pass away at some point future to Paul's writing, designated by him "completion" . . . . It is difficult to believe that Paul could have expected the Corinthians to think that by "completion" he was alluding to the cessation of the writing of Scripture.

No, it is not difficult to believe such a thing, in light of the very unique purpose for the gifts Paul is listing and the pattern that God had followed with OT revelation. The potential, and it is suggested, misleading impact of translating *to teleion* as "perfection" instead of "completion" becomes evident. If we are to correctly understand

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<sup>292</sup> Carson, *Spirit*, 68-70, italics in the original, underlining added.

this passage of Scripture, we need to honor, instead of ignore, the Apostle's intentional contrast in the Greek text of verse 10 between that which is incomplete with that which is complete.

[c] **method of receiving, understanding, and communicating the whole NT revelation:** The insertion of "revelation" here reflects the context of this passage which is methods of receiving divine revelation, as argued above.<sup>293</sup> In verse 9, it is the "NT revelation" that they knew and prophesied in part. The partial thing in 10b refers to the "NT revelation" that they knew in part in verse 9. If what is known in part and what is partial in verses 9 and 10b refer to the "NT revelation" received through these gifts, then the completed thing in 10a is also referring to the "NT revelation" received through these gifts.

[d] **fragmentary and temporary:** Reflects the meaning of *ek merous* in the text. See discussion under section C above.

[e] **become obsolete** (*katargeo*: "abolish") The idea of obsolescence is supported by the word's use in the NT to describe something that is being made obsolete, in order to replace it with something else. Thus it is translated "nullify" (NASB, NIV, RSV) "without effect" (NKJV) and "cancel" (JB, NEB) in Romans 3:3; and "nullify" (NASB, NIV), "make void" (NKJV), "overthrow" (RSV), and "pointless" (JB) in Romans 3:31, to describe the OT law that is made obsolete by the New Covenant.

In Romans 4:14, *katargeo* is translated "void" (RSV), "made of no effect" (NKJV), "worthless" (NIV, TEV, NCV, CEV), "nullified" (NASB), and "meaningless" (NLT), to describe the uselessness of God's promise to save by faith if we are still under the law (cf. Gal. 3:17). This rendering also reflects the meaning of *katargeo* as "abolished" in this verse and elsewhere. See section B.2.e above.

## D.2) Interpretation: *when the NT revelation is completed, the revelatory gifts will cease*

It is suggested here that if "the completed" mode of NT revelation is the best translation of *to teleion*, then the best interpretation of "the completed" mode of NT revelation would be the completed NT Scriptures, making the temporary NT revelatory

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<sup>293</sup> For further discussion on the "revelational" context, see section A.4 above

gifts obsolete and bringing about their extinction. Again, the maturity of the Church would not seem to reflect a “**completed**” mode of NT revelation. Nor would the person/return of Christ when the context would seem to specifically apply to the completion of the NT revelation that was to accompany and facilitate the implementation of the New Covenant. Robert Gromacki, Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Bible and Greek at Cedarville University, would seem to put it all together when he says:

This word *teleion* means that something is partially here now, is presently developing, and one day will become complete. This word fits the concept of the progressive revelation of the New Testament of which Paul [and Peter were] aware (John 14:25-26; 16:12-13; cf. Col. 1:25 [see also 2 Pet. 3:15-16]). . . .

Logically, *to teleion* must refer to completeness or perfection in the *same realm* as that referred to by *ek merous*. Since *ek merous* refers to the transmission of divine truth by revelation, the other term *to teleion* must refer to God’s *complete* revelation of truth, the entire New Testament.<sup>294</sup>

Likewise, the Greek scholar Spiros Zodhiates in his popular *Complete Word Study New Testament* comments on verses 8-10 and concludes:

The phrase “when that which is perfect is come” refers to the written revelation of Scripture. When this revelation was completed, there was no need for the temporary gifts (e.g., tongues, prophecies, and knowledge) which were given in order to substantiate the message that the Apostles were preaching.<sup>295</sup>

Along the same lines, Bruce R. Compton, Professor of Biblical Languages and Exposition at the Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, has written in an excellent exegesis of 1 Corinthians 13:8-13:

Since Paul declares that the gifts mentioned in 13:9 are in some way “in part,” the proper approach to identifying the meaning of the phrase is to ask what these gifts have in common that could be described as “in part.” Based on the definitions given above, the common denominator among the

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<sup>294</sup> Gromacki, 126.

<sup>295</sup> Spiros Zodhiates, *Speaking in Tongues and Public Worship: An Exegetical Commentary on First Corinthians Fourteen* (AMG, 1998), 572.

gifts is that they all involve direct revelation from God. As such, the expression “in part” simply refers to the fact that the revelation communicated by these gifts is partial or piecemeal. The corresponding expression “the perfect” as the counterpart to the partial must refer to the full or complete revelation, of which these gifts contribute their portion.

Finally, since these gifts are specifically identified in 12:27–28 as those which God has given to the church, the body of Christ, “the perfect” represents the full or complete revelation that God intends for the church. Thus, “the perfect” points to completed revelation God has intended for the church and has preserved in the New Testament.<sup>296</sup>

*What we are suggesting here is precisely what happened with the revelation, recording, canonizing, and distribution of all the divine revelation that accompanied the implementation of the Old Covenant.* As we have argued above, God had clearly set a precedent for all to see, and there is little doubt that Paul, and the first century Church, understood that the implementation of the New Covenant, and its accompanying revelation, would follow a similar pattern.<sup>297</sup>

Do we doubt then that Paul understood that after the NT revelation had been “deposited” through the revelatory gifts, that these gifts would cease, and gifts of teaching would replace them, just as the “Teachers of the Law” had replaced the OT Prophets? Considering the precedent set by the reception and completion of the OT, surely Paul did not expect the direct and divine NT revelation to continue indefinitely. That would seem to be precisely why he envisioned the cessation of these revelatory gifts.

It was also noted above that *teleion* is derived from the root *tel-*, which in classical Greek originally meant “the turning point, hinge, the culminating point at which one stage ends and another begins.” This describes very well what occurred with the methods of understanding, receiving and communicating the NT revelation when the NT Scriptures were completed. That was indeed a “turning point . . . the culminating point at which” the temporary gifts of divine revelation ended and the era of the perfect, complete, permanent, whole, directly, and personally available NT Scriptures began. The revolutionary nature of that transition should not be missed. One only has to imagine the Christian life without the NT

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<sup>296</sup> Compton, 124

<sup>297</sup> For further discussion of the “biblical” context see section A.4 above

Scriptures to realize why Paul would have been so excited about its completion and subsequent distribution.

As was noted earlier, the fact that these temporary gifts involved the reception of NT revelation, means that their operation was not so much to bring about the return of Christ, but rather the completed NT revelation. Therefore, it would seem the “turning point” for these gifts would more precisely be the completion of the NT Scriptures, rather than the return of Christ. Not to mention that the historical evidence for the extinction of these gifts at the time the early Church completed the recognition, copying, and sufficient distribution of the NT revelation.<sup>298</sup>

What then with other possible interpretations of this verse? Did Paul view the maturing of the Church as being the means by which the NT revelation would become written, canonized, and distributed as the OT revelation was? It certainly was not the maturing of the nation of Israel that inscripturated the OT revelation.

Did Paul envision that the return of Christ would result in a completion, recording, and distribution of the NT revelation? Again, that was not the case with the OT revelation. And, in fact, the completion of the OT revelation occurred long before the first advent of Christ, and it would seem reasonable to assume that Paul certainly accepted the possibility that the completion of the NT revelation, and its inscripturation would occur before the second advent of Christ.

He certainly understood that the completion of the NT revelation and NT Scriptures was essentially unrelated to the return of Christ and could be accomplished without it, just as the completion of the OT revelation and Scriptures had been unrelated to the first advent of Christ. Paul envisioned a completed NT revelation resulting in NT Scriptures and what he envisioned as bringing that about was not the maturity of the Church, nor the return of Christ, but the NT Scriptures.

We see other reasons for rejecting the idea that in this context of speaking about a change and improvement in the modes of divine revelation, that the Apostle had the return of Christ or the Eternal State in mind. In other words, would the return of Christ, or Christ Himself, be the perfect method of NT revelation that Paul intended to communicate? It is suggested not, for the following reasons.

First, *to teleion* is in the neuter form, clearly referring to a thing, not a person. Therefore, it is highly unlikely that the Apostle would

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<sup>298</sup> For the fact that the completion of the NT canon coincided with the historical cessation of the *Scripture* and *sign gifts* see section 11.7.D.

refer to the person of Christ as the coming mode of revelation in this way.

Secondly, it should be remembered that Paul's use of the three gifts he chooses to discuss in this passage suggests that the context here is a communication method that God will use to deliver the NT revelation that is to accompany specifically the implementation of the New Covenant. Whatever replaces the gifts in question need only provide a completed NT revelation to accompany and facilitate the implementation of the New Covenant, and nothing beyond that. Again, the purpose of these gifts was not to bring about the return of Christ.

Accordingly, it is suggested here that the revelation of Jesus Christ and the resulting Eternal State will indeed go far beyond what was needed to accompany and facilitate the implementation of the New Covenant. The completion of the NT Scriptures, however, did facilitate the implementation of the New Covenant by providing the complete NT revelation that the temporary gifts could not.

Accordingly, interpreting Paul as saying that in terms of revelation, the Church was to go from the inferior revelatory gifts, all the way to seeing and hearing Jesus Christ Himself, with no methods of divine communication in between, completely ignores the very significant event of the completion, recording, acceptance, and distribution of the written NT revelation in Scripture. It was pointed out above that Paul and the Corinthians were well aware of the revelatory process that had occurred with the revelation and implementation of the *Old Covenant*, and that process had included the completion and distribution of written Scripture. Between the time the Prophets had spoken and the first arrival of Christ, there had been the completion of the OT Scriptures. To claim that Paul thought the Church would go from prophecy to God in person, without written Scripture in between, completely ignores the precedent that God had already set with the revelation and implementation of the OT.

Finally, even if the best translation of *teleion* in verse 10 was absolute perfection, it is suggested that the NT Scriptures would be an equal or superior interpretation of a perfect mode of NT revelation than either of the two alternatives. Although many translate *teleion* as "the perfect thing" it seems surprising how few interpret "the perfect thing" as the completed NT Scriptures. This very adjective *teleion* is used in James to describe the written Scriptures (cf. Jms 1:15). The idea of perfection is applied to the Scriptures throughout the OT (Ps 19:7-10, 119:140, Pr 12:6). Remembering that the context here is the *methods* which God uses

to communicate to man, we can readily see that the NT Scriptures could certainly be interpreted as a perfect method of revelation.

Nonetheless, the best interpretation of verse 10 is that the Apostle is referring to the completion of the reception, communication, recording, and distribution of the NT revelation that these gifts provided, at which time these gifts would cease, just as they did in the fourth century with the completion of these things. And at least our interpretation does not make the Apostle a false prophet.

## E) Interpretation of Verse 11

### E.1) Text & Translation

**When I was a child, I used to speak as a child, think as a child, reason as a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things.** (1 Cor 13:11 NASB)

**As an analogy [a], when I was a child I used to communicate information like a child, process information like a child, and receive information like a child [b]. But when I became an adult, I permanently replaced [c] these temporary and inferior methods of communicating, processing, and receiving information, and changed to better methods of communication [d], allowing me to communicate more clearly and understand more completely.**

[a] **As an analogy:** It is important here to remember that Paul is using a metaphor. The partial and inferior modes of communication are not a literal child, just as the replacement mode of divine revelation was not to be a literal adult person.

[b] **communicate information like a child, process information like a child, and receive information like a child:** The NASB “**speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child**” reflects the literal Greek well. However, the expanded translation reflects the fact that the context is modes of communication, revelation and understanding.<sup>299</sup> It also reflects the fact that Paul is comparing the relatively inferior and temporary ways in which a child communicates and understands with the superior perception and communication abilities of an adult.

[c] **permanently replaced:** The fact that these gifts are abolished, or set aside so that they can be replaced by something better fits the meaning of *katargeo* and reflects both the context here and the fact that it is virtually inconceivable that an adult would revert to childish communication skills.

[d] **better:** This reflects the comparison that Paul is wanting to make with this analogy. An adult’s perception and communication skills are not “perfect” compared to a child’s “imperfect” skills.

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<sup>299</sup> See “revelatory” context above in section A.2

Rather, they are simply “better.” Again, there is no idea of perfection being communicated here.

**E.2) Interpretation:** *revelatory gifts are for immature stage of covenant*

Obviously, the idea of the NT Scriptures being a *better* mode of receiving and understanding revelation, accurately reflects Paul’s intended meaning for the contrast of child/adult communication abilities and effects. Paul wrote this at a period of time when the implementation of the New Covenant was still in its “childhood.” He also understood that in the introductory stage of the implementation of a covenant, miraculous gifts are given to provide and authenticate the revelation needed to implement the covenant. However, after that revelation is sufficiently available to implement the covenant, a more “mature” and written mode of revelation replaces the gifts and remains. Thus the Apostle’s contrasting child/adult metaphor to reflect the “partial” vs. “completed” mode of revelation spoken of in verse 10.

In fact, later in 1 Corinthians chapter 14, the Apostle will refer to the use of tongues as immature:

**Brothers, stop thinking** [*phresin*: “mind”; “understanding” KJV] **like children** [in how you value the gift of tongues] . . . **but in your thinking** [understanding] **be adults. In the Law it is written:** “**Through men of strange tongues and through the lips of foreigners I will speak to this people, but even then they will not listen to Me,**’ says the Lord.” **Tongues, then, are a sign, not for believers but for unbelievers.** (14:19-21)

In what way were the Corinthians immature in their understanding of the gift of tongues? They placed far too great a value on it as a means of divine revelation. Accordingly, Paul explains that similar phenomenon in the OT was used as a sign of judgment on God’s people. And Paul reminds them, the essential purpose of tongues was not as a great mode of divine revelation, but as a miraculous authentication of other divine revelation. Likewise, at 13:11, Paul is encouraging them to devalue childish forms of revelation such as tongues, for better “adult” and full grown forms of revelation such as Scripture.

Accordingly, G. B. Weaver in the *Grace Theological Journal* comments on verse 11:

He [Paul] does refer to tongues in his personal illustration of verse 11: “When I was a child I spake as a child.” Just as the

thinking and reasoning correspond to the gifts of knowledge and prophecy, this corresponds to the relative inferiority of tongues as a revelation of . . . God, as compared with the yet-to-be-completed [Scriptures].<sup>300</sup>

Again, Paul is speaking of the maturation process of revelation. Gifts like divine knowledge, prophecy, and tongues are a part of the infancy stage of the revelational process to implement a new covenant. As that process matures, it produces more mature forms of revelation like the more permanent Scriptures.

Along these lines, Dr. Judisch wrote:

One may observe, furthermore, that this [*historicist*] interpretation accords well with the two illustrations used in verses 11-12 to contrast the state of the Christian before the completion of the apostolic revelation and his state after its completion.

In verse 11 Paul compares this difference to that between himself as a child and himself as a man. A child knows much less than a man and is consequently less capable of . . . systematic thought. Similarly the Christian was less knowledgeable and consequently less capable of . . . systematic thought in A.D. 50, when Paul wrote 1 Corinthians, . . . then in 100 [A.D.] when John died.

In the year 50 the Christian was dependent for an infallible guide to faith and life almost wholly, aside from the Old Testament, upon the oral instruction of the Apostles and . . . Prophets. . . . And that oral instruction came to the Christian only bit by bit, something in one congregation and something else in another—"piecemeal," as Paul puts it in verse 9 (*ek merous*).

By the time Paul died, on the other hand, his own revelation was complete, the essence of it having been committed to writing, and there were at least twenty-one apostolic writings available for careful study and comparison by the Christian. By the time of John's death, the whole revelation of God was complete and its essence set down in the most definitive and useful manner possible.<sup>301</sup>

What again of other views? Obviously, the child/adult analogy here fits very well with a "maturity" interpretation, which is why advocates of this view make this analogy the controlling theme of

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<sup>300</sup> G. B. Weaver, "Tongues Shall Cease" *GTJ* 14 (Winter 1973), 22.

<sup>301</sup> Judisch, 50.

the entire passage. However, "maturity" does not at all fit the analogy Paul uses next: seeing in "**a mirror dimly**" (v. 12). Nor, as argued above, does it reflect the real controlling theme of a contrast between that which is *ek merous* ("in pieces") and that which is *to teleion* ("complete").

Paul's child/adult metaphor also presents problems for the view that Paul has Christ's return or the Eternal State in mind. Dr. Thomas explains:

Equating *to teleion* with the *parousia* is beset by yet another difficulty, the illustration in v. 11. As Robertson and Plummer have aptly noted, the difference between childhood and manhood is a very feeble illustration of the vast difference between the Christian's present state and that after the *parousia*.<sup>302</sup>

For Paul to compare the present economy in its entirety with the immature condition of a *nepios* [child] is completely out of character for him as he is known in the rest of his writings. Whether in reference to an individual believer or to the body of Christ collectively, Paul's projection was a growth process through which conditions of childhood were left behind.

Furthermore, use of his own adult status to picture perfection following Christ's return is at odds with the very next verse, where his present condition is one of limitations: "Now that I am a man (v. 11), I know partially (v. 12)."

A further difficulty in understanding v. 11 in harmony with the *parousia* view lies in the nature of transition from childhood to adulthood. It is not a momentary [or instant] change, as prophetic Scripture anticipates the *parousia* to be, but a gradual one.<sup>303</sup>

Dr. Farnell adds:

Paul's illustration of gradual development from childhood to adulthood does not really typify the immense transformation associated with the Lord's return (v. 11). Adulthood is not completely free of limitations as would be the Parousia.<sup>304</sup>

In other words, if the Apostle had really had in the mind the return of Christ as the moment in which divine revelation would be "completed," he would not have used the child/adult metaphor.

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<sup>302</sup> Robertson and Plummer, 297.

<sup>303</sup> Thomas, "Tongues," 17, 86.

<sup>304</sup> Farnell, 193.

However, the idea of a completion of the NT revelation in Scripture fits the child/adult metaphor as explained above, and the mirror/face to face analogies, as we argue next.

## F) Interpretation of Verse 12a

### F.1) Text & Translation

#### For now we see in a mirror dimly

**For now** [*arti*: "right now"] **we see in a mirror** [*di esoptrou*] **dimly** [*en ainigmati*]

**Another analogy of the modes of revelation we experience now in the first century through these gifts [a], is how we would perceive someone through their reflection in a mirror in an indirect and limited way [b].**

[a] **the modes of revelation we experience now in the first century through these gifts** (*arti*: "right now"): The Greek word *arti* expresses, "strictly present time in contrast to the past or future."<sup>305</sup> Therefore, the immediate context is the revelatory situation c. 50 A.D. when Paul wrote the Corinthians. The larger context is, again, a transition of ways God will provide divine revelation. Thus, in verse 8 the Apostle introduces this whole section listing revelatory and sign gifts that operated in the first century.

[b] **how we would perceive someone through their reflection in a mirror in an indirect and limited way**: This rendering reflects what Paul means by his analogy of a reflection in a mirror.<sup>306</sup> NT scholar Leon Morris pointed out, "what [a mirror] shows is limited by the frame, and it is always indirect."<sup>307</sup> Paul's analogy applies very well to the suggestion that he is talking about the "limited" and "indirect" modes of divine revelation that were in use

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<sup>305</sup> *Vine's*, 436.

<sup>306</sup> Regarding Paul's analogy of a "mirror" (*di esoptrou*), Dr. Compton writes:

The *first* question is whether Paul refers to looking in a "mirror" or to looking through a "glass" or a "window." The only other use of this word in the Old or New Testament is in James 1:23. There, it clearly refers to a mirror in that James describes someone looking at himself. Furthermore, since "mirror" is the predominant use of the word outside the Bible, it may be assumed that this is what Paul intended here. (133-4)

<sup>307</sup> Morris, 183.

at the time. They were “limited” in the fact that no one Prophet or Apostle seems to have possessed all of the revelation that God intended for the NT age. God distributed different pieces of that revelation among several different men.

As was mentioned above, even Paul’s extensive knowledge of new divine revelation was incomplete without John’s Revelation. These gifts were “indirect” for most Christians in the sense that the new divine revelation at this time came through the work of the Spirit in *another* person’s life, through someone’s revelatory gift.

The habit of translators rendering *en ainigmati* as “dimly” (cf. RSV, ESV; NIV “poor reflection”; KJV “darkly,” NLT “imperfectly”) is unfortunate and misleading. The Apostle is not implying that the then current modes of divine revelation such as divine knowledge and prophecy produced a *distorted* image of truth. On the contrary, these gifts produced the trustworthy word of God that we have in NT Scripture today. Accordingly, the Pentecostal Dr. Fee writes:

Corinth was famous as the producer of some of the finest bronze mirrors in antiquity. That suggests that the puzzling phrase *en ainigmati* is probably not as pejorative [negative] as most translations imply. . . . In fact the idea that their mirrors were of poor quality and therefore one did not get a true image is purely a modern idea. . . . More likely the emphasis is not on the *quality* of seeing that one experiences in looking into a mirror—that would have surely been an affront to them [the Corinthians]—but to the *indirect nature* of looking into a mirror as opposed to seeing someone “**face to face**” . . . . It is not a distorted image that we have in Christ through the Spirit; but it is as yet indirect, not complete.<sup>308</sup>

Accordingly, Dr. Thiselton translates the Greek: “**For we are seeing the present only by means of a mirror indirectly.**”<sup>309</sup> Again, the controlling factor in the translation is the comparison that is being made between seeing someone in a mirror (indirectly) and seeing someone “**face to face**” (directly). This is derived as well from the ancient Greek understanding of a mirror in relation to divine revelation. Dr. Barrett notes:

The metaphor [of a mirror] is sometimes used, especially by Philo, to describe an indirect and partial knowledge of God. . . . The fact is that the metaphor of the glass must take its sense

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<sup>308</sup> Fee, *1 Cor.*, 648, incl. n. 46, italics in the original. Dr. Thiselton agrees and discusses this at length (cf. 1067-69)

<sup>309</sup> Thiselton, 1027

from the context; always the glass is an instrument of revelation, sometimes the stress lies simply on the revelation, sometimes on its indirectness. The latter use obtains here, but the ambiguity of the metaphor accounts for the addition (for which some odd explanations have been supplied) of a further qualification, *obscurely* (literally, *in a riddle, en ainigmati*). In this Paul is probably dependent not so much on Hellenistic usage as on Num. xii. 8, where God says that He will speak to Moses "**face to face**," not obscurely.<sup>310</sup>

## **F.2) Interpretation:** *revelatory gifts provide indirect revelation to the Church*

Again, the Apostle is merely using the metaphor of a mirror to reflect the fact that divine revelation coming through Apostles and Prophets was "indirect" for Christians in the Church. And he will contrast this with the fact that a more "direct" mode of revelation is forthcoming.

It is true, however, that seeing someone "**face to face**" as opposed to in an ancient bronze mirror would also give you a clearer image of the person. But this is simply because you would see more detail of the person's face. And as the collection of written NT revelation grew in the early Church, they too would have more details about the New Covenant, and a clearer picture of God's plan.

## **G) Interpretation of Verse 12b**

### **G.1) Text & Translation**

**but then face to face** (1 Cor 13:12b NASB)

**but then** [*tote de*] **face to face** [*prosopon pros prosopon*]

**But when God provides the completed method of communicating the NT revelation [a], then our reception of the whole NT revelation will be more direct and our understanding of it more clear [b]. It will be like seeing**

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<sup>310</sup> Barrett, 307

**someone in person as opposed to just seeing their reflection in a mirror.**

[a] **But when God provides the completed method of communicating the NT revelation** (*tote de*: “but then”): The “then” is clearly referring back to when “**God will provide the completed [to teleion] method of communicating the NT revelation**” mentioned in verse 10.

[b] **then our reception of the whole NT revelation will be more direct and our understanding of it more clear** (*prosopon pros prosopon*: “face to face”). The phrase is adverbial, with no subject here, so Paul’s point is not actually seeing someone’s face, as much as simply a comparison with seeing things in an equally hypothetical mirror. And because the context of the metaphor is how we receive divine revelation, Paul’s point is that when “the completed thing comes” (v. 10), “**then our reception of the whole NT revelation will be more direct and our understanding of it more clear**” because the more indirect and limited revelation coming from the gifts (like a mirror) will cease.

**G.2) Interpretation:** *Scripture provides more direct & clear revelation*

It is understandable that many would assume that Paul is alluding to literally seeing Christ “**face to face**” as the mode of revelation that will replace the gifts. However, there are several problems with this.

First, it is to be remembered that the Apostle is using metaphor. The phrase “**face to face**” cannot be taken any more literally than “seeing in a mirror.” Most would agree that in 12a Paul is not intending to say that he and the Corinthians were currently and literally looking into a real mirror and seeing the face of Christ “indirectly.” Therefore, it would seem misguided to assume that he is talking about them seeing a literal face in the future, let alone the literal face of Christ.

Accordingly, Dr. Gromacki writes, quoting Dr. Weaver:

If the mirror is metaphorical for something, then the ‘face to face’ experience is also metaphorical. If the mirror represents imperfect knowledge, then the face to face encounter is metaphorical for the complete state of knowledge.<sup>311</sup>

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<sup>311</sup> Gromacki, 127.

Likewise, Dr. Judisch pointed out:

Those who want “the complete thing” of verse 10 to be the state of eternal glory argue that the first clause of verse 12 is referring to seeing Christ in a dim way throughout this life and that the second clause speaks of seeing Christ face to face in a literal sense in heaven. Such an interpretation is dubious . . .

[I]t takes the “dimly” (*ainigmati*) of the first clause figuratively [not literally as seeing Christ’s face dimly with our eyes], but the “face to face” (*prosopon pros prosopon*) of the second clause literally; a more consistent approach to the intended contrast seems preferable . . . supplying the object “Christ” or “God” or the like is a rather arbitrary procedure.<sup>312</sup>

Finally, we will quote Dr. Compton:

Virtually all recognize that the first part of Paul’s analogy, “seeing in a mirror dimly,” functions metaphorically and refers to the limitations associated with the “in part” nature of the revelatory gifts in 13:9–10. (See, for example, Spicq, *Agape in the New Testament*, 2:162; and Garland, *1 Corinthians*, p. 623)

Taken as a metaphor, “face to face” simply means that, whenever “the perfect” comes, believers will see or perceive clearly, fully, and distinctly what previously they had seen only partially, indistinctly, and unclearly. . . . The predominant use of the “face to face” expression in the Old Testament as a metaphor argues in favor of Paul using it in a similar way in 1 Corinthians 13:12.<sup>313</sup>

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<sup>312</sup> Judisch, 51.

<sup>313</sup> Compton, 134-5, 138. See full discussion in Compton, 134-9 where he concludes:

The predominant use of the “face to face” expression in the Old Testament as a metaphor argues in favor of Paul using it in a similar way in 1 Corinthians 13:12. This is especially true when combining Numbers 12:8 with Exodus 33:11 and then comparing these with Paul’s analogy. God is described in Exodus 33:11 as speaking to Moses “face to face,” just as a man speaks to his friend.” In the parallel passage in Numbers 12:7–8, God declares that He reveals Himself to the Prophets in visions and dreams. This is not the case with Moses, how-ever. With Moses, God declares, He speaks “mouth to mouth,” that is, “openly and not in dark sayings.” Taking these two expressions “face to face” and “mouth to mouth” as synonymous, the contrast in Numbers 12:8 is between the piecemeal and somewhat

Secondly, we have a great deal of biblical evidence that he need not be referring to actually seeing God's face. The phrase "**face to face**" is used four other times in the NT and it is always speaking of another human (cf. Acts 25:16; 2 Cor 10:1; 2 John 1:12; 3 John 1:14) and never of Christ or God. Even when the phrase is used in the OT in reference to God, it simply means a more personal and direct revelation of God, and never literally seeing the "face" of God, which was forbidden.<sup>314</sup>

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enigmatic revelation given to the Prophets through visions and dreams and the full and direct revelation God gave to Moses.<sup>119</sup>

This appears to be the same contrast that Paul makes in 1 Corinthians 13:12a. Paul describes the church's perception of God's revelation, based on the revelatory gifts, as though someone were seeing something dimly in a mirror, that is, seeing something indistinctly or unclearly. In contrast, when God's revelation for the church is fully disclosed, it will be like seeing someone or something face to face, that is, clearly and distinctly.

In other words, partial revelation, whether through dreams and visions in the Old Testament or through the revelatory gifts in the New Testament, results in limited or restricted sight; complete revelation results in clear sight. The word "dimly" Paul uses in 1 Corinthians 13:12 is the same word the LXX uses to translate the expression "dark sayings" in Number 12:8, referring to God's revelation through the Prophets. Thus, consistent with the metaphor in the first half of Paul's analogy, to see something "**face to face**" in the second half means simply to perceive the revelation of God's will for the church clearly and completely.

<sup>314</sup> For the prohibition to seeing God's face see esp. Exod 33:11, 20,23; Gen 32:30; Num 12:8; 14:14; Deut 5:4; 34:10; Judg 6:22; and Ezek 20:35. Elsewhere in *KOG* we have written:

One of the earliest and most striking examples of a personal encounter with God is His revealing of Himself upon the request of Moses to, "**show me your glory.**" God variously describes what He reveals as, "**My goodness,**" "**My glory,**" and "**My back**" (Exod 33:18-23). God's personal encounters with Moses were so intimate that the Scriptures say, "**The LORD would speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks with his friend**" (Exod 33:11). Likewise, Jacob says, "**I saw God face to face**" (Gen 32:30; cf. Num 12:8; Deut 5:4)

Such statements need to be carefully interpreted in light of other Scripture concerning seeing God. For example, God tells Moses, "**you cannot see My face, for no one may see Me and live**" (Exod. 33:20). This echoes NT declarations including Christ's claim that, "**No one has seen the Father except the One who is from God; only He has seen the Father**" (John 6:46; cf. John 1:18; 1 John 4:12).

When the Apostle writes "**For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face**" (12a-b), he is probably alluding to how God described His revelatory relationship with Moses:

**When a Prophet of the LORD is among you, I reveal Myself to him in visions, I speak to him in dreams. But this is not true of My servant Moses . . . . With him I speak face to face, clearly and not in riddles; he sees the form of the LORD.** (Num 12:8)

Here, God too is saying that the gifts of divine knowledge and prophecy, which worked through "**visions**" and "**dreams**,"<sup>315</sup> was a more indirect method of divine revelation. And the "**face to face**" revelation that Moses received came to him in a more direct way. However, this did not mean that Paul was promising that we would consistently see "**the form of the Lord**" in our life on Earth like Moses. Nor did Moses actually see God's face, and not even his experience would imply the idea of seeing God or the Eternal State, an idea that so many want to impose on Paul's statement.

Dr. Charles Ryrie, in his well known *Study Bible*, objects that *to teleion* in verse 10 cannot "refer to the completion of the canon of Scripture [because] that would mean that we now see more clearly

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Likewise, the Apostle Paul describes God as the One, "**who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see**" (1 Tim. 6:16).

We must conclude then that when Isaiah says, "**I saw the Lord**" (Isa 6:1), that it was a physical representation of the presence of God rather than a vision of the full and real essence of God. In addition, it is necessary to see the phrase "**face to face**" as "a biblical idiom for direct personal communication" and not as a literal claim to have seen the unveiled face of God. Even though Jacob says, "**I saw God face to face**" (Gen. 32:30) his encounter with God is clearly described as occurring in the form of a "**man**" (*'iysh*, male person, 32:24). Jacob's description cannot be taken to mean that he saw God's physical face and it is clear that Jacob simply used this language to convey the intimacy that he experienced in his personal encounter with God. It is only in Heaven, after shedding mortality, that "**we shall see Him as He is**" (1 John 3:2). (2.4.10.B)

<sup>315</sup> For further discussion of the fact that the Apostles and Prophets received their revelation through more objective means such as visions, rather than merely "inspiration," see sections 10.7.C; chapter 8.3 and 9.5.

than Paul did.”<sup>316</sup> Dr. Ryrie’s argument suggests that Paul’s knowledge of the NT revelation was complete in c. 55 A.D. when Paul wrote this letter. That would seem unlikely considering that according to the consensus of modern scholarship, at least 20 of the 27 books of the NT hadn’t been written yet, including most of what Paul would contribute. (e.g. see helpful chart in *The Ryrie Study Bible*, 1499). The Apostle Paul never thought he was the sole source of the NT revelation, as he presented his revelation to “**Peter, James, and John**” for approval (cf. Gal 2:1-9).

Because we possess today 13 NT writings, none of which we can be certain that Paul ever saw, it would seem safe to say that our possession of the completed and entire NT does indeed give us a clearer and better understanding of the entire NT revelation than the Apostle.<sup>317</sup> Accordingly, Dr. Compton, in agreement with others<sup>318</sup> writes:

After all it is Paul who has declared that prophetic revelation is piecemeal (1 Cor 13:9). The portion of divine revelation that Paul knew was considerable, and he knew that portion as well as any believer could, but he still did not have the entirety of divine revelation for the church. Therefore, his understanding was to that extent limited and less than that which is available with the completed canon.<sup>319</sup>

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<sup>316</sup> Charles Ryrie, *Study Bible*, 1836, n. 13:10. In addition, there would seem to be a disconnect in Dr. Ryrie’s subsequent note on 13:11 where he states “With the completion of the NT the need for such gifts disappeared.” (Ibid., 1836, n. 13:11).

<sup>317</sup> Mr. Deere erroneously writes:

If this [*historicist*] view were correct, we would have to say that “Paul saw but a poor reflection as in a mirror, but we see face to face; Paul knew in part but we know fully . . . Even though we have the completed Bible today, would anyone seriously want to argue that our knowledge and experience of God are superior to the Apostle Paul’s?” (*Power*, 142).

Deere misstates the *historicist* position again. What we are specifically stating is that we have a more completed NT revelation than Paul had in c. 51 A.D. when he wrote 1 Corinthians. Who could say whether “our knowledge and experience of God are superior”? But such a question is irrelevant to disproving the *historicist* position.

<sup>318</sup> For additional support for the idea that Paul thought a completed NT revelation would even provide him a better understanding, see Reymond, 35, n. 12; Houghton, 353.

<sup>319</sup> Compton, 142.

The purpose of Paul's metaphor here is simply to tell the first century Corinthians that the "**communication of the whole NT revelation will be more direct and our understanding of it more clear**" after the "**completed**" thing mentioned in verse 10 becomes available. The Christian's possession of the entire NT revelation in written form gives them a "**clearer**" understanding of it than the "**limited**" understanding of the first century Christian who was only able to receive bits and pieces of it through the inspired utterances of the Apostles and Prophets. Also, our possession of the Scriptures makes our reception of God's word "**more direct**" and personal as it comes through the written word which we can possess personally (as opposed to only being known by an Apostle or Prophet). This is something that Paul says more expressly in the next statement.

## H) Interpretation of Verse 12c

### H.1) Text & Translation

**now I know in part** (1 Cor 13:12c NASB)

**now I know** [*ginōskō*] in part [*ek merous*]

**Now, even my gift of divine knowledge only allows me to understand part of the whole NT revelation [a]. And like seeing someone's reflection in a mirror, some of that understanding comes indirectly through others who also have gifts of divine knowledge and prophecy. And, not everything about the whole NT revelation is clear to me yet [b].**

[a] **my gift of divine knowledge:** Paul's switch to the singular "**I**" is significant and its significance lies in the unique abilities that Paul had to receive direct and divine revelations of new truth, which relatively few of the Corinthians had. See Paul's description of his unique abilities in Eph. 3:1-9. Paul in fact reminds the Corinthians of his special gift of revelation in 1 Cor 1:6-11 and 2 Cor 2:14, 11:6.

[b] **not everything about the whole NT revelation is clear to me yet:** This is intended to reflect *ek merous* in the text. However, when Paul says "I know in part", he is clearly making a

parallel statement to seeing in a mirror dimly. Therefore the meaning of “knowing in part” should reflect the mirror analogy as it does here. And again, his statement here also refers to the gift of knowledge which was a temporary method of understanding the NT revelation. Accordingly, Dr. Thiselton paraphrases Paul’s use of *ek merous* here as, “**The . . . attempt to put together fragments or “parts” of knowledge indirectly from various sources**”<sup>320</sup>

## H.2) Interpretation: *Paul’s understanding of NT revelation was partial*

By saying he knows divine revelation “**in part,**” the Apostle is simply repeating what we have suggested he is saying throughout the passage.

## I) Interpretation of Verse 12d

### I.1) Text & Translation

**but then I shall know fully just as I also have been fully known** (1 Cor 13:12d NASB)

**but then** [*tote de*] **I shall know fully** [*epiginōskō*] **just as I also have been fully known** [*epiginōskō*]

**But when** [a] **God provides the completed method of understanding, receiving, and communicating the whole NT revelation, then, like seeing someone in person, even I will have a more direct and better understanding of the whole NT revelation** [b]. **Just like people can have a more direct and better understanding of me if they meet me personally.**  
[c]

[a] **But when** (*tote de*: “but then”): This clearly again refers back to when “**God provides the completed method of understanding, receiving, and communicating the whole NT revelation**” mentioned in verse 10.

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<sup>320</sup> Thiselton 1069.

[b] **then, like seeing someone in person, even I will have a more direct and better understanding of the whole NT revelation** (*epiginōskō*: "to know"): The addition of the word "fully" in the NASB, NIV, RSV and similar phrases in the less literal translations, is not warranted by the Greek word *epiginōskō*. The word's mistranslation here significantly distorts the meaning of the text. *Epiginōskō* literally means to "know upon" and nothing more.

The word occurs 44 times in the Greek NT and is curiously translated "fully know" only here in the NASB and NIV. Usually it is translated simply "to recognize" or "to know." Its first occurrence is found in Matthew 7:16: "**By their fruit you will recognize** (*epiginōskō*) **them.**" *Ginosko* (know) and *epiginosko* (know upon) are virtually indistinguishable in the NT and because they are both used to convey the same meanings. Accordingly, the Greek reference *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (*NIDNTT*) makes no distinction between them.<sup>321</sup> *Epiginosko* then is not a "fuller" or "perfect" knowledge as opposed to *ginosko* as implied by these translations. Douglas Moo, Professor of NT at Wheaton, points out that:

Some scholars think that Paul generally distinguishes between *gnōsis/ginōskō* and *epignōsis/epiginōskō*, the latter denoting a "deeper," more advanced knowledge than the former<sup>322</sup>. . . . But any such distinction simply does not hold in Paul. As J. A. Robinson has shown<sup>323</sup> the *epi*-prefix indicates not intensity, but direction; and Paul uses *epignōsis* customarily with an object of the "knowing."<sup>324</sup>

Therefore, in this text, the Apostle is not speaking of him knowing *anything* "fully," nor of anyone, including God, knowing him "fully." The text should simply read: "**then I shall know just as I also have been known**" and the knowledge he speaks of is not

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<sup>321</sup> *NIDNTT*, 2:392, 93, 98.

<sup>322</sup> Even *Vine's Dictionary* makes the mistake of sharply distinguishing between *gnōsis* and *epi gnōsis*.

<sup>323</sup> J. A. Robinson, *St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians*, 2nd ed., (James Clarke, n.d.), 248-54.

<sup>324</sup> Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Eerdmans, 1996), 17, n. 139. The respected work of J. H. Moulton and George Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament* (Hodder & Stoughton, 1914-19) states that "The evidence of the [ancient Greek] papyri [writings]" supports Moo's and Robinson's definition. (Part III, 236)

some kind of full or perfect knowledge, but may in fact be imperfect and incomplete.

So what can we make of Paul's comparison between *ginōskō* and *epiginōskō* in verse 12? Paul says, "**now I know** [*ginōskō*] **in part, but then I shall know** [*epiginōskō*] **as I also have been known** [*epiginōskō*]. It has already been pointed out that the insertion of "fully" to reflect the use of *epiginōskō* erroneously implies a greater intensity, instead of simply direction. It is suggested here that what Paul is implying is a more "personal" knowledge, rather than a "perfect" knowledge.

This suggestion would not only reflect the Greek word's use in the NT, but is supported by the fact that Paul is simply restating his "mirror/face to face" metaphor here.<sup>325</sup> It is important at this point to see Paul's flow of thought in verse 12:

(12a): **For now we see in a mirror dimly**

(12b): **but then face to face;**

(12c): **now I know** [*ginōskō*] **in part** [*ek merous*],

(12d): **but then I shall know** [*epiginōskō*] **just as I also have been known** [*epiginōskō*].

This attaches the meaning of *epiginōskō* in 12d, to what it means to see someone "**face to face**" in 12b. This makes the difference between *ginōskō* and *epiginōskō* the same as the difference between indirectly seeing someone in a mirror and directly seeing someone "**face to face.**" The latter does not mean seeing something "perfectly," but rather more directly. This definition reflects the fact that the *epi*-prefix "upon" implies a direction of the knowledge instead of a greater intensity.

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<sup>325</sup> Dr. Compton expands the context even further back to verses 10 and 11:

Paul employs two additional analogies in 13:12 to support his argument regarding the cessation of miraculous gifts. Specifically, the explanatory "for" at the beginning of the verse indicates that the analogies here are explaining and reinforcing the analogy in 13:11. In effect, the analogies in this and the preceding verse clarify and support Paul's argument in 13:9–10 about the coming of "the perfect" and the cessation of that which is "in part." By repeating the "now"/"but then" language in both analogies in this verse, Paul highlights the contrast in 13:9–10 between what is presently experienced "in part" and what transpires when "the perfect" comes. (Similarly Fee, 647; and Thiselton, 1067. Contra Barrett, 306; and Thomas, *Understanding Spiritual Gifts*, p. 80. Barrett and Thomas take 13:11 as a parenthesis and tie 13:12 directly to 3:10). (133)

In addition, the meaning of *epiginōskō* is derived from a contrast with “**in part**” (*ek merous*) in 12c. *Ek merous* never carries the idea of “imperfect” or “flawed” and therefore it is suggested that *epiginōskō* cannot carry the meaning of “perfect” or “flawless” knowledge, which again, is not reflected in the prefix *epi* anyway.

**[c] Just like people can have a more direct and better understanding of me if they meet me personally:** The common, but misguided, practice of interpreting *to teleion* as “perfect” when it is being compared to *ek merous* (“in part”) has already been pointed out above. The unlikelihood that *epiginōskō* can be interpreted as “perfect” knowledge has also been pointed out here.

The NLT rendering of verse 12c-d offers a good example of the absurdity that occurs when the idea of “perfection” is forced upon these terms: **“All that I know now is partial and incomplete, but then I will know everything completely, just as God knows me now.”**

First of all, “God” is not in the Greek text, although it is carelessly inserted in many modern translations (cf. TEV, NEB, PME, NCV, CEV). *Paul could just as well be speaking about how he can be known by other people, instead of by God.* This is a critical point.<sup>326</sup> Assuming that Paul is speaking of God unnecessarily skews the meaning of the text. Accordingly, Dr. Weaver writes concerning 1 Corinthians 13:12:

Another possible interpretation is that Paul is contrasting the subjective knowledge that a person has of himself with the more objective knowledge that others have of him. The prophet’s narrow insight given to him for a local need gives way to the more universal message recorded in canonical scripture. In connection with this it is noteworthy that Paul

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<sup>326</sup> If Dr. Thomas made this one observation, and did not unnecessarily insert “God” into the text, we wonder if he might change his view. He has written:

As to I Corinthians 13:10, this brief survey of prophecy and knowledge gives plausibility to assigning the completed New Testament canon as the meaning of *to teleion*. Yet one serious drawback confronts the advocate of this viewpoint, and that is the reference in v. 12 to the condition which so obviously will be realized only at the *parousia*. Thomas, “Tongues,” 82.

does not speak specifically of knowing as God knows him, but merely, "as I am known," the agent left unexpressed.<sup>327</sup>

Notice again what the text says when we erroneously insert "God" into the text. The NLT has the Apostle saying, "**but then I will know everything completely, just as God knows me now.**" *No he will not.* That cannot be what the Apostle intended to say. Nonetheless, "charismatic" scholars such as D. A. Carson, Wayne Grudem, and Jack Deere place this very interpretation on the text. For example, Mr. Deere writes:

[T]he statement, "Then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known" (v. 12) can only refer to the Lord's return. . . . The translation of the New International Version, "fully known" accurately reflects the meaning of the verb *epiginōskō*. . . . Paul is not saying that when the Lord returns, believers will be omniscient like the Lord. Rather, we will know accurately without any misinformation or misconceptions . . . when the Lord returns . . . we shall know as fully as we are known.<sup>328</sup>

First, Mr. Deere makes the critical error of imposing the idea of "full" on the prefix *epi* in *epiginōskō*. Secondly, he is not honest enough about the comparison the Apostle is making. Likewise, Drs. Carson and Grudem claim that their view only means that our knowledge will "resemble" God's.<sup>329</sup> But Paul says, "**I shall know [epiginōskō], even as [kathos] I am known [epiginōskō].** *Kathos* does not convey the idea of remotely resembling something. Dr. Fee notes that, "Paul uses this word [*kathōs*] 25 times, always with the connotation, "exactly as," i.e., "it makes an exact comparison."

<sup>330</sup> Accordingly, Dr. Compton remarks:

The debate centers on the second half of the analogy with the meaning of the statement, "I will know fully just as I also have been fully known." The majority opinion is that Paul is once again addressing events surrounding the return of Christ. As such, the statement is interpreted to mean that, in conjunction with Christ's return and the church's being gathered to stand before Him, believers will know God as fully then as they are fully known by God now.

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<sup>327</sup> Weaver, 14, 21. Author agrees with my interpretation.

<sup>328</sup> Deere, *Power*, 142, 282, n. 9.

<sup>329</sup> Carson, *Spirit*, 70; Grudem, *Prophecy*, 213.

<sup>330</sup> Fee, *1 Cor.*, 649.

There are a number of problems with this interpretation that make it unacceptable. The first is that this interpretation, in effect, says too much. It blurs the creator–creature distinction by equating in some way, at least, the believer’s knowledge of God with God’s knowledge of the believer.

A number of those championing this [return of Christ] interpretation sense this tension. They attempt to mitigate the tension by adding qualifiers to the effect that the verse does not say what this interpretation seems to imply. The knowledge the believer will have of God is similar in only some ways, they explain, to the knowledge God has of the believer.

Such qualifications, however, are not supported by the text. The expression Paul employs in the comparison, “just as,” does not permit qualifying or lessening the force of the comparison. The expression is used a number of times elsewhere by Paul, always in the sense of an exact correspondence.<sup>331</sup>

The erroneous conclusion that one comes to from these translations, and the meaning imposed on them by many interpreters, is that *in Heaven our knowledge will be as complete and perfect as God’s current and perfect knowledge of us*. That simply is not true. We will never be “all-knowing” like God. This fact alone strongly argues against the insertion of “God” here or the implication of perfect knowledge. Logically and biblically, you cannot impose such a meaning on this text. It is admitted that Paul is obviously implying a *better* knowledge in the terms and metaphors here, but not a *perfect* God-like knowledge.

**I.2) Interpretation:** *When the NT revelation was complete even Paul would have a more complete understanding and direct experience of it*

“God” is not in the original text, and should not be added. We suggest all the Apostle is saying is that when the “**completed**” mode of revelation comes, it will be a more direct mode than the gifts. Because the Apostle himself did not personally possess all NT revelation, even he did not know it all directly.

Once again, the metaphor of “**know in part**” vs. “**know fully even as I am known**” needs to be interpreted in a way that is consistent with the mirror/“face to face” analogy, and even the

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<sup>331</sup> Compton, 139-40.

adult/child analogy. Neither of these metaphors describe something imperfect becoming perfect. An adult's communication and reasoning skills are not perfect, nor is a human's visual perception, even by direct sight. This same theme of indirect/direct then needs to guide our interpretation of the Paul's third metaphor of knowing something indirectly and "**in part**," and knowing someone in a fuller and more direct way because you know them personally.

This is simply the contrast between how the Corinthians might have experienced Paul indirectly and "**in part**" from his letters, but in a fuller and more direct way when he visited them personally. Once again, the Apostle is merely contrasting the indirect way that divine revelation comes to the average Christian, with the more directly and personally accessible way it comes to us in Scripture. This will be analogous to how some *people* knew Paul—directly, personally.

Too many underestimate the value of having the completed Scriptures. It enables us to go from knowing very little about God, to perhaps knowing a great part of everything we will ever know about Him. Perhaps the increase in the *quantity* of our knowledge of God in Heaven is exaggerated. Will we learn of a new characteristic of God in addition to His love, grace, or power?

The completed NT Scriptures provide us with an exponential increase in our knowledge of the ways and will of God. Again, think about how much we would know about Him without Scripture? Perhaps the exponential increase in our knowledge through Scripture is more comparable to the shift in our knowledge that will occur at the return of Christ, than many have considered. Indeed, we will have a more direct and personal knowledge of things, but that knowledge may still be about the same love, grace, and power we know of now.

## **J) Interpretation of Verse 13**

### **J.1) Text & Translation**

**But now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.** (1 Cor 13:13 NASB)

**But now [*de nuni*] abide [*menei*] faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.**

**But now [a], unlike these temporary methods of divine revelation [b], the virtues of faith, hope, and love will continue [c]. But the greatest of all these is love, because it will not only outlast these gifts, but faith and hope as well [d].**

[a] **But now** (*de nuni*): The question among some is whether Paul's meaning is temporal (as in "now at this time") or logical (as "in conclusion"). The difference is important, as the former maintains the temporal theme of the passage. Paul has repeatedly contrasted the state of things "now" (in c. 50 A.D.) and what they will be like in the future. Accordingly, *nuni* most naturally carries a temporal meaning in the Greek.<sup>332</sup> Dr. Fee writes:

Despite the long debate over the temporal or logical force of the combination, "and now," it is difficult under any circumstances to divest the adverb "now" of all temporal sense. That is, even if its basic thrust is logical (= but as it is), it carries the force "as it is in the present state of things."

This seems to be all the more so here, given the present tense of the verb "remain," and the fact that these three opening words conjoin directly to the preceding eschatological words. Thus, however we finally translate them, these opening words seem to imply some kind of present situation over against what is yet to be . . .<sup>333</sup>

Dr. Judisch adds: "Some would argue that since the original and most common sense of *nuni* is temporal rather than logical, one should render verse 13, 'But *in the present age* three things endure.'"<sup>334</sup>

[b] **But now, unlike these temporary methods of divine revelation:** Paul has begun this statement with "But now" and is clearly referring to the current situation. Throughout this passage, in Paul's contrast between the "now" and "then," the subject of the "now" is the temporary gifts. See especially verse 12. It must be remembered too that Paul is concluding his argument here, the main purpose of which has been to emphasize how very temporary (like childhood) these gifts are. So not only throughout this whole

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<sup>332</sup> For further support of the temporal meaning for *nuni* at 1 Corinthians 13:13 see Thomas, "Tongues," 84.

<sup>333</sup> Fee, *Presence*, 212.

<sup>334</sup> Judisch, 48.

passage is the temporary nature of these gifts the subject, but it is also the subject of this last verse. The continuing virtues are being contrasted with the ceasing gifts.

[c] **the virtues of faith, hope, and love will continue** (*menei*: "remain, endure") This word is from the Greek *menō* and used in the NT 118 times and is variously interpreted in the NASB as "continue, endure, last, remain, abide, and stay."

However, it does not always communicate an *eternal* existence. For example, Paul in 1 Corinthians tells the unmarried to "**remain**" (*meinōsin*) unmarried (7:8) and "**Each one should remain** (*menetō*) **in the situation which he was in when God called him**" (7:20). The word in these verses is clearly used to mean something that endures during this lifetime, not eternity. Therefore, when the next occurrence of this word in this letter comes in 13:13, we should not assume that the Corinthians understood it necessarily as an eternal endurance, but simply something that will last longer than the gifts that will cease.

[d] **But the greatest of all these is love, because it will not only outlast these gifts, but faith and hope as well:** This explains how and why love could be greater than faith and hope. The best reason must be taken from the immediate context. One theme throughout this passage is the contrast between the temporary and the enduring. Those who would try to explain love's superiority to faith and hope in terms of anything but its eternal endurance (the fact of which Paul began his whole argument, v. 8) completely ignores the context here.

This view has ancient support. Tertullian (c. 200) quotes 1 Corinthians 13:13 and then comments:

Rightly [is love the greatest]. For faith departs when we are convinced by vision, by seeing God. And hope vanishes when the things hoped for come about. But love both comes to completion and grows more when the perfect has been given.

<sup>335</sup>

Chrysostom (c. 400 A.D.) shares Tertullian's view:

When the good things believed and hoped for have come, faith and hope cease. . . . 'For hope that is seen is not hope' (Rom 8:24). . . . So these cease when those appear, but then love

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<sup>335</sup> Tertullian, *Who is the Rich Man?*, 38; online at [www.ccel.org](http://www.ccel.org).

becomes most exalted. . . . 'The greatest of these is love' (I Cor 13:13).<sup>336</sup>

Likewise, Calvin (1509-1564) comments on this passage:

For faith does not remain after death, inasmuch as the Apostle elsewhere contrasts it with sight, (2 Corinthians 5:7) and declares that it remains only so long as we are absent from the Lord . . . . Faith and hope belong to a state of imperfection; *love* will remain even in a state of perfection.<sup>337</sup>

As these men noted, such perspectives on the relationship between faith, hope, and love come from the Apostle Paul himself. Regarding faith, he wrote the Corinthians themselves:

**So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal. . . . We live by faith, not by sight.** (2 Cor 4:18; 5:7)

Likewise, the author of Hebrews wrote: **"Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see"** (11:1). Simply put, the biblical concept of faith ceases to exist when the object of faith is physically seen. According to the Apostle, we now **"live by faith"** but in Heaven **"by sight."** Faith is simply not needed after Christ's return, for we will see all we need to.

Likewise, the virtue of hope disappears with sight. The Apostle writes:

**For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.** (Rom 8:24-25)

This is why the Apostle says love is greater than faith or hope. It lasts forever, **"never fails"** (v. 8). But faith and hope, while abiding with love during the present age, will cease in the next age.

This would all be perfectly clear to everyone except this meaning argues against the idea that the gifts being discussed in the passage would also remain until the end of this age along with faith, hope, and love. In fact, we need to quote rather ancient sources to find the common sense interpretation argued above, because most

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<sup>336</sup> Chrysostom, *1 Cor. Homily*, 34:5; online at [www.ccel.org](http://www.ccel.org).

<sup>337</sup> Calvin, *Comm.*, *in loc.*

modern commentators argue that Paul thought faith and hope would last as long as love, or that love is qualitatively better than faith and hope. They conclude just about anything except the common sense meaning in the passage and throughout Scripture, that the reason Paul says love is greater than faith and hope is that it lasts longer.

One notable exception is the Pentecostal Dr. Fee who argues this very thing, but as Dr. Thomas notes: "Surprisingly, Fee champions this interpretation as well, but does not clarify how this interpretation fits in with his having the revelatory gifts also continuing throughout the present age."<sup>338</sup>

We could debate on merely philosophical grounds as to whether we will be exercising faith and hope in Heaven, simply based on human understandings of these virtues. But we do not need to debate this with mere human philosophy as so many do. Scripture gives us the answer. Nor do we need to speculate as to how the Apostle thought love was superior to faith and hope as many do. He tells us.

Nonetheless, most modern expositors attempt to find a different meaning. Dr. Morris seems to avoid the issues completely when he writes: "We should not press Paul's comparison too closely, nor waste our time inquiring into the precise manner in which love surpasses faith or hope."<sup>339</sup> On the contrary, the Apostle intends it to be an essential point to the conclusion of the argument of the passage.

Charles Hodge (1797-1878), like many today, argued that faith and hope are eternal like love:

If, however, (vuvì δέ), *but now*, be taken, as is commonly done, as relating to time, the meaning is, 'Now, i.e. so long as we continue in this world, there remain faith, hope and love.' These are the three great permanent Christian graces, as opposed to the mere temporary gifts of prophecy, miracles, and tongues.

But this does not seem to be consistent with what precedes. The contrast is not between the more or less permanent gifts pertaining to our present state; but between what belongs exclusively to the present, and what is to continue for ever [precisely]. In v. 8 it is said of love, as a ground or reason of

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<sup>338</sup> Thomas, *Understanding Spiritual Gifts*, 83-84. In Fee see *1 Cor.*, 649-51

<sup>339</sup> Morris, 185.

its pre-eminence, that *it never fails*; and here the same idea is expressed by saying, *it abides*.

'To abide,' therefore, must mean, that it continues for ever. The same permanence is attributed to faith, hope, and love. They are all contrasted with the temporary gifts, and they are all said to abide. The one [love] is to continue as long as the others [faith and hope].<sup>340</sup>

We confess that Dr. Hodge is confusing here. Nonetheless, his conclusion that faith and hope "abide" as long as love ignores both the immediate context and what other Scripture says about faith and hope. Contrary to Dr. Hodge, we pointed out above the Greek *menō* often does not mean lasts forever. Unfortunately, Dr. Hodge's view is reflected in the REB translation which reads: "There are three things that last forever."

Dr. Hodge goes on to suggest that the superiority of love is in its greater quality:

Others say that love is superior to faith and hope, because the latter belong to the present state only, and love is to continue for ever. But, according to the true interpretation of the verse, all these graces are declared to abide.

The true explanation is to be found in the use which Paul makes of this word *greater*, or the equivalent term *better*. In 12:31, he exhorts his readers to seek *the better* gifts, i.e. the more useful ones. And in 14:5, he says, 'Greater is he that prophesies, than he that speaks with tongues;' i.e. he is more useful.

Throughout that chapter the ground of preference of one gift to others is made to consist in its superior usefulness. This is Paul's standard; and judged by this rule, love is greater than either faith or hope. Faith saves ourselves, but love benefits others.<sup>341</sup>

Admittedly, Dr. Hodge is full of ingenuity here. However, would anyone want to seriously argue that in this life love is "more useful" than faith! Or would we want to argue that our faith never "benefits others"? On the contrary, without the Christian faith that Paul is speaking of, Christian love itself is nonexistent. Trying to make love qualitatively better than faith and hope, rather than

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<sup>340</sup> Charles Hodge, *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, in *loc.*; online at [www.ccel.org](http://www.ccel.org).

<sup>341</sup> *Ibid*

merely longer lasting, has a number of problems with it that are unnecessary and unbiblical.

Dr. Barrett argues that faith ceases at the end of this age if Paul is referring to the "miracle-working faith" mentioned in 13:2. But in the sense of general Christian faith, he says "the life of the age to come will rest on faith as completely as does the Christian life now."

<sup>342</sup> Those following Dr. Barrett in some sense include Drs. Thiselton,  
<sup>343</sup> Karl Barth,<sup>344</sup> and H. Conzelmann.<sup>345</sup>

However, this view seems to clearly ignore what the rest of Scripture says concerning the nature of faith. Ironically, Dr. Barrett himself, in his commentary on 2 Corinthians, states concerning the Apostle's statement that "**we live by faith, not by sight**" (2 Cor 5:7): "sight is a good counterpart to faith."<sup>346</sup> If it is, then we best not confuse our current age of faith, to the future age of sight.

Likewise, in our opinion, Dr. Thiselton shows a complete misunderstanding of the nature of the gifts Paul is discussing when he writes:

[H. W.] Meyer correctly argues that Paul cannot be using [*menei*] to mean remains until the parousia [like Hodge did], as if to distinguish this triad [of virtues] from spiritual gifts that fall away as the church matures, for then he would be omitting prophetic preaching, teaching, and knowledge, which the church needs throughout its history.<sup>347</sup>

On the contrary, this is precisely what the Apostle is saying because the gifts of prophecy and divine knowledge produced extra-biblical divine revelation. The Apostle is indeed distinguishing the duration of the gifts and the virtues of faith, hope, and love. Which, again, is why so many wish the Apostle to be saying something else.

Unfortunately, Dr. Carson writes regarding the Apostle's view of hope:

[I]t is true that there is a sense in which hope is no longer

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<sup>342</sup> Barrett, 308-9.

<sup>343</sup> Thiselton, 1073.

<sup>344</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 5 vols., (T&T Clark, 1936-1977), 4/2 (sect. 68), 840.

<sup>345</sup> H. Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, trans. J. W. Leitch (1975), 230-31.

<sup>346</sup> C. K. Barrett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Hendrickson, 1997), 158.

<sup>347</sup> Thiselton, 1073.

needed once eternity dawns. But that is not the only sense of hope: in 1 Corinthians 15:19, for instance, Paul writes, "If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men." Presumably in one sense Paul expects hope to continue beyond this life in the continued enjoyment of that for which we hoped."<sup>348</sup>

In Carson's view then, Paul meant that if our hope in Christ does not *exist* after death, we are to be pitied. What is more likely is that Paul meant that if our hope in Christ does not *apply* after death, we are to be pitied.

Notice that the NIV which Dr. Carson quotes says "If only *for* this life" rather than "If only *in* this life." Such a translation of the Greek *en* would seem to argue against his interpretation. The TEV for instance translates the Greek "**If our hope in Christ is good for** (as opposed to "exists in") **this life only, and no more, then we deserve more pity than anyone else.**"

This translation is supported by the context. The idea that our hope in Christ would simply continue after death does not support Paul's argument concerning the importance of the resurrection. However, the fact that experiencing the *effect* of our hope depends on the resurrection, does strengthen Paul's argument.

It is true that some translations interpret *en* here as "in" (NASB, NKJV), however most interpret it as "for" (NIV, RSV, TEV, JB, NEB, NCV, CEV, and NLT). The preposition can be translated either way and the *NIDNTT* says: "Sometimes all the exegete can do is to reduce the number of possible meanings of *en* by examining the context." And again, it is suggested here that the context of 1 Corinthians 15 favors "for" instead of "in."

Regardless, Dr. Carson can offer no other verse in the NT that would imply that hope, as we know it, continues into eternity; and basing such a conclusion on the debatable interpretation of the verse he cites and his merely hypothetical reasoning does little to change Paul's clear statement in Romans that "**hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has?**" (8:24).

Regarding faith, Dr. Carson says:

[I]t is true that in one sense faith will be displaced by sight. But there is another sense in which faith is simply thankful trust in God, deep appreciation for him, committed subservience to him. Will there be any time . . . during which the very basis of my presence in the celestial courts will be

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<sup>348</sup> Carson, *Spirit*, 74.

something *other* than faith in the grace of God? <sup>349</sup>

Yes, there will. We will be in the physical presence of Grace, and will no longer need faith. Again, Dr. Carson can offer no Scripture for his claim, and his attempt at redefining faith again does nothing to change what the Scriptures clearly state: "**Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.**" (Heb. 11:1). The effects of our biblical faith continue beyond this life, but not faith itself.

Although Dr. Fee adopts the view that in 1 Corinthians 13:8-13 Paul has in mind the return of Christ, he would seem to at least exercise some common sense when it comes to verse 13:

The obvious difficulty with the eschatological view [i.e. Paul is referring to Christ's return]—with which all who adopt it struggle in some way—is how Paul could envision "faith" and "hope" as continuing into eternity, especially since in 2 Cor. 5:7 he contrasts faith with the final glory in the words "for we walk by faith and not by sight," and in Rom. 8:24 he says that "hope that is seen is not hope."

Despite a variety of suggestions as to how these two virtues could still be a part of our eternal existence, I find the idea especially incompatible with Rom 8:24. "Hope" does not seem to be a meaningful concept once it has been realized." <sup>350</sup>

And yet he does not change his view that Paul is speaking of the return of Christ.

Dr. Thomas is one of the relatively few who takes a common sense approach to Paul's thought:

A further weakness in seeing *to teleion* as the *parousia* is the unnatural interpretation of v. 13 that results. Since the entire paragraph dwells upon the temporal superiority of love, v. 13 in bringing the paragraph to a climax would most naturally maintain this same emphasis. *Nuni* would have a temporal force in such a setting as this, and v. 13a would refer to the abiding character of faith, hope and love during the present and up to the *parousia*.

Also v. 13b would explain love's supremacy among these three on the basis of its eternal character. Love alone will survive the *parousia*. This agrees with Paul's concept of faith and hope in two other epistles of this period. In II Corinthians 5:7 he notes that faith will be replaced by sight at the coming

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<sup>349</sup> *Ibid.*, 74-75.

<sup>350</sup> Fee, *1 Cor.*, 650, n. 58.

of Christ. Similarly Romans 8:24–25 expresses his concept of hope as ceasing at this same moment. Thus because of love's never failing (v. 8a) at the beginning of the paragraph it is "the greatest of these" at the end (v. 13b).<sup>351</sup>

Dr. Thomas then adds a suggestion as to why there is so much confusion on this topic:

The temporal understanding of v. 13 is at least as old as Chrysostom, and has been espoused by some more recently. But for some mysterious reason it has been avoided by the majority.

Why has what appears to be an obvious meaning been so avoided? The motivation in a majority of the cases, if not all, has been a desire not to lose the contrast between prophecy, tongues and knowledge on the one hand, and faith-hope on the other. In other words, the compulsion is to extend faith and hope beyond the *parousia* so as to produce a temporal distinction between these and the three spiritual gifts mentioned earlier.

In other words, all agree that Paul is making the three virtues superior to the three gifts. So in order to maintain the presumption that the gifts were to endure until Christ's return, they need to make the gifts endure beyond Christ's return. Accordingly, Dr. Thomas adds:

Built into this scheme is the impregnable assumption that prophecy, tongues and knowledge extend up to the time of the *parousia*. Here possibly is the origin of what for many is an insoluble problem in v. 13. Is it not much more direct to notice that prophecy, tongues and knowledge do not necessarily cover the entire period up to the *parousia*, and that herein lies the contrast with faith-hope. In this way the more natural temporal connotation can be assigned to v. 13.<sup>352</sup>

## **J.2) Interpretation:** *even faith & hope will outlast the revelatory gifts in the Church Age*

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<sup>351</sup> Thomas "Tongues," 84.

<sup>352</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

The NASB translates v. 13: "**But now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.**" On this verse, Dr. Fee asks an important question, but gives a disappointing and unacceptable answer:

But why this triad in the present context where the contrast has been between gifts and love? The answer lies beyond our immediate reach, since it is probably related to his former association with this church, where he had spent eighteen months preaching and teaching.<sup>353</sup>

On the contrary, Dr. Morris is more substantial and accurate when he writes:

[T]he verb *remain* is singular in the Greek. . . . Paul is seeing the three as in some sense one. They form a unity. By adding *these three* he effectively sets them apart from everything else. They are pre-eminent [above the three gifts]. Nothing may stand with them [even the three gifts]. We see this also in the fact that the three are often linked in the New Testament and early Christian literature (Rom. 5:2-5; Gal. 5:5f.; Eph. 1:15-18; 4:2-5; Col. 1:4f.; 1 Thess. 1:3; 5:8; Heb. 6:10-12; 10:22-24; 1 Pet. 1:3-8, 21f.; cf. Barnabas 1:4; 11:8; Polycarp 3:2f.).<sup>354</sup>

The fact that the whole point of Paul's argument here is to stress the temporary nature of the revelatory gifts, and the fact that he attaches *meno* (endurance, continuance) to faith, hope, and love makes it clear that *he is arguing that the triad of virtues is greater than the triad of gifts simply because they last longer*. But what is also apparent is not only that faith and hope outlast these gifts, but love outlasts them all. The Bible would seem to be clear that in Heaven, both faith and hope are no longer necessary (cf. Rom 8:24-25, 2 Cor. 4:18, 5:7, Heb. 11:1). But Paul had introduced this section of Scripture by stating that "**love lasts forever**" (v. 8) and this is the most obvious reason why it is greater than even faith and hope (v. 13).

Therefore, it is suggested here that we also have a triad of time segments: 1) The gifts, becoming obsolete and being abolished (v. 8 *katargeo*) in what would seem to be the relatively near future for the Corinthians, as their temporal nature is even likened to the very temporary and fleeting nature of childhood (v. 11); 2) the

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<sup>353</sup> Fee, *Presence*, 213.

<sup>354</sup> Morris, 184-5.

endurance of faith, hope, and love beyond the existence of these gifts, until Christ's return, thus making the virtues greater than the gifts because of their greater endurance; and 3) the eternal endurance of love even after Christ's return which makes it greater than the three gifts and the other two virtues. Another way of saying it is that there were three gifts that were to cease in this age, three virtues that were to remain during this age, and one virtue that would remain beyond this age.

The fact that Paul compares the temporary nature of these gifts with the more enduring nature of faith, hope and love is intended to strengthen his argument regarding the inferior value of these gifts compared to these virtues. The Corinthians know that faith, hope, and love will last until they die or the Lord returns, just like the marriages and life situations that Paul had described earlier with *meno* as well (ch. 7). But he gives no such assurance for the Corinthians regarding the endurance of these gifts, and in fact stresses their transitory nature throughout.

Notice that Paul includes love as not only enduring past this life (13b), but as something that endures throughout this life also with faith and hope (13a). *Those who would claim that these gifts were to endure as long as faith and hope (i.e. the return of Christ), make these gifts in one sense equal to love which accompanies them.* A conclusion which is completely contrary to everything Paul is saying here. Because the triad of virtues was clearly to be understood as remaining until the Lord's return, the triad of gifts could not be understood this way in the context of Paul's argument.<sup>355</sup>

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<sup>355</sup> This is perhaps the only place in Dr. Compton's exegesis of 1 Corinthians 13:8-13 where we were a little disappointed. While he covers the rest of the passage in some detail, and comes to the same conclusion as we regarding v. 13, his discussion here is rather short. Perhaps he felt the need to bring an otherwise excellent article to an end.

Accordingly, we must go back over 30 years to find what we believe to be a complete and accurate interpretation of v. 13. Dr. Judisch correctly stated the obvious, not being biased against the *historicist* view as others would seem to be:

Verse 13 makes the point that, while prophecies, tongues, and prophetic knowledge will disappear, faith, hope, and love go on. Paul cannot be thinking then of a contrast between this life [the duration of which the three gifts endure] and the life to come [in which the three virtues endure]. For although love will go on into eternity (v. 8), faith and hope will not.

Hope in the midst of eternal bliss is a contradiction in terms, as Paul observes elsewhere: "Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience" (Rom. 8:24-25).

## K) An Expanded Translation

In the introduction above, it was stated that our purpose was to present evidence in favor of interpreting this passage as teaching that the gifts mentioned were to cease with the completion, canonization, and distribution of the NT revelation. Knowing this, it may seem that the above expanded translations are intentionally biased toward this opinion, as they would seem to clearly point to such a conclusion. However, a comparison of the expanded translations with the literal NASB will reveal that actually the former differs from the latter in only the following, relatively minor ways:

- 1) The context, one of which consists of God's method of communicating divine revelation to His people, is explicitly mentioned throughout the text. The "revelatory" context was established in section A.3 above.
- 2) The *Scripture* and *sign* gifts which introduce the passage in verse 8, are explicitly mentioned whenever they are referred to throughout the passage. And as discussed under the "biblical" context in section A.2 above, they are described as the NT consistently describes them as miraculous gifts of divine revelation and authentication.
- 3) Paul's statements are repeated throughout the text where applicable so that his train of thought may be better followed.
- 4) The Greek *to teleion* in verse 10 is translated as "**complete**" instead of "*perfect*" as in the NASB.

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Likewise faith, because of the element of hope essential to it, is also inappropriate to the world to come. So Paul observes that while we are in the body, "we walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Cor. 5:7). And in a passage familiar to all, "faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1).

The Apostle cannot mean, therefore, death or the parousia as the date at which the prophetic gifts will finally cease. Indeed, in order to make a point of the contrast between the temporary nature of the [miraculous] gifts and the relatively enduring nature of faith and hope, Paul must presuppose the disappearance of the [miraculous] gifts a considerable time before the translation to glory of the church in general. (47-48).

- 5) The most obvious meaning of Paul's contrasting metaphors (mirror/face to face and child/adult) in verses 11 and 12a are explicitly included in the text.
- 6) The Greek verb *epiginosko* in verse 12 is correctly given the meaning of "**direct and personal**" knowledge, instead of "full" or "perfect" knowledge.

Accordingly, we will conclude with the expanded translation of 1 Corinthians 13:8-13 for which we have offered several arguments above:

**[8] Love lasts forever. But unlike love, wherever God has provided the temporary method of receiving the NT revelation through the gift of prophecy, that method of divine revelation will be abolished. Wherever God has provided the temporary method of authenticating the NT revelation, particularly to the Jews, through the gift of miraculously speaking in foreign languages, that method of divine authentication will cease to function. Wherever God has provided the temporary method of receiving and communicating the NT revelation through the gift of divine knowledge, that method of divine revelation will also be abolished.**

**[9] These temporary methods of divine revelation will be abolished because currently the gift of divine knowledge operates in pieces through separate individuals in isolated cases, therefore providing us with only a partial and fragmented reception, understanding, and communication of the whole NT revelation. Likewise, currently the gift of prophecy operates in pieces through separate individuals in isolated cases, therefore providing us with only a partial and fragmented reception, understanding, and communication of the whole NT revelation.**

**[10] But when these fragmentary and temporary methods of revelation have fulfilled their purpose, God will provide the completed method of receiving, understanding, and communicating the whole NT revelation, and these fragmentary and temporary methods will become obsolete.**

**[11] As an analogy, when I was a child I used to communicate information like a child, process information like a child, and receive information like a child. But when I became an adult, I permanently replaced these temporary and inferior methods of communicating, processing, and receiving information, and changed to better methods of communication, allowing me to communicate more clearly and understand more completely.**

**[12a] Another analogy of the modes of revelation we experience now in the first century through these gifts, is how we would perceive someone through their reflection in a mirror in an indirect and limited way.**

**[12b] But when God provides the completed method of communicating the NT revelation, then our reception of the whole NT revelation will be more direct and our understanding of it more clear. It will be like seeing someone in person as opposed to just seeing their reflection in a mirror.**

**[12c] Now, even my gift of divine knowledge only allows me to understand part of the whole NT revelation. And like seeing someone's reflection in a mirror, some of that understanding comes indirectly through others who also have gifts of divine knowledge and prophecy. And, not everything about the whole NT revelation is clear to me yet.**

**[12d] But when God provides the completed method of understanding, receiving, and communicating the whole NT revelation, then, like seeing someone in person, even I will have a more direct and better understanding of the whole NT revelation. Just like people can have a more direct and better understanding of me if they meet me personally.**

**[13] But now, unlike these temporary methods of divine revelation, the virtues of faith, hope, and love will continue. But the greatest of all these is love,**

**because it will not only outlast these gifts, but faith and hope as well.** <sup>356</sup>

### **Publications & Particulars**

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<sup>356</sup> The greatly respected Reformed scholar, Sinclair Ferguson, likewise writes:

We might paraphrase I Corinthians 13:8-12 in the following way:

Love will never come to an end, since God himself is love; but special gifts like prophecy and speaking in tongues and the word of knowledge will, since they are only temporary ways in which the God of love makes himself known to us.

At the moment the knowledge of God we receive from prophecy, tongues and words of knowledge gives us only fragmentary knowledge of God. When we have the whole picture these gifts will give way - 'when perfection enters, imperfection creeps away'; 'the grown man puts away his baby toys', as they say.

Tongues, words of knowledge, prophecies - they are all like looking into the mirrors for which you Corinthians are so famous! But even a mirror with 'Made in Corinth' on it is a poor substitute for seeing (and therefore knowing) yourself as clearly as someone else can see and know you! But in the future, when we have the complete knowledge God has planned for us, we will not need to depend on these imperfect mirrors of tongues, words of knowledge and prophecy. Then we will know God completely, not merely in a fragmentary way -just as others know us.

Such a paraphrase has the merit of questioning the ease with which 'Perfection' and 'know fully, even as I am fully known' have been equated with the parousia and 'being known by God'. (*The Holy Spirit* [Intervarsity, 1996], 227-8.



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## Chapter 8.7

# Answering Arguments Against *Historicism*

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*Publications & Particulars*

### **Primary Points**

- *Historicism* is our label for those who recognize the fact that the *Scripture* and *sign gifts* such as divine knowledge, prophecy, healing, and tongues ceased with the completion of the reception, recording, recognition, and sufficient distribution of the NT revelation.
- The most important evidence for *historicism* comes from the intended purpose of the *Scripture* and *sign gifts*.
- At least one of the first century *Scripture* and *sign gifts*, apostleship, is widely recognized as ceasing during the early



## A) A Summary of Biblical Evidence for *Historicism*

*Historicism* is our label for those who recognize the fact that the *Scripture* and *sign gifts* such as divine knowledge, prophecy, healing, and tongues ceased with the completion of the reception, recording, recognition, and sufficient distribution of the NT revelation. Several arguments for *historicism* have been discussed at length elsewhere.<sup>357</sup> They are repeated briefly here only to supplement the arguments from the text of 1 Corinthians 13:8-12.

The most important evidence comes from the intended purpose of the *Scripture* and *sign gifts*. If their specific purpose was in fact to communicate and authenticate NT revelation in the absence of NT Scripture in order to implement the New Covenant, as was done with the implementation of the Old Covenant with the written OT, then the debate over their cessation would seem settled. We defend the purposes of these gifts elsewhere.<sup>358</sup>

At least one of the first century *Scripture* and *sign gifts*, apostleship, is widely recognized as ceasing during the early history of the Church, and never to be in operation again.<sup>359</sup>

Ephesians 2:19-20 would seem to add prophecy to the list of gifts with a relatively temporary purpose:

**Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household [the Church] built on the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.**

The gift of prophecy is described with apostleship as a foundational gift upon which the Church is built. It is clear that once a foundation is built, its construction must cease in order for anything to be built on it, again implying that these gifts were temporary and have now ceased, never to return. Accordingly, we have noted in revelatory history that when a superior mode of divine revelation is available (e.g. Christ, Scripture), inferior modes cease (e.g. prophecy).

Hebrews 2:3-4 also suggests a limited time and purpose for these gifts:

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<sup>357</sup> For further support of the discontinuity of the *Scripture* and *sign gifts* see section 10.7.C and the historical data in chapters 9.13; 11.7; and 12.13.

<sup>358</sup> We defend the purposes of these gifts in section 10.7.C.

<sup>359</sup> For further on the cessation of the gift of Apostleship see chapter 8.5.

**How shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed [past tense] to us by those who heard Him. God also testified [past tense] to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to His will.**

No doubt this passage concerns at least the *sign gifts*, prophecy (in the ability to predict the future) and tongues being among them.

The later letters of the NT do not refer to these gifts at all. This absence is particularly significant in the pastoral letters where Paul's last instructions regard teaching truth that has already been revealed, rather than seeking more revelation.

The Apostle John's warning in the Revelation also clearly implies that the Church was no longer to expect any more revelation that would be normative for the universal Church to believe and obey. Among the very last biblical words, of the very last revelatory Apostle, we read:

**I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. (Rev 22:18)**

While many doubt that this warning has any relevance to the debate over whether the revelatory gifts of the Apostolic Age have ceased, we believe the thoughts of the highly respected Reformed theologian, Robert Reymond, are worth consideration:

In this verse John writes: "I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book." There can be no doubt that John's warning here against adding words to "the prophecy of this book" has immediate reference to the Book of Revelation itself; in short, John opposes any and all tampering with his Patmos prophecy. This cannot be controverted and no one denies it.

But does John's warning here have exclusive reference only to the Book of Revelation? While good scholars have said so, good reasons exist to believe that the warning applies to all the prophetic Scriptures construed as a unitary whole.

Consider the fact that this portion of the Word of God not only deals with "last things" but also was the last portion of the New Testament to be written. It is quite conceivable that John could have had before his mind the entire corpus of prophetic writings (his own and those preceding his) when he issued his warning, for doubtless John knew he was the last of

the apostles, and there is evidence that by the last decade of the first century the several literary parts of our New Testament were already regarded as God's word to his church and were being gathered together in codex or "book" form.

It should also be noted that the Book of Revelation, by the very nature of its content, in no sense stands in isolation from the other prophetic writings of Scripture. To the contrary, John presents us with more direct allusions to the prophetic Scriptures of the Old Testament, verse for verse, than perhaps any other writer of New Testament literature.

In other words, from his vantage point in history, under inspiration John reaches far back, as it were, into Old Testament prophecy, brings both its weal and its woe forward and integrates them with his own and then relates the whole to the farthest reaches of this age. So there is a real sense in which the very subject which he treats unites his prophecy with the earlier prophetic writings, and unites them together in such a way that to add to his book is just to add to their book of prophecy. Standing midway, as he does, between all the former prophetic writings and the eschaton itself, John by means of the most comprehensive and extensive prophetic statement of them all brings past and future together with his own book serving as the uniting "linchpin" for prophecy and fulfillment.

When the all-time-encompassing manner in which John handles his material is kept in mind, it is readily perceptible that John's warning against adding to "the words of the prophecy of this book" must be construed in the widest and most comprehensive sense possible and not in the more restricted sense as is often done.

Once this is realized, it follows that Revelation 22:18, in its warning not to add anything to the prophetic Scriptures *per se*, envisions a completed canon, with the addition of the Book of Revelation itself constituting the concluding segment; and thus this verse becomes one of the strongest affirmations in the New Testament that the revelatory process ceased with the writings of the apostle John.<sup>360</sup>

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<sup>360</sup> Robert Reymond, *What About Continuing Revelations And Miracles In The Presbyterian Church Today?: A Study Of The Doctrine Of The Sufficiency Of Scripture* (Presbyterian & Reformed, 1977), 40-41. See also MacArthur, quoted in section 8.8.C, and Albert Barnes, *Barnes' Notes on the New Testament*; online at [www.ccel.org](http://www.ccel.org), *in loc*.

Other commentators are unfortunately slow to recognize that modern "prophecies" could be seen by the Lord as adding to His last prophecy. These include Leon Morris, *Revelation* (Eerdmans, 1996); William Barclay,

And as we have demonstrated elsewhere, the reception of biblical revelation, and the supernatural gifts that accompanied it, *did* cease.<sup>361</sup>

## B) Answering Arguments Against *Historicism*

### B.1) The Misuse of Acts: *Where are the Apostles?*

Any honest student of the Bible recognizes that special care must be taken when attempting to apply the events recorded in it to our own time. Along with trusting their emotional experiences too much, the fundamental error of *charismaticism*<sup>362</sup> is this very thing. They claim a greater spirituality and faith because they expect and supposedly experience a greater array of the events in Scripture.

It is tempting, of course, to think that all that we see in the Bible is for us today, but that is shoddy hermeneutics. We do not attempt to apply all of the OT commands and practices to our lives. The same is true even of the NT. For example, Christ told the disciples, **“Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel”** (Matt

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*The Revelation of John* (Westminster John Knox, 1976); William Hendricksen, *More Than Conquerors* (Baker, 1995); and Michael Wilcox, *The Message of Revelation* (Intervarsity, 1975).

Both G. E. Ladd (*A Commentary on the Revelation* [Eerdmans, 1972]) and F. F. Bruce, *The Book of Revelation* [Eerdmans, 1998]), interpret the passage as merely warning of distorting the text of Revelation.

Beale rightly refers to texts in Deuteronomy as parallels, but then limits the “adding and taking away” of John’s prophecy to “adherence to false teaching about the inscripturated word,” (Gregory Beale, *The Book of Revelation* [Eerdmans, 1999], 1151) particularly idolatry. This interpretation is controlled by Dr. Beale’s spiritualized approach to the Revelation as an allegory against idolatry. Nevertheless, added prophecies are certainly in mind, and even Beale recognizes that the warnings in Deuteronomy are in the context of warnings against false prophets.

<sup>361</sup> For further historical demonstration of the cessation of the gift of Apostleship see chapter 8.5. For prophecy see chapter 9.14. For miracle working see chapter 11.7. For the historical cessation of tongues see chapter 12.13.

<sup>362</sup> For a definition of *charismaticism* see endnote in chapter 8.2.

10:5-6). We readily recognize this command as only applying to the Twelve disciples for a specific and unique period of time.

Likewise, the Acts of the Apostles are just that, and record the abilities and actions of a very special group of men at a very special time- the inauguration of a New Covenant and the Church. It is clear that not all of what our first century brothers and sisters experienced is to be experienced by us today and therefore a good deal of caution must be used in any modern claim to phenomena in the early Church. Acts is *primarily* a book of history, not instruction, devotion, or doctrine. Indeed, the Acts of the Apostles was given to us so that we may witness the *unique* power with which the Church came into existence; but it is limited, just as the OT is, in dictating what the modern Christian experience is to be like.

There is a historical fact that many in *charismaticism* ignore when they wish to make the Acts of the Apostles a doctrinal book for the modern Church. That historical fact is that the central characters of the book, Apostles, no longer exist. If Acts is a historical account of the ministry of a unique group of men, a ministry which no longer exists, then we had better be careful about what we expect to apply to our own day.

Accordingly, the respected NT scholar D. A. Carson writes:

The essential salvation-historical structure of the Book of Acts is too often overlooked by charismatics. Therefore, as [even the Pentecostal NT scholar Gordon] Fee laments, the exegesis of Acts in most charismatic circles is hermeneutically uncontrolled. The way Luke tells the story, Acts provides not a paradigm for individual Christian experience, but the account of the gospel's outward movement, geographically, racially, and above all theologically.<sup>363</sup>

Therefore, there are all kinds of unique experiences recorded in Acts. For example, we do not feel compelled to cast lots in order to

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<sup>363</sup> D. A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit: A Theological Exposition of 1 Corinthians 12-14* (Baker Book, 1987), 150. Carson is referring to Dr. Fee's article, "Hermeneutics and Historical Precedent—a Major Problem in Pentecostal Hermeneutics," in Russell P. Spittler, ed., *Perspectives on the New Pentecostalism* (Baker, 1976), 119-122.

choose leaders (cf. Acts 1:26).<sup>364</sup> There has never been another recorded instance of the Spirit manifesting Himself in the sound of a rushing wind loud enough to draw thousands of people (cf. 2:1-41).<sup>365</sup> Christians do not worship today in Jewish temples (cf. 2:46; 3:1) or live communally (cf. 4:32-35). Therefore, the Church has historically recognized that the Acts of the Apostles are not to be read indiscriminately as the norm for subsequent generations of Christians.

Even *prophetism* refuses to claim God is granting new Scripture-quality revelation today as He did in Acts. Therefore, we are agreed that there are some fundamental occurrences in Acts that have no place in Christianity today. Accordingly, we have written at length elsewhere of the marked discontinuity in the biblical history of *extraordinary* means of divine revelation.<sup>366</sup>

## **B.2) Acts 2:16-21: Where is the Blood & Fire?**

On the day of Pentecost, the Apostle Peter gave the following explanation for the tongues phenomena that occurred:

**This is what was spoken by the Prophet Joel: "In the last days, God says, I will pour out My Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on My servants, both men and women, I will pour out My Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy."**

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<sup>364</sup> Although casting lots was a common practice in those days among the Jews, it became unnecessary and extinct as a means of communication from God when the Church received the Holy Spirit just a few days after this incident. However, one wonders in light of the contemporary frenzy to restore first century gifts and means of revelation, why the casting of lots isn't included in the mix. The practice was, of course, used by John Wesley with regrettable results. See Arnold Dallimore, *George Whitefield*, 2 Vols. (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1970), I:150, 309; 2:553.

<sup>365</sup> On the day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit manifested Himself as "**a sound like the blowing of a violent wind**" that was "**heard**" not only by the disciples, but by "**Jews**" who "**were staying in Jerusalem**" (Acts 2:2,5). We know that the sound was loud enough that "**when they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment**" (2:6). We know too that at least 3000 people had heard the sound and gathered (2:41), and undoubtedly there were many thousands more.

<sup>366</sup> Regarding the discontinuity of extraordinary means of revelation see section 10.7.C.

**I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord. (Acts 2:16-21)**

Teachers within *prophetism* routinely mention this passage as support for claiming that we are currently in an age of prophecy, tongues, revelatory visions and dreams, and miracle working in general. A full explanation of this passage is beyond the scope of this topic and its interpretation affects many areas of theology including pneumatology and eschatology. Still, some points can be made here.

First of all, it is obvious that the Apostle does not intend to literally apply all of Joel's prophecy to the Church Age. Although the Apostles did receive the Spirit and no doubt prophesied (cf. Acts 19:6), the "**wonders in the heaven above**" including "**blood and fire and billows of smoke**" and the "**sun**" being "**turned to darkness and the moon to blood**" clearly pertain to "**the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord**" when Christ returns to Earth (cf. Matt 24:29-31; 2 Thess 1:6-10), and especially with the judgments as described in Revelation (cf. 8:5-10; 9:2-18).

This reflects the fact that Joel's prophecy specifically applies to the nation of Israel and only *after* Christ's Second Advent. It reads:

**Then you will know that I am in Israel** [after Endtime judgments described previously in Joel 2], **that I am the LORD your God, and that there is no other; never again will My people be shamed.**

**And afterward, I will pour out My Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on My servants, both men and women, I will pour out My Spirit in those days.**

**I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood [right] before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. (Joel 2:27-31)**

The prophecy of Joel that Peter quotes did not directly pertain to Pentecost, or the founding of the Church, but rather events occurring after Christ comes to Earth in His Second Coming. Evidently, during that time, the saved remnant of the nation of Israel will all have the Holy Spirit poured out on them and even

their children will be Prophets and their old men receiving divine revelations as well.

Obviously, then, some of these specific prophecies have not yet come true. Neither in apostolic days, nor in modern *prophetism* do we have testimonies of youths ("**sons and daughters**" and "**young men**" [*neaniskoi*: "youths"]) in contrast to "**old men**") receiving and communicating direct divine revelation from God. It is clear that the prophecy includes child Prophets, and there has been none that we are aware of throughout Church history, nor in the modern *prophetist* movement.

Accordingly, that same movement had better be careful what they attempt to prove from this passage. If not all of Joel's prophecy can be literally applied to the Church Age, then it is obvious that great care must be taken in determining what part can. Nonetheless, in typical fashion, *prophetism* picks out of the passage the parts they want to use and ignores the rest.

It is widely recognized that biblical prophecies often have some characteristics that make them difficult to properly apply. First, they can have a dual fulfillment with one being near future and partial, and the other being far future and full (cf. Isa 7:13-17; cp. Matt 1:22-23). Likewise, prophecies often contain unrecognized large gaps of time within them (cf. Isa 61:1-2; cp. Luke 4:16-21). Both features would seem to be in play in Peter's application of Joel's prophecy with some near partial fulfillment in the coming of the Spirit, and far future fulfillments after the return of Christ.<sup>367</sup>

It is clear that Joel's prediction of the unprecedented indwelling of the Holy Spirit can be applied as an ongoing experience of the Church. However, the fact that Joel's prophecy does not even mention the tongues phenomenon that Peter is wanting to explain, would seem to imply that Peter's focus here is on the fact that the Spirit has come, not on the various temporary manifestations that occurred. His specific point was that the men were not drunk, but rather had been indwelt with the Holy Spirit. That was the truly significant thing occurring here, and that is to be the continuing experience of the Church Age.

Such "straining a gnat and swallowing a camel" exegesis is typical of *prophetism*. It is guilty of attempting to make the most significant use of Peter's statement refer to their pet doctrines of ongoing tongues speakers and modern "prophets" in their churches. On the contrary, there is something occurring here that is much more important, and easily missed in *prophetist* dogmatics: the indwelling of the Holy Spirit for the eternal sealing and moral

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<sup>367</sup> For further discussion of the interpretation of biblical prophecy see section ?

regeneration of all Christians. And this is precisely the part of Peter's meaning that has continued throughout the Church Age, while the miraculous gifts ceased relatively early in its history.

Beyond the monumental indwelling of all of God's people with His Spirit, it is very debatable what modern expositors can pick and choose from Joel's prophecy, or which events on the day of Pentecost were to be the continuing experience of the Church. It has already been noted that there are clearly things in Joel's prophecy that do not literally apply to the continuing experience of the Church Age at all. It has also been pointed out in the preceding section that many of the "fireworks" that accompanied this monumental, revolutionary, and initial indwelling of the Holy Spirit cannot be expected to be the continuing experience of the Church either.

Also, although it is common for NT writers to use OT passages to illustrate a NT concept, all expositors will agree that great care is needed in interpreting these OT quotations and how (or how much) they were to be applied to the present NT context is often unclear and understandably debatable. This is especially true of prophetic OT passages, and this quotation from Joel by Peter is just that. Simply put, the foundational theological passage for *prophetism* and essentially *charismaticism* itself, is Peter's quotation of an OT prophecy in a NT context, a type of NT text that is among the most difficult to precisely interpret and apply.

The best commentary we have found on Acts 2:17-21 comes from the respected NT scholar Richard N. Longenecker in the *Expositors Bible Commentary*:

[Peter's] use of the Joel passage is in line with what since the discovery of the DSS [*Dead Sea Scrolls*] we have learned to call a *peshet* (from Heb. *peser*, "interpretation"). It lays all emphasis on fulfillment without attempting to exegete the details of the biblical prophecy it "interprets." So Peter introduces the passage with the typically *peshet* introductory formula "this is that" (*touto estin to*; NIV, "this is what"). . . .

Debates arise between proponents of "realized eschatology" and "inaugurated eschatology," on the one hand, and between amillennialists (including here postmillennialists) and premillennialists (cf. "The Eschatology of the Bible," Robert L. Saucy, *EBC*, 1:103-26), on the other hand, about how Peter and the earliest followers of Jesus understood the more spectacular physical signs of Joel's prophecy (i.e., "blood and fire and billows of smoke," "the sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood").

Realized eschatologists and amillennialists usually take Peter's inclusion of such physical imagery in a spiritual way, finding in what happened at Pentecost the spiritual fulfillment of Joel's prophecy--a fulfillment not necessarily tied to any natural phenomena. . . . Moreover, some realized eschatologists and amillennialists, desiring to retain more than just the symbolic, suggest that these signs should be understood as having actually taken place in the natural world "during the early afternoon of the day of our Lord's crucifixion," when "the sun turned into darkness" and "the paschal full moon ... appeared blood-red in the sky in consequence of that preternatural gloom" (Bruce, *Book of the Acts*, p. 69).

On the other hand, certain features in Peter's sermon show his reason for his emphatic citation of Joel's prophecy. These features are Peter's introductory formula "this is that," his alteration of "afterward" (Joel 2:28) to "in the last days," his addition of "God says" at the beginning of the quotation, and his interruption of the quotation to insert "and they will prophesy." He quotes the entire prophecy in Joel 2:28-32 because of its traditional messianic significance and because its final sentence ("And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved") leads logically to the kerygma section of his sermon.

But Peter might not have known what to make of the more physical and spectacular elements of Joel's prophecy, though he probably expected them in some way to follow in the very near future. (Certainly he could not have foreseen a delay of many centuries before their fulfillment.) So his emphasis was on the inauguration of the Messianic Age ("the last days")--an emphasis we should see as being essential to his preaching and beyond which we are not compelled to go.<sup>368</sup>

Accordingly, *charismaticism* is on rather shaky ground to insist that this passage is a fundamental biblical foundation for their theology. Nevertheless, Pentecostal Douglas Oss not only illustrates the importance of Joel's prophecy to *charismaticism*, but describes why it is foundational:

The cessationist's [i.e. *historicism's*] theological model for understanding miraculous gifts . . . is based on the "open-canon" premise. [They] hold that since the early church . . . did not yet have a New Testament, they needed

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<sup>368</sup> R. N. Longenecker, *Acts*, in the *Expositors Bible Commentary*, Frank E. Gaebelin ed. CD-ROM (Zondervan).

the utterance gifts to function as a New Testament canon until such time as the canon was complete and available. [They] see this picture in texts such as Ephesians 2:20-22.

At the heart of continuationist framework . . . is the biblical-theological understanding of the "last days." We hold that the experiences described in the New Testament fulfill the "last days" expectation of Scripture [i.e. Joel's prophecy] and are characteristic of the age until the Lord's return.

Both of these "models" or "frameworks," are being used to exclude evidence from the other position. For example, the cessationist can identify any evidence the continuationist can bring against cessationism as belonging to the open-canon period and thus deny its continuing function. Likewise, the continuationist can deny the cessationist's arguments by appealing to the continuing nature of the "last days" and the characteristic miraculous activity of the Spirit that defines the epoch [of the Kingdom of God]. . . . The two paradigms clash profoundly.<sup>369</sup>

Simply put, Dr. Oss is claiming that everything the Apostles experienced is to be our experience because both are in the "last days." Our first point, again, is that we might be more open to believe him if *charismaticism* could in fact duplicate the miraculous and revelatory powers of the Apostolic Age. In fact, however, their "tongues speakers" do not miraculously speak in real human foreign languages as occurred in Acts 2:4-12. Their "prophets" do not perfectly predict the future as Prophets in Acts did (cf. Acts 11:28; 21:10-11; Deut 18:17-22). And their "miracle workers" do not heal commandingly, powerfully, and convincingly as biblical miracle workers did.<sup>370</sup>

*Charismaticism* is asking us to believe something that in reality is not happening. And, in fact, hasn't happened for over 1600 years of Church history. If that 1600 years has been in the "last days" that the Apostle spoke of, and modern *charismaticism* was to be a part of it, then the movement has no good explanation of why it simply has not been the case.<sup>371</sup>

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<sup>369</sup> Douglas Oss in *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today?*, Wayne Grudem, ed. (Zondervan, 1996), 19.

<sup>370</sup> For further discussion of the biblical attributes of tongues see chapters 12.2-5. For prophecy see chapters 9.1-8. For miracle-working see chapters 11.1-2.

<sup>371</sup> For the inadequate and even arrogant explanations that *super-supernaturalism* offers for why the *Scripture* and *sign gifts* ended

If *Charismaticism* really wishes to emphasize the "'last days' expectation of Scripture" as being descriptive of our experience, why are they so silent on the Apostle's warning that:

**There will be terrible times in the last days. . . . For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.**  
(2 Tim 3:1, 4:3-4)

It is only on Judgment Day that we will know for sure, but it is our suggestion that just this kind of false teaching will be revealed as *charismaticism's* greatest reflection of "last days" characteristics. It certainly has not been in some supposed superior possession of the Holy Spirit. They are not experiencing the "greater works" of regeneration and subsequent virtuous fruits of the Spirit any more, and perhaps even less, than other Christians.<sup>372</sup>

### **B.3) Ephesians 4:11-13:** *What is necessary for the maturity of the Church?*

The Apostle wrote to the Ephesians:

**It was He who gave some to be Apostles, some to be Prophets, some to be Evangelists, and some to be Pastors and Teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.**  
(Eph 4:11-13)

Obviously, the Apostle is teaching that God granted certain ministry gifts to the Church to facilitate its spiritual maturity. *Prophetists* suggest that the gift of prophecy, or Christian Prophets, are accordingly needed today, as the Church has not yet reached its full maturity.

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in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century Church and returned to them in the 20<sup>th</sup>, see section 11.7.C.

<sup>372</sup> For further biblical critiques of *charismaticism* see esp. chapters 10.13-16.

First of all, most *prophetists* agree that “**Apostles**” are no longer being given to the Church, in the sense that Paul was using this term here. Apparently then, this most important of all gifts for the sake of Church has not been needed for its maturity since the first century.

The reason for this is that apostleship was for the purpose of forming the foundation of the Church, not the continuing building of its superstructure. The same is true of Prophets. Accordingly, the Apostle places the gift of prophecy with apostleship as a foundation-laying gift for the Church in this very letter to Ephesians. Elsewhere we have written:

Perhaps the clearest indication of the authority of NT Prophets was their equality with NT Apostles. Accordingly, the Apostle Paul said of Christian Prophets:

**In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy Apostles and [NT Christian] Prophets, with Christ Jesus Himself as the chief cornerstone.** (Eph. 3:4-5)

In terms of speaking direct revelation from God, Christian Prophets in the early Church possessed the same ability as the revelatory Apostles. This is why the Apostle Paul makes the rather remarkable statement that the Church was “**built on the foundation of the Apostles and [NT] Prophets, with Christ Jesus Himself as the chief cornerstone**” (Eph. 2:20). Both revelatory Apostles and Christian Prophets uniquely possessed the New Covenant revelation upon which the Church was founded, and because all divine revelation is absolutely and equally authoritative, Apostles and Prophets were equally authoritative.<sup>373</sup>

#### **B.4) 1 Corinthians 1:7:** *grace does not equal gifts*

Paul states in 1 Corinthians 1:4-7:

**I thank my God always concerning you, for the grace [charity] of God which was given you in Christ Jesus, {5} that in everything you were enriched in Him, in all speech and all knowledge, {6} even as the testimony concerning Christ was confirmed in you, {7} so that [ōste: “therefore”] you are not lacking in any gift**

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<sup>373</sup> Excerpt from section 9.6.C. For further arguments that Paul is speaking of NT Prophets who possessed the NT gift of prophecy see this section.

**[charismati], awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ (NASB).**

Some use this verse in support of the idea that the *Scripture* and *sign gifts* were to last until the return of Christ.<sup>374</sup> Several things should be noted however.

First of all, Paul is making no connection between the Corinthian's gifts and the return of Christ. The Greek does *not* provide a conjunction between the statement concerning the abundance of their "gifts of grace" and the return of Christ. This is correctly reflected in the NASB translation above.

However, several translations insert a conjunction, resulting in the impression that there is some intended connection between the grace gifts of the Corinthians, and the return of Christ. The NIV illustrates this false impression when it translates "**you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed.**" The conjunction "**as you**" is not in the original Greek and it implies that the Corinthians will not lack any spiritual gift *while*, or during the whole time that they might "**wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed.**"

Compare this to the more accurate NASB which says, "**you are not lacking in any gift, awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ.**" Paul is simply making two *separate* statements about the Corinthians: 1) they have an abundance of "gifts of grace", and 2) they are waiting for Christ's return.

While there is no conjunction between the gifts and the return of Christ in the text, there is a conjunction in the text that is being ignored. The Apostle says, "**the testimony concerning Christ was confirmed in you, so that** [*ōste*: "therefore"] **you are not lacking in any gift, awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ** (NASB). The real connection between the statements concerning the gifts and the return of Christ *is not* between one another, but that they are both results of "**the testimony concerning Christ** (being) **confirmed in** (them), **so that** [you are (first of all) **not lacking in any gift**, (and secondly) **awaiting eagerly the return of our Lord Jesus Christ.**" Paul's point is that both of these statements are the result of the Corinthians becoming Christians. Any other connection between these two statements is a false one.

The other misleading assumption that is made concerning this verse is that by "**gifts**" Paul is especially referring to *spiritual* gifts.

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<sup>374</sup> Mr. Deere also uses the verse to argue that the Corinthian Christians possessed all the spiritual gifts. See, *Surprised by the Power of the Spirit* (Zondervan, 1993), 65.

Again, "spiritual" is not in the Greek but is inserted in the NIV, NLT, RSV, and JB. Paul simply uses the word *charismati* here which he uses elsewhere to describe other gifts rather than spiritual gifts.

In Romans 5:15-16 Paul uses *charisma* ("gift") to describe the grace of God. Notice in this very passage that Paul has already reminded the Corinthians of **"the grace (*chariti*) of God which was given (them) in Christ Jesus"**. Surely this grace of God is to be included in what Paul means by the abundance of gifts that have come to the Corinthians because of their faith in Christ.

In Romans 6:23 Paul uses *charisma* ("gift") to describe eternal life through Christ. In Romans 11:29 Paul uses the same word to describe the irrevocable election of Israel. These uses of *charismata* remind us of Paul's introductory statement to the Ephesians that because of our salvation, **"the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ . . . has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ"** (1:3). John says the same in his gospel: **"From the fullness of His grace (*charis*) we have all received one blessing after another"** (Jn 1:16).

Accordingly, the idea of these gifts simply referring to the abundant and varied blessings we have received in Christ is reflected in the TEV translation of *charismati* in 1 Corinthians 1:7: **"you have not failed to receive a single blessing"** and in the CEV which says, **"You are not missing out on any blessings as you wait for him to return."**

Specifically in the Corinthian letters the Apostle uses *charisma* ("gift") to describe the God given blessings of marriage and celibacy (1 Co 7:7) or simply to refer to the **"favor bestowed upon us through the prayers of many"** (2 Co 1:11). While spiritual gifts may be included in Paul's thought here, it certainly is not the only *charisma* that he has in mind and the insertion of "spiritual gifts" here is unwarranted.

Finally, when we think of the whole context of why the Apostle is writing to the Corinthians, we have another very good reason to believe that he is not specifically referring to the gifts of tongues or prophecy as *charismaticism* would have us believe. When the Apostle pens his introduction to this letter, he knows that the Corinthians are already overvaluing the miraculous spiritual gifts over the greatest grace gift of love. To think that the Apostle is primarily, or at all praising them for their abundant possession of miraculous gifts, is unlikely.

No doubt, the Apostle is including the miraculous gifts as part of the "grace gifts" the Corinthians had, and a way in which they had been **"enriched . . . in all speech and all knowledge"** (v. 5). But because these graces certainly included more than just miraculous gifts, the Apostle is not saying here that the miraculous gifts will

continue until Christ returns. For example, surely the virtues of faith and hope would have been included in the types of grace that had enriched the speech and knowledge of the Corinthians, and the Apostle will clearly state later in the letter that, not only are these graces more important than the miraculous gifts, but they last longer than the gifts.<sup>375</sup>

Accordingly, in the context of 1 Corinthians, Dr. Carson comments that, "it is very clear that the term [*charisma* "gifts"] is not a technical one for Paul that refers only to a select set of supranormal gifts like healing and tongues."<sup>376</sup>

Essentially, the Pentecostal scholar Dr. Fee is in agreement when he writes specifically concerning 1 Corinthians 1:7:

In this case the noun has been formed from [*charis*] (grace), as a way of concretely expressing the abstract noun. [*Charis*] issues in a [*charismati*]; and that is what it means in its every instance in Paul—a concrete expression of grace, thus a "gracious bestowment." In nearly half of its uses, therefore, [*charismati*] lacks any reference at all to the Spirit [let alone miraculous spiritual gifts], but simply designates a variety of ways God's grace is evidenced in the midst of, or in the lives of, his people. It includes such diverse "gifts" as eternal life (Rom 6:23; cf. 5:15, 16), the many special privileges granted to Israel (Rom 11:29, referring to 9:4-5), celibacy and marriage (I Cor 7:7), and deliverance from a deadly peril (2 Cor 1:10).<sup>377</sup>

However, Dr. Fee goes on to express why he feels Paul's use of *charismati* in 1 Corinthians 1:7 refers specifically to miraculous spiritual gifts:

On the other hand, the word frequently relates to special manifestations or activities of the Spirit, indicating "gracious gifts" of the Spirit, which is why it has come to be thought of as a Spirit activity as such. That its basic relationship is to "grace," while at the same time pointing toward the "gifting" that comes from the Spirit, surfaces in [1 Cor 1:4-7]. . . [I]n 1 Cor 1:4-7 God expresses his grace concretely in the rich number of [*charismati*] he bestows upon this community; it is

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<sup>375</sup> For further support that the virtues of faith and hope were to outlast the gifts of divine knowledge, prophecy, and tongues, see section 8.6.J.

<sup>376</sup> D. A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit: A Theological Exposition of 1 Corinthians 12-14* (Baker, 1987), 20.

<sup>377</sup> Gordon Fee, *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Hendrickson, 1994), 33.

in this way, especially as the word is picked up in chapter 12 [referring to miraculous spiritual gifts], that [*charismati*] comes to be understood as "gifts of the Spirit."<sup>378</sup>

Given what Dr. Fee says earlier about Paul's varied use of *charismati*, it seems rather arbitrary to insist this is the Apostle's narrow meaning at 1 Corinthians 1:7, especially in light of the reasons given above.

Accordingly, we prefer the more traditional interpretation reflected by Albert Barnes (1798–1870): "The word used here *charisma*, does not refer necessarily to extraordinary and miraculous endowments, but includes also all the kindnesses of God toward them in producing peace of mind, constancy, humility, etc."

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### **B.5) Romans 11:29:** *referring to Israel, not spiritual gifts in the Church*

In Romans 11:29 Paul says, "**the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.**" It is quite a remarkable thing that Jack Deere, formerly an Assistant Professor of Old Testament at Dallas Theological Seminary would suggest that this verse applies to the gift of healing.<sup>380</sup> In the context there is no doubt whatsoever that Paul is referring to the blessings ("**gifts**") and election ("**calling**") of *the nation of Israel* as he had enumerated in this very section in 9:4-12. It has nothing to do with spiritual gifts in the Church.<sup>381</sup>

Paul was simply assuring the Roman Christians that God would fulfill all of His promises to Israel (cf. Rom. 11:26). The passage

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<sup>378</sup> Ibid.

<sup>379</sup> Barnes, *in loc.*; online at [www.ccel.org](http://www.ccel.org). This was the view of John Calvin (*Calvin's Bible Commentaries*; online at [www.ccel.org](http://www.ccel.org)). Leon Morris agrees with our interpretation of 1 Corinthians 1:4-7, stating that the gifts here refer to "God's good gifts in general (Rom 11:29)" (*1 Corinthians* [Eerdmans, 1999], 37-8). Anthony Thiselton takes the same view (*The First Epistle to the Corinthians* [Eerdmans, 2000], 98). On the other hand, C. K. Barrett (*The First Epistle to the Corinthians* [Hendrickson, 1968], 38), and John MacArthur (*MacArthur's New Testament Commentary*, Electronic Edition STEP Files CD-ROM [Parsons Technology, 1997]) confine the term here to spiritual gifts.

<sup>380</sup> Deere, 289, n. 27.

<sup>381</sup> See Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans (NICNT)* (Eerdmans, 1996), 732.

does not refer to the permanence of spiritual gifts. And it had better not do so, for even Mr. Deere would hopefully admit that the revelatory gifts of Apostles *have been* revoked.

## **B.6) Hebrews 13:8**

The writer of Hebrews says, "**Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today, yes and forever**" (Heb 13:8). This verse is used by some to imply that because the Person of Jesus Christ is unchanging, His purposes and methods are unchanging as well. In other words, if Christ gave miraculous gifts to His disciples, He is surely giving them today.

We certainly affirm the fact that the *Person* of Jesus Christ and *His character* have remained the same since eternity past and will continue as such into eternity future. But Christ has changed both His *methods*, and even *attributes* at certain times. It was pointed out earlier (section B.1) that He once told his disciples not to preach to Gentiles (cf. Matt 10:5-6); later, He told them to preach to the Gentiles (cf. Matt 28:18-20). Jesus did not change; *His program* did.

We should also be reminded that Christ has existed in different forms also. Throughout the OT He appeared as the Angel of the Lord.<sup>382</sup> Then there was a period of almost thirty four years that He lived in a human body and walked and talked upon the Earth. He does so no longer.

Finally, we have thoroughly discussed elsewhere the biblical and historical fact that God has indeed repeatedly changed and discontinued methods of divine revelation.<sup>383</sup> It becomes obvious then that this passage cannot be used to support the position that the miraculous gifts were to continue throughout the Church Age. For one thing, they have not.

### **Publications & Particulars**

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<sup>382</sup> For further discussion on the Angel of the Lord and His identification with the pre-incarnate Christ, see section 10.9.C.

<sup>383</sup> Finally, we have thoroughly discussed elsewhere the biblical and historical fact that God has indeed repeatedly changed and discontinued methods of divine revelation. See 10.7.C.

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**Book 8**  
**God's Apostles**  
**Part III**  
**The Creation vs.**  
**"Inspiration of Scripture"**

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## Chapter 8.8

# The "Inspiration" of Scripture

## *It's Elements & Problems*

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  - D.5) The inherent contradiction in the theory of *concurrent inspiration*
  - D.6) The difficulty & actually misguided effort to denounce "dictation"

*Extras & Endnotes*

### **Primary Points**

- Discussing "inspiration" is one of the most daunting theological tasks.
- Simply put, *Scripture is the faithful human recording of divine revelation.*
- The topic of "inspiration" does not involve how the *revelation* of Scripture was received, but rather, how did the human authors *write* and *record* the revelations after they had received them.
- If a biblical writer had made a mistake in what he recorded, God could have, and would have, granted another revelation, telling him of the mistake and ensuring that it was corrected.
- It is the denial that humans would be capable of recording divine revelation with sufficient accuracy to communicate what God intended that has caused the century-long debate on the issue.
- In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there were significantly more scholarly books, articles, and debates devoted to the topic of "inspiration" than any other theological issue.
- Contrary to liberal Bible scholars, the divine authority of Scripture *does* depend on its inerrancy. Therefore, we do need an explanation for how Scripture could be inerrant even though recorded by humans.
- Packer: *concurisve inspiration* means: "the [biblical] writers' . . . thinking and writing was both free and spontaneous on their part and divinely elicited and controlled."
- *Verbal plenary inspiration*: "the whole of

## A) A Rare But Simple Explanation of How We Got Scripture

Embarking on a discussion of the "inspiration" of Scripture is one of the most daunting of all theological tasks. This is true of even defining it. The simple question we are trying to answer is how did God's thoughts get recorded in writing? There are additional and related questions as well. What did God have to do in and through humans to inerrantly record divine revelation in Scripture? How can we deem Scripture as divine when human "authors" were involved in its recording?

These are the kinds of questions involved in the debate over "inspiration" and they have prompted a century of theological effort to describe something that Scripture leaves rather ambiguous. For example, what are we to understand of Paul's statement that: "**All Scripture is God-breathed**" and therefore divinely authoritative for, "**teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness**" (2 Tim 3:16)? It is understandable that thinking men, in an effort to defend the authority of Scripture, would make attempts to unpack this.

Accordingly, such attempts have been made. H. D. McDonald, in his book, *Theories of Revelation: An Historical Study 1700-1960*, lists 80 different theories of biblical "inspiration."<sup>384</sup> And there have certainly been more since 1960. Likewise, R. C. Sproul writes: "Of the writing of histories of the doctrine of inspiration it seems that there will be no end."<sup>385</sup> Nevertheless, there has been little consensus in that history, as William Abraham, Professor at SMU and noted expert on Christian epistemology and revelation writes:

To speak in these circumstances of there being some kind of Church doctrine of inspiration is historical nonsense. There is no more a single doctrine of inspiration than there is a single doctrine of atonement.<sup>386</sup>

Like we said: daunting. Nevertheless we are going to begin with a rather simple description of how we believe God's thoughts

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<sup>384</sup> H. D. McDonald, *Theories of Revelation: An Historical Study 1700-1960* (Baker, 1979).

<sup>385</sup> R. C. Sproul, John Gerstner, and Arthur Lindsey, *Classical Apologetics: A Rational Defense of the Christian Faith and a Critique of Presuppositional Apologetics* (Academie Books, 1984), 172.

<sup>386</sup> William J. Abraham, *Canon and Criterion in Christian Theology: From the Fathers to Feminism* (Clarendon Press, 1998), 42.

were recorded in writing. We have supported several of these throughout *Knowing Our God* including this book on the revelation of the Apostles.

Simply put, *Scripture is the faithful human recording of divine revelation*. The two steps can be described as follows:

- 1) God revealed information to Prophets and Apostles through obvious and rather "objective" means including physical apparitions and voices, or the more psychical means of visions. The point is, when God "spoke," those He was speaking to knew it. And this part of the process was quite supernatural, as was the information received.
- 2) Humans recorded or wrote Scripture based on the revelation they had received, with the God-given mental equipment and natural abilities He has given humans. In rare instances, Prophets in particular virtually dictated word-for-word what God was telling them in a vision. In other instances, especially with Apostles, they simply wrote out of the supernatural knowledge they had been given.

The crucial point here is that we believe the second step in producing Scripture was rather "natural." Humans are able to communicate such revelations with sufficient accuracy to communicate God's meaning, without some sort of supernatural mental manipulation on the part of God. This is especially so because God generally intended to communicate *ideas* rather than specific words.

When God met with Moses "**face to face**" (Exod 33:11), physically appearing to his eyes and being heard with his ears, "**Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Write down these words'**" (Exod 34:27), and Moses did. It is that simple. And if Moses had made a mistake in what he recorded, God could have, and would have, granted another revelation, telling him of the mistake and ensuring that Moses corrected it.

After giving Isaiah a supernatural vision, God told him, "**Go now, write it on a tablet for them, inscribe it on a scroll, that for the days to come it may be an everlasting witness**" (Isa 30:8; cf. Hab 2:2). There was no need for some sort of divine mental manipulation to ensure Isaiah accurately recorded what he had just seen and heard.

Likewise, when God gave Ezekiel a vision describing the temple to be built he was commanded: "**make known to them the design of the temple—its arrangement, its exits and entrances—its whole design and all its regulations and laws.**"

**Write these down before them so that they may be faithful to its design and follow all its regulations"** (Ezek 43:11). Did Ezekiel need some sort of supernatural assistance to do that? We don't think so.

Likewise, before giving the Apostle/Prophet John his visions, Jesus told him, "**Write on a scroll what you see**" (Rev 1:11, 19). And he did.

The Apostle Paul, after having Jesus personally appear to him on several occasions to give him direct divine revelation (cf. Acts 18:9-11; 22:14-18; 23:11; 27:23-4; Gal 1:11-12; 1 Cor 11:23; 2 Cor 12:1-4; cf. section 8.3.C.4), simply wrote the Ephesian, Roman, and Philippian Christians out of the knowledge he had gained through those revelations. He did not need some sort of immediate human/divine mental telepathy or mind control to write Scripture. He already had what he needed: 1) supernatural knowledge from divine revelations; 2) the natural, human ability to accurately record and express that knowledge. And again, if the Apostle had made a mistake in what he had written, we believe God could have, and would have, reappeared to him and corrected the mistake.

In other words, there is no need for the multitude of theories of "inspiration." There isn't even a need for the word, in relation to Scripture, which, as we demonstrate later, is why the word "inspiration" does not occur in Scripture at all. Scripture is simply *the accurate human recording of divine revelation*. There was supernatural divine revelation and there was human, natural writing based on that revelation that produced Scripture. Some kind of third category which combines the two steps into a supernatural whole in which God is supernaturally manipulating and controlling the mind, and therefore the pen of the writer, is not only unnecessary for Scripture to be inerrant, but not supported in Scripture.

Accordingly, let us simplify things again and note that the topic of "inspiration" does not involve how the *revelation* of Scripture was received, but rather, specifically how did the human authors *write* and *record* the revelations after they had received them. In other words, for us, the word "inspiration" is synonymous with "writing" in the context of Scripture. It does not involve the act of revelation at all, but rather, its recording. And for that we need no theory of "inspiration" at all because the Prophets and Apostles were naturally able to faithfully record the revelations they had received.

If you have similar convictions, then you need not read on. It is, in fact, the denial that humans would be capable of recording divine revelation with sufficient faithfulness to communicate what God intended, that has caused the century-long debate on the

issue, and prompted the many theories on "inspiration." And because we have found no one else who will simultaneously uphold the inerrancy of Scripture and propose that nothing supernatural was needed in the *writing* of the revelation, we will spend the next few chapters defending that view.

## B) A Very Brief History of the Greatest Theological Debate of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there were significantly more scholarly books, articles, and debates devoted to the topic of "inspiration" than any other theological issue. The nature of the "inspiration" of Scripture has been *the* subject of study for the last century. And remarkably, it still remains almost as confusing and controversial as when the whole debate began.

James Orr (1844-1912),<sup>387</sup> a revered defender of the authority of Scripture and the original editor of the influential *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, wrote in 1910 something that could be written today:

There is perhaps no subject at the present moment more difficult to write upon, and above all to write upon wisely, than this of Revelation and Inspiration. . . . The many able books which have recently been written on this subject probably help more to reveal the difficulties connected with it than to furnish a practical and satisfactory solution of these difficulties.<sup>388</sup>

Most scholars will agree that for the first 1900 years of Christianity, the nature of the "inspiration" of Scripture was hardly touched upon by theologians and Teachers of the Church. The early Church did not develop an orthodox description of *how* biblical writers recorded their divine knowledge and revelations, although they were adamant that the *result* was trustworthy Scripture.<sup>389</sup> Accordingly, no early list of the biblical canon mentions "inspiration" as a criteria for a document to be Scripture. We would suggest this

<sup>387</sup> Not to be confused with James E. Orr (1912-1987), former Professor of Church History at Fuller Theological Seminary.

<sup>388</sup> James Orr, *Revelation and Inspiration* (Eerdmans, 1952), 1.

<sup>389</sup> Along these lines, Roman Catholic scholar Raymond F. Collins writes:

By and large, the early Fathers did not develop a theory on inspiration. As a matter of fact, the debate on revelation is a relatively late development in the history of theology. It is barely a century old, the topic having obtained a place unto itself only because of the issuance of magisterial statements on inspiration-sometimes largely provoked by the difficulties which modern historical findings were causing for the traditional inspiration [inerrancy] of the Scriptures. To this date, the tract on inspiration lacks the theological nuance and sophistication found in most other theological expositions. (Raymond F. Collins, *Introduction to the New Testament* [Doubleday, 1983], 326.

is because early Church leaders assumed the ability of the Apostles and Prophets to faithfully communicate divine revelation without "inspiration."

However, during the late 1800's and early 1900's, attacks on the inerrancy of Scripture began in earnest from professing Christian scholars. Foremost among these critics were the "Bad B's" from Europe, starting with F. C. Baur (1792-1860), and including E. Brunner (1889-1966), R. Bultmann (1884-1976), G. Bornkamm (1905-1990), J. Barr (1924-2006), and to a significant extent, K. Barth (1886-1968). All of these Bible scholars began their studies of Scripture with the belief that it contained errors, and developed theories regarding the nature of the Bible based on this assumption.

It was these attacks on the inerrancy of Scripture that prompted more conservative Bible scholars such as James Orr, B. B. Warfield (1851-1921), J. G. Machen (1881-1937), Carl F. H. Henry (1913-2003), and J. I. Packer (b. 1926) to develop in earnest, explanations of the "inspiration" of Scripture that would defend the inerrancy of Scripture and therefore its authority.<sup>390</sup>

## **C) Scripture's Divine Authority Depends on its Inerrancy**

First of all, let us make it clear that we believe in the Evangelical doctrine of the inerrancy of Scripture. Contrary to some more

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<sup>390</sup> In reality, these men wrote to defend the current canon of Scripture. In other words, if documents in the Bible such as 2 Chronicles were rejected from what is believed to belong to Scripture, a good portion of the accusations against the Bible's accuracy and authority would be diminished. On the other hand, if Romans was the only document accepted as Scripture, it is unlikely there would be any debates whatsoever regarding the inerrancy of Scripture, nor would there be such a felt need to devise theories of divine "inspiration."

All of this is why we believe issues of inerrancy relate more to the question of canonicity. If someone believes a document of Scripture truly contains error than it should be thrown out of their canon of divinely authoritative Scripture, and the decision of early Church leaders to include it, questioned. This seems a better approach than trying to come up with an all-encompassing, purely human theory of "inspiration," all designed to defend the decisions of fourth century Bishops to approve a document as the Word of God which we believe contains errors.

liberal Bible scholars,<sup>391</sup> the divine authority of Scripture *does* depend on its inerrancy. God does not speak lies, errors, mistakes, and blunders. And if Scripture is God speaking, as we believe, then it will not contain lies, errors, mistakes and blunders either. These types of things describe a great deal of especially unregenerated human thinking, but not the mind or communication of our perfect God. If there truly is an error of any kind detected in something claiming to have been spoken or revealed by God, then its claim can be, and should be, outright rejected. Whatever contains error is not divine, but at best human, and perhaps demonic.

Not only are the following stated in documents we believe to be the word of God, but they are things that any human would expect of a God worthy of trust and worship:

**God is not a man, that He should lie.** (Num 23:19)

**God . . . does not lie . . .** (Tit 1:2)

**[I]t is impossible for God to lie.** (Heb 6:18)

It is the devil, the archenemy and antithesis of God who lies. Accordingly, Jesus says of him, "**from the beginning**" satan was "**not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. Yet . . . I [God] am telling the truth**" (John 8:44-45).

Not only is the nature of God not to lie or err, but truth itself, as created by God and recognized by humans, cannot contain contradictions. The Apostle wrote: "**O Timothy, guard the deposit [of truth] entrusted to you. Avoid the irreverent babble and contradictions [Gr. *antithesis*] of what is falsely called "knowledge," for by professing it some have swerved from the faith**" (1 Tim 6:20 ESV). In other words, true "**knowledge**" of anything cannot contain "**contradictions.**"<sup>392</sup>

Accordingly, the claim that the Scriptures are the word of God clearly depends on their being without error and contradiction.

<sup>391</sup> For a defense of the view that Scripture can contain errors but still be considered the divinely authoritative word of God, see Jack B. Rogers and Donald McKim of Fuller Theological Seminary in their book, *The Bible: An Historical Approach*, (Harper & Row, 1979).

<sup>392</sup> Regarding the fact that truth cannot contain contradictions see especially chapter 2.10:  
*A Critique of Fideism.*

Otherwise they are merely the words of men without divine authority. Hence John Calvin's (1509-1564) famous formulation: "The Scriptures obtain full authority among believers only when men regard them as having sprung from Heaven, as if there the living words of God were heard."<sup>393</sup> And we will believe such words are from Heaven instead of men only if they are inerrant.

Along these lines, Erwin Lutzer, Teacher of Moody Bible Church, writes:

Let us not fall into the illogical views of those liberals who say that the Bible is not the Word of God, but nevertheless is a helpful guide for the church to follow. It is either a fact or a fraud. . . .

[I]f the claims of the Bible are in fact true, it is obvious that it would be without error in the original manuscripts. If God is a God of truth, He must speak only that which is consistent with His character. It would be unthinkable to have an untruthful message from a truthful God. To say as some do, that the Bible is authoritative in matters of theology but has errors in matters of history and science, is nonsense.<sup>394</sup>

Accordingly, apart from its references to "inspiration," we fully agree with the following statements from the "Chicago Statement of Biblical Inerrancy":

Art. V. The authority of Scripture is inescapably impaired if this total divine inerrancy is in any way limited or disregarded, or made relative to a view of truth contrary to the Bible's own; and such lapses bring serious loss to both the individual and the Church.

Art. XI. We affirm that Scripture, having been given by divine inspiration [more accurately, objective revelation], is infallible, so that, far from misleading us, it is true and reliable in all the matters it addresses.

We deny that it is possible for the Bible to be at the same time infallible and errant in its assertions. Infallibility and inerrancy may be distinguished, but not separated.

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<sup>393</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1:74; online at [www.ccel.org](http://www.ccel.org).

<sup>394</sup> Erwin Lutzer, *Seven Convincing Miracles* (Moody, 1999), 51-53.

Art. XII. We affirm that Scripture in its entirety is inerrant, being free from all falsehood, fraud, or deceit.

We deny that Biblical infallibility and inerrancy are limited to spiritual, religious, or redemptive themes, exclusive of assertions in the fields of history and science. We further deny that scientific hypotheses about earth history may properly be used to overturn the teaching of Scripture on creation and the flood.<sup>395</sup>

Accordingly, we *do* need an explanation for how Scripture could be inerrant even though recorded by humans. This question, of course, entails many topics. Nonetheless, explanations of how Scripture was written are valuable in order to defend its inerrancy. Along these lines, Baptist theologian Millard Erickson writes:

Can we really formulate a theory of inspiration? It should be apparent that such a question is necessary before even beginning the procedure. Some would say that such a procedure is neither necessary nor helpful. We should instead simply use the Bible rather than theorize regarding its nature. We should be content with the fact that the Bible is inspired rather than ask how it was inspired.

This argument, however, is faulty. The fact is that our utilization of the Bible will be influenced by what we think about its nature. We will, whether consciously or unconsciously, be dealing with it on the basis of an implicit theory of its nature. It would therefore be desirable to think out our view of inspiration.<sup>396</sup>

As noted above, we do not need a theory of "inspiration," but rather a description of how Scripture was written. With this modification we can agree with both Dr. Erickson and Herman Bavinck (1854-1921) who wrote:

There is in fact only one ground on which the authority of Scripture can be based, and that is [the nature of] its inspiration [or rather writing]. When that goes, also the authority of Scripture is gone and done with. In that case, it is merely a body of human writings, which as such cannot rightfully assert any claim to be a norm for our faith and

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<sup>395</sup> "The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy," online at <http://www.bible-researcher.com/chicago1.html>.

<sup>396</sup> Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed., (Baker, 1998), 229.

conduct. And along with Scripture-for the Protestant-all authority in religion collapses. All subsequent attempts to recover some kind of authority say, in the person of Christ, in the church, in religious experience, in the intellect or conscience-end in disappointment.<sup>397</sup>

## D) Problems With the Evangelical View of "Inspiration"

As noted above, Evangelicals and liberals alike have certainly attempted theories of "inspiration" regarding Scripture. For the most part, throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Evangelicals have united around the theory developed by B. B. Warfield (1851-1921). As such, he is recognized as perhaps the Protestant Church's foremost authority on the subject. Dr. Abraham writes: "There is little doubt but that Warfield did more to shape recent Evangelical thinking on inspiration than any other theologian."<sup>398</sup> Dr. Warfield's basic thoughts are reflected in the following:

[If] the Divine purpose [is] that these books should possess qualities which rise above the powers of men to produce . . . then something more than providence . . . is necessary. This is the reason for the superinduction, at the end of the long process of the production of Scripture, of the additional Divine operation which we call technically "inspiration."

By it, the Spirit of God, flowing confluent in with the providentially and graciously determined work of men, spontaneously producing under the Divine directions the writings appointed to them, gives the product a Divine quality unattainable by human powers alone.<sup>399</sup>

On the contrary, we would say that the supernatural *revelation* they received "gives the product a Divine quality unattainable by human powers alone," and the human recording of the revelation

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<sup>397</sup> Herman Bavinck, *Prolegomena, Church Dogmatics*, Vol. 1 (Baker, 2003), 462.

<sup>398</sup> William J. Abraham, *The Divine Inspiration of Holy Scripture* (Oxford, 1981), 15.

<sup>399</sup> B. B. Warfield, "The Biblical Idea of Inspiration" in *Revelation and Inspiration*, (Oxford, 1932), 103-4.

gives the Scriptures their obvious human qualities as well. As we argue later in chapter 8.10, Scripture is not just divine, just as Jesus was not only divine. Scripture is human as well.

Nonetheless, Dr. Warfield makes two main claims here. First, humans alone, even under God's providential oversight, are not able to faithfully record the revelations they received without some sort of supernatural assistance. Secondly, that supernatural assistance consists of a continuing influence of the Spirit on the minds of the men, giving their writing "a Divine quality." This simultaneous working of the Spirit in the mind of men, with the working of the author's own human mind, has been labeled *concurvive inspiration*.

As Evangelicals ourselves, and committed believers in the absolute inerrancy of anything reflecting the true word of God, we appreciate Dr. Warfield's view, and his attempt to defend the inerrancy of Scripture. He is, in fact, one of our very favorite theologians. However, we see several problems with his theory on "inspiration."

Before detailing them, we believe our general perspective on the topic of "inspiration" is perhaps well described in the introduction to a symposium of Professors from Westminster Theological Seminary on the issue of biblical "inspiration":

This book seeks to warn against both superficial or reactionary orthodoxy [i.e. Evangelicalism] and unguarded academic speculation [i.e. Liberalism]. Critical scholarship [Liberalism] will judge our arguments as too conservative. Defenders of the evangelical status quo may fear we yield too much ground. The latter judgment is our deepest concern in this volume.<sup>400</sup>

And an even greater concern of ours is the truth. In light of that, we would point out the following issues we see in "the evangelical status quo" regarding the topic of biblical "inspiration."

### **D.1) All theories of "inspiration" are just that--theories**

We will demonstrate elsewhere that Scripture does not describe anything like "inspiration" in the process of recording revelation. Accordingly, any description of it is merely a human theory. This is why, in fact, that Dr. Warfield consistently appealed to historical theology to support his view. However, even here it would seem

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<sup>400</sup> *Inerrancy & Hermeneutic*, Harvey Conn ed. (Baker, 1988), 11.

there was some exaggeration. Dr. Abraham, a well known expert on the topic has written of Dr. Warfield:

He never tired of pointing out that he was simply presenting the doctrine of the Church as it had been held throughout the ages. However, he systematically and conveniently ignored the plain historical facts. First, the Church never at any time prior to the Reformation adopted a canonical account of inspiration. In fact, the early Church never even sanctioned a doctrine of divine revelation, content to leave this matter in the Scriptures and in the writings of the Fathers in an informal state.<sup>401</sup>

And again, it was because of the attacks on the inerrancy of Scripture beginning in the 16<sup>th</sup> century that such theories were deemed necessary.

Now to the problems we see with the consensus Evangelical theory of "inspiration."

## **D.2) The assumption that humans cannot faithfully record revelation**

First, we question the underlying assumption that humans are automatically unable to faithfully and sufficiently record divine revelation. As we have described at length elsewhere in *KOG*, the Bible is quite descriptive of how its contents were *revealed* by God, including the use of apparitions, auditions, and visions.<sup>402</sup> However, we believe the reason Scripture is *not* descriptive of how those revelations were *recorded*, is because unlike modern theology, it was assumed that God had made humans capable of sufficiently recording divine revelation. And if they didn't, then God was certainly capable of providing another revelation to correct them. However, we never observe this happening, again reflecting the fact that God deemed humans capable of faithfully recording His revelations without some sort of supernatural influence.

In fact, if the sufficient capabilities of humans to simply record the revelation God gave them were recognized, the whole debate and topic of "inspiration" would be eliminated. And the assumption of human inability to sufficiently record received revelation is the

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<sup>401</sup> Abraham, *Canon*, 328.

<sup>402</sup> Regarding means of divine revelation experienced by Prophets and Apostles see chapter 10.7.

foundational reason for all of the 80 some theories on "inspiration" including Dr. Warfield's. Accordingly, further support for our claim that humans are capable of accurately recording revelation will be given in chapter 8.10.

### **D.3) The promotion of & dependence on *divine/human mental telepathy* even though there are no clear biblical examples of it**

A critical problem with the popular view of biblical "inspiration" is that it requires nothing less than the *divine/human mental telepathy* that is so foundational to *mega mysticism*. A typical explanation of *verbal concursive inspiration* is given in Carl F. H. Henry's book, *Revelation and the Bible*:

By inspiration is meant that influence of the Holy Spirit on the minds of selected men which rendered them organs of God for the infallible communication of that revelation.<sup>403</sup>

Notice that only by God directly planting thoughts in the mind of the writers apart from any objective means can such "inspiration" be achieved. In fact, the popular view of "inspiration" is so secret, mystical, and subjective that many claim the Apostles, for example, did not even know they were being "inspired" when they wrote Scripture. What is being described here is *divine/human mental telepathy* in which God directly transfers His thoughts to the minds of biblical writers. The result is that acts of revelation such as apparitions and visions are not even needed because the "inspiration" apart from these means makes them unnecessary.

Such descriptions of this *divine/human mental telepathy* in regards to how people wrote Scripture are common. The great Reformed theologian Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920) wrote:

Inspiration presupposes a person with a thought that he wishes to transfer directly to the consciousness of another, without the intervention of a third person or of writing or of gesture [or apparently an act of revelation to the physical/psychical senses of the person like an apparition or vision]. Hence when God speaks to man three things are implied:

First, that God has a thought which He wills to communicate to man. Second, that He executes His design in a direct way.

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<sup>403</sup> R. A. Finlayson in *Revelation and the Bible: Contemporary Evangelical Thought*, Carl F. H. Henry, ed. (Baker, 1958), 222.

Third, that the person addressed now possesses the divine thought with this result, that he is conscious of the same idea which a moment ago existed only in God.<sup>404</sup>

That is what we have thoroughly discussed elsewhere as *divine/human mental telepathy*.<sup>405</sup> Such a view makes "inspiration" one supernatural event, rather than involving 1) a supernatural physical/psychical revelatory act, and 2) the human recording of that revelation.

Likewise, J. I. Packer's description of "inspiration" can only be described as *mental telepathy* when he writes:

Scripture has a double authorship, and man is only the secondary author; the primary author is God the Holy Spirit, through whose initiative, prompting and enlightenment, and under whose superintendence [i.e. mind control] each human did his work.<sup>406</sup>

More recently, Dr. Erickson would seem to have done the same, but implies that *divine/human mental telepathy* was even the most common mode of revelation that Prophets and Apostles experienced. He writes:

Divine speech may take several forms. It may be an audible speaking. It may be a silent, inward hearing of God's message [where does Scripture say that?], like the subvocal process that slow readers engage in (they "hear" in their heads the words they are reading). It is likely that in many cases this was the mode used.<sup>407</sup>

Again, a "silent, inward hearing of God's message" is nothing more than *divine/human mental telepathy* in which God transfers thoughts directly to the mind apart from any other revelatory act.

Why is such a view of revelation and/or "inspiration" such a problem? Because Scripture *never* describes Apostles or Prophets

<sup>404</sup> Abraham Kuyper, *Principles of Sacred Theology* (Eerdmans, 1953), 71.

<sup>405</sup> For an introduction to the idea of *divine/human mental telepathy* and its unbiblical nature see chapter 14.1. For a fuller discussion see chapter 14.6.

<sup>406</sup> J. I. Packer, "Inspiration" in *New Bible Dictionary* (Intervarsity, 1999), 507.

<sup>407</sup> Erickson, 213

experiencing such a thing. For example, there are no instances in Scripture where God subjectively and mystically gives an author of Scripture a mere inward mental impression for the sake of guidance or revelation. In fact, we have demonstrated that the only examples of such secret *divine manipulation* through *divine/human mental telepathy* occurred in order to control pagan unbelievers against their will, but never to communicate to His people.<sup>408</sup> And those pagans never knew God was even controlling them! On the other hand, when God had specific direction for His people, He revealed it in unmistakable and miraculously authenticated ways such as a vision or apparition.

In other words, there is *no* biblical evidence for the kind of "mind influence" and control in the Christian's life that is so essential to both the popular view of biblical "inspiration" and the *mega mystical* way of life that expects divine guidance on extrabiblical matters through mental impulses. Accordingly, we have written elsewhere:

The non-biblical word ["inspiration"] has given many unbiblical ideas about divine revelation. Both secular and sacred dictionaries typically define divine "inspiration" merely as a "divine influence" on the mind of the writer. Often included in the idea of "inspiration" is that God spontaneously, and even rather imperceptibly, guided the thinking of the biblical writer, such that the words they wrote entered their mind through a process of something like divine/human mental telepathy.

By "mental telepathy" we mean the direct transference of thoughts from one mind to the other, apart from physically "hearing" or "seeing." This is very much like what is known as Extra Sensory Perception (ESP) which the *Encyclopedia Britannica* defines as: "perception that occurs independently of the known sensory processes."<sup>409</sup> Likewise, popular modern explanations of biblical "inspiration" clearly reflect the idea that God's Son, Prophets, and Apostles experienced nothing more than ESP in their revelatory experiences.

On the contrary, we demonstrate elsewhere that such secret, mystical, subjective *divine manipulation* and *divine/human mental telepathy* are recorded in Scripture as only occurring

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<sup>408</sup> Regarding the biblical data concerning *divine/human mental telepathy* see chapter 14.6.

<sup>409</sup> "Extrasensory perception"; Online at [www.britannica.com](http://www.britannica.com).

with unbelieving pagans.<sup>410</sup> Secondly, and as also thoroughly demonstrated elsewhere, whenever the process of receiving divine revelation is described in Scripture, the recipient always described it as "seeing" or "hearing" something.<sup>411</sup> We put these terms in quotation marks because while divine revelation at times came through physical apparitions seen by physical eyes and heard by physical ears, at other times God communicated directly to the part of the mind that processes these physical senses such that they "saw" and "heard" a vision in their mind. . . .

The fact that God always made it clear when He was providing someone with extra-biblical miraculous revelation underscores His desire to make it abundantly evident to people when He is speaking to them, a fact often neglected by modern *mega mysticism* which insists we need to be listening for some "still small voice" to understand God's will. . . . There simply are no biblical examples of this in Scripture.<sup>412</sup>

Unfortunately, in typical attempts to describe "inspiration," a process only used by God to imperceptibly control pagan rulers, is invoked. Never are any people of God described as experiencing what proponents of "inspiration" claim was the foundational experience of biblical writers and the foundational explanation of its authority. Do we really want the authority of God's word resting on such a mystical, subjective, even unbiblical process as some sort of direct *divine/human mental telepathy*? We don't think so. Scripture is simply the faithful human recording of a supernatural revelation given through visions, auditions, Angels, apparitions, etc.

#### **D.4) The effort to devise one all-encompassing theory of "inspiration"**

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<sup>410</sup> Regarding the pagan nature of the *divine manipulation* and *divine/human mental telepathy* that is so foundational to popular notions of biblical "inspiration" and *mega mystical* theology regarding divine guidance see chapter 14.6.

<sup>411</sup> For a thorough study of the nature of the revelation that Apostles and Prophets experienced see chapter 10.7; 8.3 and section 9.5.A.

<sup>412</sup> Excerpted from section 10.7.C.

Another problem with the standard Evangelical understanding of "inspiration" is that there is an effort to devise one all-encompassing theory that explains all of Scripture. In other words, it is implied that the writing that a historian like Luke wrote to produce Acts, involved and required the same kind of "divine influence" on the mind, as when a Prophet like Ezekiel wrote to record a vision. On the contrary, the experience of these two men were quite different, and a "one-theory-fits-all" approach is far too simplistic to accurately reflect the great variety of genres we encounter in Scripture. Along these lines, Wayne Grudem writes:

It must be emphasized that the Bible does not speak of only one type of process or one manner by which God communicated to the biblical authors what he wanted to be said. In fact, there is indication of a *wide variety of processes* God used to bring about the desired result. <sup>413</sup>

Accordingly, we will discuss different types of Scripture and how we believe their writing would have differed in the next chapter. Along these lines, William Sanday, NT Professor at Oxford, wrote concerning the one-theory-fits-all mentality of modern promoters of "inspiration":

One class [of scholars] will have "All" of some little system, whether as is most often the case descended from the past, or an invention of the present. This is perfectly clear-cut and sharp in its outlines, and it fits compactly together like a piece of mechanism. With it they drive a straight furrow through the world of phenomena [e.g. Scripture], regarding neither to right nor left, and not heeding what delicate flowers or what subtle interlacing growths their ploughshare overturns and buries. <sup>414</sup>

### **D.5) The inherent contradiction in the theory of *concurrent inspiration***

As noted above, Dr. Warfield's theory of *concurrent inspiration* has become the most accepted view. J. I. Packer describes it as follows:

We are to think of the Spirit's inspiring activity, and, for that matter, of all His regular operations in and upon human

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<sup>413</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Zondervan, 1994), 80

<sup>414</sup> William Sanday, *Inspiration* (Green & Co., 1903), 428-9.

personality, as (to use an old but valuable technical term) concursive; that is, as exercised in, through and by means of the writers' own activity, in such a way that their thinking and writing was both free and spontaneous on their part and divinely elicited and controlled, and what they wrote was not only their own work but also God's work. <sup>415</sup>

How convenient. Convenient because all Bible scholars recognize the very human element in Scripture. Therefore, it is quite convenient to espouse a theory that says the biblical writers were "free and spontaneous" in "their thinking and writing" as an accurate description of what we see in a great deal of Scripture. But it is also contradictory to espouse a theory that says the biblical writers were "free and spontaneous" in "their thinking and writing" but that same "thinking and writing" was "divinely elicited [caused] and controlled." We have noted elsewhere Dr. Packer's penchant for "paradox theology" in which he claims God has intentionally revealed contradictory things in Scripture that we are to simultaneously accept as true. <sup>416</sup> Unfortunately, this unbiblical paradigm extends to a great deal of modern theology as well, including the popular theory of "inspiration."

Which is it? Were the biblical writers ultimately "free and spontaneous" in "their thinking and writing," or was God ultimately controlling their minds and actually "inspiring" every thought and word they wrote? Again, it is quite convenient to devise a theory that says both, but it is also embarrassingly contradictory and therefore not acceptable as being worthy of our trust as the truth of the matter.

Dr. Packer attempts to clarify when he writes elsewhere:

The idea is not of mechanical dictation, or automatic writing, or any process which involved the suspending of the action of the human writer's mind. Such concepts of inspiration are found in the Talmud, Philo, and the Fathers, but not in the Bible. The divine direction and control under which the biblical authors wrote was not a physical or psychological force, and it

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<sup>415</sup> J. I. Packer, *"Fundamentalism" and the Word of God* (Eerdmans, 1958), 80-1.

<sup>416</sup> Regarding the "paradox theology" of J. I. Packer see section 2.10.B.

did not detract from but rather heightened the freedom, spontaneity, and creativeness of their writing.<sup>417</sup>

If the "divine direction and control under which the biblical authors wrote was not a . . . psychological force," then how did it influence the writers at all? Instead of the obvious contradictions created by stating that humans wrote with "freedom, spontaneity, and creativeness" while God controlled and "inspired" every thought and word written, we believe it is better to simply say that *Scripture is the faithful human recording of divine revelation*.

#### **D.6) The difficulty & actually misguided effort to denounce "dictation"**

In the quote from Dr. Packer above we note his interest in wanting to deny that *concurrent inspiration* means "mechanical dictation." This introduces another problem with the most popular Evangelical understanding of the "inspiration" of the Bible. Proponents of *concurrent inspiration* seem concerned, but unable to distinguish their view from the idea of "dictation" concerning how the human authors wrote Scripture.

First, we note the consistent denial that their view of "inspiration" involved "dictation." The slightly neoorthodox Presbyterian theologian Donald Bloesch is typical when he writes: "Verbal inspiration must not be confused with . . . mechanical dictation."<sup>418</sup> Likewise, Dr. Packer has written:

Because Evangelicals hold that the biblical writers were completely controlled by the Holy Spirit, it is often supposed . . . that they maintain what is called the "dictation" or "typewriter" theory of inspiration. . . . But it is not so. This "dictation theory" is a man of straw. It is safe to say that no Protestant theologian, from the Reformation till now, has ever held it; and certainly modern Evangelicals do not hold it. . . . It is true that many sixteenth and seventeenth-century theologians spoke of Scripture as "dictated by the Holy Ghost."

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<sup>417</sup> J. I. Packer, "The Inspiration of the Bible," in *The Origin of the Bible*, ed. Philip W. Comfort (Tyndale, 1992), 35.

<sup>418</sup> Donald Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*, Vols. 1 & 2 (Harper & Row, 1978), I.55.

But all they meant was that the authors wrote word for word what God intended. [what else is "dictation"?] <sup>419</sup>

The reason for such a denial stems from two things: 1) Evangelical theologians are typically attempting to find a "one-theory-fits-all" approach to how Scripture was written and; 2) much of Scripture obviously reflects the personality and feelings (humanity) of the writer and is therefore just as obviously not dictated. The human freedom, spontaneity, and personalization of much of Scripture are too obvious to claim it is simply word-for-word dictated by God.

Nevertheless, along with *concurrent inspiration*, an even more central term to the popular theory of how Scripture was written is *verbal inspiration*. As we discuss further in chapter 8.11, *verbal inspiration* is concisely defined in the "Chicago Statement of Biblical Inerrancy": "We affirm that the whole of Scripture and all its parts, down to the very words of the original, were given by divine inspiration." <sup>420</sup> Again, that sounds like dictation.

Remembering that Dr. Packer denies his view of "inspiration" involves "dictation," note his more detailed description of *verbal inspiration*:

The point that plenary and verbal [inspiration] make is that the biblical words themselves (in Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek) are to be seen as God-given. Men were not left to articulate information about, and interpretations of, God's ways with men apart from His superintending providence. On the contrary, the Lord who gave the Word also gave the words. <sup>421</sup>

Elsewhere, Dr. Packer writes: "The biblical concept of Scripture . . . is of a . . . God-given message, set down in writing in God-given words." <sup>422</sup> Likewise, he writes: "Inspiration is a work of God terminating, not in the men who were to write Scripture (as if, having given them an idea of what to say, God left them to

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<sup>419</sup> Packer, *Fundamentalism*, 79.

<sup>420</sup> "The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy," online at <http://www.bible-researcher.com/chicago1.html>.

<sup>421</sup> J. I. Packer, "The Adequacy of Human Language," in *Inerrancy*, Norman Geisler ed. (Zondervan, 1979), 211.

<sup>422</sup> Packer, *Fundamentalism*, 88.

themselves to find a way of saying it), but in the actual written product.<sup>423</sup>

Again, we recognize the obvious contradiction here to Dr. Packer's insistence above that God did not exercise a "psychological force" in "inspiration" but rather, the biblical writers wrote with "freedom, spontaneity, and creativeness." Secondly, how else are we to understand *verbal inspiration* other than "dictation" if indeed, all the words of Scripture are "God-given" and "Men were not left to articulate" the revelations they received in their own wording, but "the Lord who gave the Word also gave the words."

*Webster's* defines "dictation" as: "the act or manner of uttering words to be transcribed."<sup>424</sup> How is that different from the definition of *verbal inspiration* in the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*:

All the words and all the verbal relationships [grammar] are inspired by God. This includes all seemingly peripheral [personal] statements as well as those more obviously germane to the matter under consideration. . . . Even [historical] accounts known beforehand by the writers from other sources are inspired in the same verbal way for inclusion in the Bible. Thus the totality of Scripture partakes of uniform verbal inspiration.<sup>425</sup>

Goodness, you would think even all the punctuation marks in Scripture were dictated by God. Nevertheless, if the act of writing Scripture involved a divine influence over the minds of the authors with sufficient power to make sure that every single word and even grammatical relationship was precisely the mind of God, then how is that different from "dictation"? It is not. In fact, *verbal inspiration* would actually require something more like divine possession or *automatic writing* in which a person is controlled to such an extent that their hand moves and writes apart from the person willing it to.

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<sup>423</sup> J. I. Packer, "Inspiration" in *New Bible Dictionary* (Intervarsity, 1999), 507.

<sup>424</sup> *Webster's Dictionary*, online at <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/dictation>.

<sup>425</sup> I. S. Rennie, "Verbal Inspiration," *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Baker, 1984), 1139.

<sup>426</sup> Regarding *automatic writing* see section 9.5.D.

Accordingly, the constant complaint of promoters of *verbal inspiration* that they are being accused of espousing "dictation" is rather ironic when we seriously consider how they describe their theory. The Anglican theologian Peter Jensen writes:

Hardly a reference to inspiration in the last hundred years has failed to exploit the confusion between 'dictation' and 'inspiration'. Whatever the author's view about the category of inspiration, we are assured that dictation is not intended. It is clear that, despite fervent protestations to the contrary, evangelicals are suspected of holding the view that God dictated the Bible word for word to its human authors, and that the human contribution was therefore minimal. The truth is that evangelicals have been careful to indicate that 'inspiration' entails no particular manner of human contribution, only the need to assert the ultimate divine authorship of the text and therefore its authority.<sup>427</sup>

Two responses are in order. First, why wouldn't "evangelicals [be] suspected of holding the view that God dictated the Bible word for word to its human authors, and that the human contribution was therefore minimal" when word for word dictation is precisely what Evangelicals mean by *verbal inspiration*?

Secondly, it is not true, as Dr. Jensen claims, that "evangelicals have been careful to indicate that 'inspiration' entails no particular manner of human contribution." On the contrary, the popular theories of *concurvive* and *verbal inspiration* attempt a very particular description of the human/divine mix in "inspiration."

Fortunately, others have been more honest about the problems and contradictions inherent in popular theories of biblical "inspiration." A generation ago, T. Rees in the "old" *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, a standard of Evangelical and even "fundamental" Christianity, noted:

In an excess of zeal to defend the Bible against an excess of denigration a position is taken—the dictation theory of inspiration—that very few, even among the most conservative of biblical scholars, have ever been willing to espouse. It must be quickly added, however, that many are hard put to show

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<sup>427</sup> Peter Jensen, *The Revelation of God* (Intervarsity, 2002), 158.

wherein their positions differ practically from the dictation formula they repudiate.<sup>428</sup>

Accordingly, what is the solution to the problems modern theories of "inspiration" create? In our opinion they are as follows:

- Recognize that many modes of writing, including "dictation," were a part of how Scripture was written. We argue for this in the next chapter, 8.9.
- Simply see Scripture as *the faithful human recording of divine revelation*. For further discussion of this see chapter 8.10 regarding the human/divine mix involved in the creation of Scripture.
- Drop the unnecessary and untenable theory of *verbal inspiration*, which we argue for in chapter 8.11.

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## ***Extras & Endnotes***

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### ***Gauging Your Grasp***

- 1) What is the definition of Scripture we suggest in this chapter? Do you agree or disagree and why?
- 2) What is the safeguard against human error that we suggest? Do you agree or disagree and why?
- 3) What do we contend is the fundamental reason for the controversy surrounding "inspiration" and the perceived need to develop theories for it?
- 4) Why do we claim Scripture must be inerrant? Do you agree or disagree and why?

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<sup>428</sup> T. Rees, "Authority in Religion" *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, James Orr, ed. Electronic Edition STEP Files (Parsons Technology, 1998), I.10.

- 5) Why do we claim a "one-theory-fits-all" approach to how Scripture was created is far too simplistic? Do you agree or disagree and why?
- 6) What is meant by *concurrent inspiration* and what is the contradiction we see in it? Do you agree or disagree?
- 7) What is *verbal inspiration* and what contradiction do we see in popular claims/denials regarding it? Do you agree or disagree?
- 8) Why do we claim that the popular theory of "inspiration" depends on *mental telepathy*? Why do we claim this is a problem? Do you agree or disagree and why?

### **Publications & Particulars**

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## Chapter 8.9

# The Creation of Scripture

### *The Meaning of 2 Timothy 3:16*

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*Extras & Endnotes*

### **Primary Points**

- 2 Timothy 3:16 simply states that Scripture is: written divine revelation.
- *Theopneustos* does not mean “inspired” but literally “expired by God.”
- Neither the word nor idea of “inspiration” is used anywhere by the biblical writers. “Inspiration” is simply not a biblical word.
- Scripture, like Creation, is another creation of the creative breath of God.
- Scripture gives us detailed descriptions of how Prophets and Apostles *received* revelation, but no descriptions of how they wrote it because this was a rather natural act that humans are capable of.
- We must gain our understanding of the different ways that Scripture was written by studying the different kinds of Scripture.
- In general, we perceive four kinds of Scripture including that which was 1) *deposited*, 2) *dictated*, 3) *researched*, and 4) *experienced*.
- *Deposited* Scripture refers primarily to Apostles who wrote from a store of supernatural knowledge gained through divine revelation.
- *Dictated* Scripture refers primarily to Prophets who wrote from dictation or recorded a revelation rather immediately after receiving it.
- *Researched* Scripture refers to the historical parts, especially reflected in Luke’s description of his Gospel and Acts as the result of him having “**investigated everything carefully**”

## A) The Creation of Scripture

### A.1) Scripture is written divine revelation

The most definitive statement on how God provided us with Scripture is given by the Apostle Paul in the following well known statement:

**All Scripture [*graphē*] is breathed out [*theopneustos*] by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.** (ESV 2 Tim 3:16) <sup>429</sup>

<sup>429</sup> Too much has been made by more liberal scholars of the NEB rendering of *pasa graphē* as, "**Every inspired Scripture . . .**," suggesting that only parts of the Bible are "inspired Scripture" but not all Scripture is "inspired." While this construction is a possible translation, one can hardly find another translation that adopts it. Regardless, Paul is speaking about the authority of divine writings, which he here calls "Scripture", and all such writings have divine authority for Paul.

Nonetheless, the following describes the Greek issues well:

The word which for our purpose is of supreme importance is the word *theopneustos*, translated in the English Bible, "inspired of God." It is a compound, consisting of the elements *theo* (God) and *pneustos* (breathed). Now, it is well to note that the word ends in the three letters *-tos*. In the Greek language, words which 1) end in *-tos* and 2) are compound with *theo* (God) are generally passive in meaning.

An example will make this clear. There is a Greek word *theodidaktos*, (many others might also be brought forth) which means "taught of God." As may be clearly seen, it ends in *-tos* and also contains the element *theo* (God). Precisely similar is the important word which we are now engaged in considering, namely, *theopneustos*. It likewise is passive in usage, and we should properly translate, "breathed of God."

This point is often overlooked, and there have been those who have somewhat vigorously insisted that the meaning is active. They would therefore translate by the phrase "breathing out God," in the sense that the Scriptures breathed forth or were imbued with the Spirit of God. Such, however, as has been noted above, is not the true meaning. The true meaning is passive, "that which is breathed out by God," and it is this strange designation that the Apostle here applies to the Old Testament Scriptures. Young, 20.

Likewise, George W. Knight III relates concerning *theopneustos* in 2 Timothy 3:16:

If this is a passive verbal form, it indicates that scripture's source is the breath of God, i.e., that scripture itself is a result of that action. If it is active, it indicates that scripture is filled with God's breath and

Here, we get a succinct description of what Scripture is: written divine revelation. The term "**Scripture**" is translated from the Greek *graphē*, which, as NT scholar G. W. Knight notes, "was used in the Greek of the day for any piece of writing."<sup>430</sup> However, the NT writers coined it for their own use to refer to a special kind of writing, because "in the NT ["Scripture"] is used only of holy scripture."<sup>431</sup> Still, in essence, "Scripture" means writing, and so in Paul's simple statement that, "**All Scripture is breathed out by God**" (2 Tim 3:16) we have the essence of what Scripture is: written divine revelation.

## A.2) Scripture is not "inspired"

In addition, the Apostle is speaking of the authority of Scripture here, as we have discussed elsewhere.<sup>432</sup> But Scripture's divine authority is based on the fact that it is "**breathed out by God.**" The ESV here is a very good translation of the Greek word *theopneustos* of which Dr. Knight writes:

is a compound of the word for God, [*theos*], and the verb "breathe," [*pneu*]. . . . The word may be properly rendered

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that it breathes out the Spirit of God. The latter was argued by Cremer in a later edition of his *Lexicon* (cf. pp. 730-32 in contrast with the other position, p. 282).

But Warfield demonstrates that in patristic literature the word bears "a uniformly passive significance, rooted in the idea of the creative breath of God" (*Inspiration and Authority*, 275; see further 245-96). He further indicates that this conclusion is confirmed by "the consideration that compounds of verbals in *-tog* with *theos* normally express an effect produced by God's activity" (281; see 281f. for a list of more than seventy-five such compounds; cf., e.g., *theodidaktos*, "instructed by God," 1 Thes. 4:9). He notes that this is in accord with "the Hebraic conviction that God produces all that He would bring into being by a mere breath" (286). Warfield's study has proved to be so convincing that BAGD list only his work in its bibliographic note on *theopneustos*. (*Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles* (NIGTC) [Eerdmans, 1992], 446

<sup>430</sup> Knight, 445.

<sup>431</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>432</sup> Regarding the authority of Scripture see chapters 7.7-7.9.

"Godbreathed," though under the influence of the [Latin] Vulgate "*inspirata*" the more common, but somewhat less accurate, English rendering has been "inspired by God"<sup>433</sup>

Several misunderstandings in modern translations can therefore be pointed out. First, it has been misguided to take Jerome's rendering of *inspirata* from the Latin Vulgate and coin the English word "inspiration" as accurately reflecting the Apostle's meaning. As we will note below, *theopneustos* does not mean "inspiration" but "breathed out."

Accordingly, the majority of translations that use the word "**inspired**" here are misguided (NASB, NLT, RSV, NRSV, KJV, NKJV, NET). Along these lines, Wayne Grudem writes:

Older systematic theologies used the word *inspired* and *inspiration* to speak of the fact that the words of Scripture are spoken by God. This terminology was based especially on an older translation of 2 Tim. 3:16, which said, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God . . ." (KJV). However, the word *inspiration* has such a weak sense in ordinary usage today (every poet or songwriter claims to be "inspired" to write) that I have not used it in this text.<sup>434</sup>

Dr. Grudem's concern regarding confusion with the concept of "inspiration" is even reflected in C. S. Lewis (1898-1963) who wrote: "If every good and perfect gift comes from the Father of Lights then all true and edifying writings, whether in Scripture or not, must be in some sense inspired."<sup>435</sup> Perhaps, but this illustrates another reason that, like Dr. Grudem, we avoid the word "inspiration" as well. Accordingly, John MacArthur seems uncharacteristically misguided to comment on 2 Timothy 3:16: "Scripture is the revelation conveyed, inspiration is the means of that conveyance."<sup>436</sup> Likewise, the NEB makes the mistake of not even recognizing the "*theo*" portion of "*theopneustos*" and translating the Greek simply as: "**inspired Scripture.**"

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<sup>433</sup> Knight, 446.

<sup>434</sup> Grudem, 75, fn. 6.

<sup>435</sup> C. S. Lewis in *C. S. Lewis on Scripture*, M. J. Christensen ed. (Word, 1979), 15.

<sup>436</sup> John MacArthur, *MacArthur's New Testament Commentary*, Electronic Edition STEP Files CD-ROM (Parsons Technology, 1997), 2 Tim 3:16.

On the contrary, *theopneustos* literally means something that is "exhaled," or "breathed out," by God, or as the NIV puts it "**God-breathed.**" More specifically then, Paul is saying that Scripture is a product of divine expiration, instead of divine inspiration. Along these lines, B. B. Warfield (1851-1921), in the most detailed study of *theopneustos* to date, writes:

The Greek term has nothing to say of inspiring or of inspiration; it speaks only of [expiration]. What it says of Scripture is, not that it is "breathed into by God" or is the product of the divine "inbreathing" into its human authors, but that it is breathed out by God, "God-breathed," the product of the creative breath of God.<sup>437</sup>

Unfortunately, then, most English translations are wrong to give the misleading term "inspiration" in this text. In fact, neither the word nor idea of "inspiration" is used anywhere by the biblical writers. "Inspiration" is simply not a biblical word.

In addition to its erroneous use in 2 Timothy 3:16, the NASB uses the word "**inspiration**" three other times. Twice it is used when translating the very common Hebrew word *lēb* ("heart," "mind") in Ezekiel 13:2, 17. Therefore, the NIV is better, rendering the phrase, "**those who prophesy out of their own imagination** [mind, heart]," rather than "inspiration."

Also the NASB has "**inspired**" to translate the phrase *ish rūāch* in Hosea 9:7, referring to false prophets (as does NIV, NLT). The latter word is the very common Hebrew term for "breath" or "spirit," and therefore OT scholars Keil and Delitzsch<sup>438</sup> and Thomas McComiskey<sup>439</sup> translate it merely as "a man of the spirit" or "spiritual man" (as does RSV, NRSV, KJV, NKJV, ESV, NCV "spiritual person").<sup>440</sup> There is no need to translate *ish rūāch* as "inspired."

None of these biblical references carry either the theological meaning of "inspiration" (i.e. revelation through divine influence) or the popular idea of divine revelation through *divine/human mental telepathy*. This is why descriptions of divine revelation coming to

<sup>437</sup> B. B. Warfield, "Inspiration," *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia (ISBE)*, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed., 4 vols. (Eerdmans, 1988), 2:840

<sup>438</sup> C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, Electronic Edition STEP Files CD-ROM (Findex.com, 2000), Hosea 9:7.

<sup>439</sup> Thomas McComiskey, "Hosea and Amos" in *The Minor Prophets*, 3 vols. (Baker, 1992, 1993, 1998), Hosea 9:7.

humans is described as something **"revealed"** (1 Cor 2:6; Eph 3:5), a **"revelation(s)"** (2 Cor 12:1, 7; Gal 1:12; 2:2; Eph 3:3; Rev 1:1), a **"teaching"** or being **"taught"** (John 8:28; 14:26; 1 Cor 2:13), or something being spoken (cf. Gen 3:8; Num 7:89; John 16:12-13; Acts 1:3; 13:2; 1 Tim 4:1; **"the Lord says"** 184x in NIV OT), seen (cf. John 3:31; Acts 26:13-19; and **"I saw"** 31x in Rev) or heard (Deut 4:12; cf. 4:33; 5:24-26; Exod 19:19; Isa 6:8; cf. Ezek 1:25, 28; John 3:31; Acts 26:13-14; "I heard" 22x in Rev)

But never an "inspiration." Accordingly, you will not find an entry for "inspire" or any of its cognates, or even anything related to the idea, in any biblical Hebrew or Greek dictionary. But you sure find a lot of references to it in modern theology. Nonetheless, when the second century Bible Teacher Hippolytus (c. 170-235) described the manner in which the Apostles wrote Scripture he said:

First of all they were endowed with wisdom by the Word [Jesus], and then again were rightly instructed in the future by means of visions. And then, when thus themselves fully convinced, they spake those things which were revealed by God to them alone.

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There is no mention here of supernatural influence in the communication of the revelation the Apostles had received.

What Christian theologians really wish to convey with the word "inspired" is "divinely authoritative." Accordingly, we recommend that you insert the latter term whenever you see "inspired" in theological writing in order to understand the topic more clearly. Or instead of "inspiration" the phrase "how the Bible was written inerrantly" could be inserted.

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<sup>441</sup> Hippolytus, *Antichrist*, 2; online at [www.ccel.org](http://www.ccel.org).

### A.3) The divine creation rather than "inspiration" of Scripture

Because *theopneustos* is never used elsewhere in Scripture, nor in any Greek document before 2 Timothy, it is evident that the Apostle himself invented the word in order to succinctly communicate something about the origin and authority of Scripture.

<sup>442</sup> Accordingly, we must derive its meaning from similar concepts in Scripture. What then did Paul mean that Scripture is "**breathed out by God**"? The most likely and biblical understanding is that Paul is referring to God's creative activity, or as Dr. Warfield put it, "the creative breath of God." In other words, the Apostle is using a metaphor that reminds one of divine creation.

It is interesting to note the other remarkable things that are said to be created by the "breath" of God, including the creation of the Universe (Ps. 33:6) and humanity itself (Gen. 2:7). Scripture is simply another creation of God through the creative breath of God.

<sup>443</sup> When God spoke, Creation came into existence, and likewise, when God spoke, Scripture came into existence. When Creation came into existence all kinds of actions resulted such as the multiplication of the human race, agriculture, governments, and cultures in general. Likewise, when God spoke to create Scripture, it initiated a flurry of human activity including the recording, copying, distributing, canonizing, translating, and teaching of the word of God.

<sup>442</sup> NT scholar I. H. Marshall writes: "This is the earliest known occurrence, [of *theopneustos* in Greek literature] and it is possible that the writer coined it. (*The Pastoral Epistles* [T & T Clark, 1999], 794).

<sup>443</sup> Dr. Packer writes:

The "breath" or "spirit" of God in the Old Testament denotes the active outgoing of divine power, whether in creation (Ps. 33:6; Job 33:4; cf. Gen. 1:2; 2:7), preservation (Job 34:14), revelation to and through prophets (Isa. 48:16; 61:1; Mic. 3:8; Joel 2:28ff), regeneration (Ezek. 36:27), or judgment (Isa. 30:28, 33). The New Testament reveals this divine "breath" (Greek *pneuma*) to be a Person of the Godhead. God's "breath" (the Holy Spirit) produced Scripture, as a means to the conveyance of spiritual understanding.

Whether we render *pasa graphē* as "the whole Scripture" or "every text," . . . Paul's meaning is clear beyond all doubt. He is affirming that all that comes in the category of Scripture, all that has a place among the "sacred writings" (*hiera grammata*, 2 Tim. 3:15), just because it is God-breathed, is profitable for the guiding of both faith and life. ("The Inspiration of the Bible" in *The Origin of the Bible*, ed. Philip W. Comfort [Tyndale, 1992], 30)

Accordingly, the Apostle is not suggesting that God breathed divinity *into* Scripture, but rather, in a creative act, symbolized by the metaphor of breathing, God produced Scripture.<sup>444</sup> Nor is the Apostle saying something like, "Scripture is inspiring" like a song might be. Paul is simply saying God created Scripture.

## **B) The Methods of Creating Scripture:** *Dictated, Deposited, Researched, Experienced*

### **B.1) Studying Scripture to understand how it was created**

Because Scripture itself simply states that God created it, we have a great deal of freedom in developing ideas about *how* God created inerrant Scripture through human writers. Scripture itself does not define this. Accordingly, the respected Reformed scholar Sinclair B. Ferguson writes:

Inspiration [how the Bible was written inerrantly] is given no final explanation [in Scripture]. No doctrine of the exact nature of inspiration is gained from 2 Timothy 3:16. This passage considers, as we have seen, the product of God's powerful working (his "breath"), not the way in which his Spirit has engaged men's lives and minds in order to create the product of Scripture.

The nature of inspiration cannot be determined in an *a priori* fashion from the simple fact of it. Nor, indeed, does 2 Peter 1:21, which speaks of the Holy Spirit's carrying or bearing the biblical authors, shed much light. The mode of inspiration must be discovered exegetically, not dogmatically, in an *a posteriori* manner, by the examination of the whole of Scripture, with special attention to its reflection on the mode of the production of its various parts.<sup>445</sup>

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<sup>444</sup> Carl F. H. Henry noted:

[W]hereas Barth emphasizes the "inspiring" of Scripture—that is, its present use by the Holy Spirit toward hearers and readers—the Bible itself begins further back with the very "inspiredness" of the sacred writings. The writings themselves, as an end product, are assertedly God-breathed. (*Revelation and the Bible: Contemporary Evangelical Thought* [Baker, 1958], 146)

<sup>445</sup> Sinclair B. Ferguson, "How Does the Bible Look at Itself?" in *Inerrancy & Hermeneutic*, ed. Harvey Conn (Baker, 1988), 56.

Dr. Sinclair makes two important points. First, there is freedom in how we understand the method God used to create inerrant Scripture through humans. Accordingly, John McClintock and James Strong wrote: "The [Church] fathers had no definite theory of inspiration at all."<sup>446</sup> Likewise, Dr. Warfield admitted, "How it [Scripture] was given through them [authors] is left . . . without specific explanation."<sup>447</sup> We believe this is because after giving very detailed descriptions of how God *revealed* Scripture (e.g. apparitions, visions, Angels, etc.), no explanation of how Prophets and Apostles *recorded* that revelation was necessary because humans are able to do this with sufficient accuracy. God describes the supernatural part in detail (miraculously revealing and confirming revelation) but saw no need to explain the natural part of recording that revelation.

The second important thing that Dr. Sinclair points out above is that any understanding of how the human authors wrote their texts needs to be derived from looking at the nature and characteristics of their writing. Many Evangelicals simply wish to wave a magic wand over Scripture and call it "divine" without discussing the vastly different types of literature in it. There are differences in how its prophetic parts were created as compared to its historical parts. Accordingly, we have demonstrated many different ways that Apostles and Prophets received divine revelation and by which God created Scripture.<sup>448</sup> Simply saying the whole Bible is "inspired" is neither accurate nor helpful. We would say that the whole Bible is divinely authoritative.

We have already noted that the popular approach to understanding how the Scriptures were written is to develop one, all-sufficient theory that explains all the different genres of Scripture.<sup>449</sup> This is a mistake. Several different modes of writing were involved in producing the different genres of Scripture. Accordingly, Dr. Ferguson writes:

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<sup>446</sup> John McClintock and James Strong, "Inspiration", in *Cyclopaedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature*, CD-ROM (Ages Software, 2000), 225.

<sup>447</sup> Warfield, *ISBE*, 2:845.

<sup>448</sup> Regarding the variety of ways that God provided divine revelation for Scripture see chapter 10.7, 9.5, and 8.3.

<sup>449</sup> Regarding the mistaken attempt to develop one, all-sufficient theory that explains all the different genres of Scripture see section 8.8.D.4.

Paul affirms that the product is God-breathed. But it came into being through a variety of means (careful research and study, ecstatic experience, and even, in the case of some parts, dictation).<sup>450</sup>

Along these lines, J. I. Packer writes:

It is clear that the psychological dimensions and phenomena of the process of divine revelation varied from one writer to another, and from time to time for the same writer. Thus, the divine revelation of the prophets delivering (and, also recording or dictating, cf. Jer. 36) God's oracles was psychologically dualistic, in the sense that they knew themselves to be simply relaying what they had received, with no admixture of their own thoughts (whatever they might have contributed to the material's poetic form).

The divine revelation of the historians was psychologically didactic, in the sense that they evidently wrote on the basis of research into facts and traditions and reflection on the most instructive shape to give their material. Something similar should be said about the wisdom writers, and about the anonymous editors and redactors who worked to give the prophetic and historical books their final form.

The divine revelation of the psalmists and poets was psychologically responsive and creative, in the sense that they crafted into shape the praises and prayers and celebratory declarations that welled up within them as they looked towards God.<sup>451</sup>

Likewise, then, we perceive four kinds of Scripture in Scripture including that which was 1) *deposited*, 2) *dictated*, 3) *researched*, and 4) *experienced*.

## **B.2) *Deposited Scripture***

In chapter 8.2 of this book, we discussed thoroughly the nature of apostolic revelation and their gifts of divine wisdom and knowledge (cf. 1 Cor 12:8; 14:6; 2:6-13, 16; 2 Cor 11:5-6; Eph 3:2-10). We spoke of the supernatural knowledge resulting from their revelatory experiences as *abiding* and wrote:

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<sup>450</sup> Ferguson, 55.

<sup>451</sup> J. I. Packer, *Truth & Power* (Harold Shaw, 1996), 69

By *abiding* revelation we mean that the gifts of divine wisdom and knowledge gave the Apostles a store or depository of divine knowledge to write from, rather than being directly, spontaneously, and continuously “inspired” as they wrote.

Accordingly, the Apostle seems to distinguish the gift of “**knowledge**” from a “**revelation**” or a “**prophecy**” in 1 Corinthians 14:6, suggesting that the latter two may be a more spontaneous, immediately given revelation, while “**knowledge**” may suggest a one time deposit of divine revelation and knowledge which numerous subsequent “words” or messages of divine wisdom and knowledge were based upon.<sup>452</sup> Along these lines, Erwin Lutzer writes: “[I]n some instances God endowed the [biblical] authors with ideas that they were allowed to write in their own words.”

While Dr. Lutzer suggests the *abiding knowledge* of apostolic revelation only occurred in “some instances,” we would suggest this is the pervasive nature of all the NT epistles. After God supernaturally granted the Apostles divine knowledge of New Covenant doctrine through the types of supernatural revelation discussed in the next chapter, they could rather naturally use that knowledge to speak and write authoritatively on these subjects, adapting their knowledge to different circumstances, and weaving such supernatural knowledge amongst more natural knowledge.<sup>453</sup>

Accordingly, we would suggest that the *deposited* type of Scripture, which is spoken or written from a store of supernatural knowledge gained in the past, can be detected when Christ said: “**Everything that I learned** [past tense] **from My Father I have made known to you**” (John 15:15).

### B.3) *Dictated Scripture*

While Apostles would seem to have written primarily out of previously supernaturally deposited knowledge, the revelations that Prophets recorded were often essentially dictated to them. We have

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<sup>452</sup> For further discussion on the distinction between the gifts of prophecy and Apostleship see section 9.4.B.

<sup>453</sup> Excerpt from section 8.2.D

discussed elsewhere the popular denial that any part of the Scriptures was written by a person merely dictating directly what God was saying to him, and have offered several examples of dictation in Scripture.<sup>454</sup> There we have written:

By dictation, we mean the act of writing or speaking word-for-word exactly what another person is saying, as they are saying it. In other words, there is absolutely no influence of the speaker or the recorder in what is said or written, but only the words of the one they are speaking or writing for. . . .

*Webster's* defines "dictation" as: "the act or manner of uttering words to be transcribed."<sup>455</sup> What else is happening when Isaiah says: "**The LORD said to me, 'Take a large scroll and write on it with an ordinary pen: Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz'**" (Isa 8:1)?

Erwin Lutzer, longtime Teacher at Moody Bible Church has succinctly written:

[S]ome of the Bible was dictated by God word for word. Moses did not add his own style when he wrote, "You shall have no other gods before Me." On many occasions the prophets received revelations from God, word for word, at other times they put the message in their own words. But dictation, as such, was rare; almost always the author's style can be recognized.<sup>456</sup>

While we would agree that dictation may have been a relatively rare mode of writing and speaking the word of God, it was perhaps more common than just the Ten Commandments that most are willing to concede. . . .

If we include within the genre of "dictation" those instances in which the biblical writer recorded the revelation rather immediately after receiving it, then we would suggest that much of the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and Revelation can be ascribed to this mode of revelation and writing.<sup>457</sup>

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<sup>454</sup> Regarding dictation in Scripture see section 9.5.C.

<sup>455</sup> *Webster's Dictionary* online at <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/dictation>.

<sup>456</sup> Erwin Lutzer, *Seven Convincing Miracles* (Moody, 1999), 22-3.

<sup>457</sup> Excerpt from section 9.5.C.

Indeed, we have elsewhere given several examples where Christ would seem to be describing dictation from the Father in His own speaking.<sup>458</sup>

## **B.4) *Researched Scripture***

### **B.4.a) The biblical research of Luke**

We have written elsewhere in *Knowing Our God* of the difference between *divine revelation* and *human research*.<sup>459</sup> The former, *divine revelation*, can be illustrated in Paul's claim:

**I want you to know, brothers, that the Gospel I preached is not something that man made up. <sup>12</sup> I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.** (Gal 1:11-12)

And based on that supernatural knowledge, the Apostle wrote the descriptions of "**the Gospel**" we find especially in Romans and Galatians.

The latter, *human research*, is illustrated in how Luke received the information he used to write his Gospel. He explains:

**Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, <sup>2</sup> just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. <sup>3</sup> Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated [researched] everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, <sup>4</sup> so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.** (Luke 1:1-4)

And based on that rather natural, indirect, *human research* derived from his own personal experience and the "**eyewitnesses**" he evidently interviewed, this premier biblical historian wrote the history we find in Luke and Acts.

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<sup>458</sup> Ibid.

<sup>459</sup> For further on the difference between *divine revelation* and *human information* see section 2.3.C.1. For examples of *human research* see chapter 2.5.

We must be careful in our distinction between *divine revelation* and *human research*. These categories were originally intended by us to distinguish the “supernatural” data we simply *read* in Scripture and the “natural” data we need to *research* from Creation. Still, they are useful categories here. In the description from Galatians above, the Apostle is speaking of a knowledge he received by direct revelation from God. On the other hand, *while the events Luke writes about were certainly divine revelations through the words and actions of people*, he did not receive knowledge of them through direct divine revelation from God, but rather, through research.

Make no mistake, the writing in Luke and Acts is as trustworthy as that in Romans. God has simply provided it in a different way. As we argue in the next chapter, humans are able to faithfully record history.<sup>460</sup> And it is a mistake to attempt to lump Luke and Paul’s experience together in something called “inspiration.” The Apostle did not need divine assistance to write the revelation he received. Likewise, we need not assume that Luke needed some sort of continual, mystical, supernatural divine influence on his mind to “**carefully investigate**” things and “**write an orderly account**” of them. He certainly doesn’t claim any such need.

In other words, both the writings of Paul and Luke are equally trustworthy descriptions of the truth and actions of God, but they have been provided to us in different ways. Much of Paul’s writing has a more supernatural source because its contents, such as the Gospel, could not be obtained in any other way (cf. 1 Cor 1:18-2:6). Luke’s writing has a much more natural source, being obtained by his personal experiences (notice the “we” passages in Acts 16:10-17; 20:5-16; 21:1-18; 27:1-28:16), or apparently interviewing “**eyewitnesses**” of the events he records. Nevertheless, just because the source of Paul’s writing is often more supernatural than Luke’s, it is not more true.

We need to remember the axiom that *God will not do for us what He has already enabled us to do*. *Super-supernaturalists* of all types forget this and invoke, claim, and require the supernatural intervention of God in places and times it is not needed. Claiming that Luke needed some sort of supernatural divine influence on his mind to do what he describes above is one more example of *super-supernaturalism*.

For example, Luke uniquely records many things about the early life of Christ that are not in the other Gospels. How did he know

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<sup>460</sup> Regarding the human ability to accurately record history see section 8.10.D.4.

these things? Visions from God? *Divine/human mental telepathy* as in "inspiration"? No. *He interviewed* people who were known to have direct knowledge of these events, as he says, **"they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses."**

For example, Mary, the mother of Jesus not only worshipped with the early Apostles (Acts 1:14), but she lived with the Apostle John (cf. John 19:27). No doubt she told her story from her perspective to many of the early Christians, including much of the history we have in Luke chapters 1-2. Accordingly, what we have in the Gospel of Luke is a **"carefully"** guarded and **"investigated"** historical account, not something directly and supernaturally revealed by God as Prophets and Apostles experienced in visions, apparitions, etc.

Accordingly, perhaps the most ancient description available of how Luke wrote his Gospel shows no sign of the need of any supernatural ability. The well-known *Muratorian Fragment* (c. A. D. 170-200) states:

The third book of the Gospel is that according to Luke. Luke, the well-known physician, after the ascension of Christ, when Paul had taken with him as one zealous for the law, composed it in his own name, according to the general belief [of others]. Yet he himself had not seen the Lord in the flesh; and therefore, as he was able to ascertain events, so indeed he begins to tell the story from the birth of John.<sup>461</sup>

This ancient document relates one reason that Luke did not need supernatural assistance or authentication to ensure the accuracy of his accounts. They could easily be compared by his contemporaries with the **"many"** who had **"undertaken to draw up an account of the things"** (Luke 1:1) Luke wrote about.

Nevertheless, many have thought that some sort of supernatural operation was needed to ensure the reliability of Luke's writing. Accordingly, Bruce Demarest and Gordon Lewis, Professors of Systematic Theology at Denver Seminary write something that is actually at odds with what Luke testified himself:

The introduction to the Gospel of Luke shows . . . how the writers [were] supervised by the Holy Spirit [while being] active in research . . . God . . . chose to work . . . miraculously in overseeing the production of . . . Luke's Gospel (1:1-4) . . . In all their research, writers were supervised by the Holy Spirit

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<sup>461</sup> *Muratorian Fragment*, translation by Bruce M. Metzger; online at <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/muratorian.html>.

. . . were kept from human error by an epistemological miracle.<sup>462</sup>

On the contrary, and as discussed elsewhere,<sup>463</sup> humans are capable of recording history and divine revelation accurately. And as also noted, if they didn't they would have been corrected by God in regards to a revelation, or their contemporaries in regards to historical events.<sup>464</sup>

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<sup>462</sup> Bruce Demarest & Gordon R. Lewis, *Integrative Theology*, 3 Vols. (Zondervan, 1987, 1990, 1994), I.149, 162.

<sup>463</sup> Regarding human ability to sufficiently record divine revelation without some supernatural influence called "inspiration" see chapter 8.10.

<sup>464</sup> Nevertheless, there are still those who have felt a need to *super-supernaturalize* Luke's writing. Reformed scholar Louis Berkhof (1873-1957) reported that:

Athanasius states that the Gospel of Luke was dictated by the apostle Paul. In view of the preface of the gospel we may be sure that the Church fathers exaggerate the influence of Paul in the composition of this Gospel, possibly to give it apostolic authority.

Paul's relation to the third Gospel differs from that of Peter to the second [Mark]; it is not so close. Luke did not simply write what he remembered of the preaching of Paul, much less did he write according to the dictation of the apostle, for he himself says that he traced everything from the beginning and speaks of both oral and written sources that were at his command.

Among these oral sources we must, of course, also reckon the preaching of Paul. That the great apostle did influence Luke's representation of "the beginning of the Gospel," is very evident. There are 175 words and expressions in the gospel that are peculiar to Luke and Paul. Cf. Plummer p. LIV. (*Introduction to the New Testament* [Benediction Classics, 2010]).

Likewise, the renowned British NT scholar J. B. Lightfoot (1828-1889) evidently tried a different route to *super-supernaturalize* Luke's account:

There are some Scripture passages that point to the inspiration of the gospel records. The older Lightfoot, (*Works* IV p. 1193, 114; XII p. 7, and following him Urquhart, *The Bible its Structure and Purpose* I Ch. 5), find a proof for the inspiration of Luke's Gospel in 1:3, where they would translate the words παρηχολουθηχότι ἄνωθεν by "having had perfect understanding of all things *from above*."

This interpretation is favored by the fact that ἄνωθεν has this meaning in eight of the thirteen times that it occurs in the New Testament, and in three of the remaining instances means *again*, while it is translated "from the beginning" only here and in Acts 26:4. The expressed purpose of Luke in writing his Gospel also falls in exceedingly well with the rendering *from above*. It is, he writes to

#### **B.4.b) Biblical research throughout Scripture**

The method that God used to produce the historical writings of Luke and Acts should not surprise us as this is precisely how much of 1-2 Samuel, 1-2 Kings, and 1-2 Chronicles were written. C. S. Lewis (1898-1963) related:

The human side of Scripture is reflected not only in different styles of writing, but in the biblical writers' use of secular archival records, prophetic annals, collections of poetry, and the like. Uninspired sources utilized by the sacred authors in the preparation of canonical Scriptures include the Book of Jashar (2 Sam. 1:18), the book of the annals of Solomon (I Kings 11:41), the book of the annals of the kings of Judah (I Kings 14:29), the records of Samuel the seer (I Chron. 29:29), the records of Nathan the prophet (I Chron. 29:29), the records of Shemaiah the prophet and of Iddo the seer (2 Chron. 12:15), and the annotations on the book of the kings (2 Chron. 24:27).<sup>465</sup>

Accordingly, Everett F. Harrison, Professor of NT at both Dallas and Fuller Theological Seminaries, writes:

The Old Testament which was so heartily endorsed by Christ and so reverently held by the early Church to be the Word of God had already been constructed in part along similar lines [as Luke and Acts], for the use of sources is often indicated throughout the historical books. We have no reason, therefore, to raise any *a priori* objection to this methodology in the composition of the Gospels.<sup>466</sup>

Along the same lines, J. I. Packer relates:

Scripture also shows us that inspired [sic] documents may be the product of first-hand historical research (as Luke's gospel

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Theophilus, that you may have the *certainty* of those things in which you have been instructed."

Yet the verb παρακολουθέω, meaning, *to follow up carefully*, and thus, *to obtain knowledge*, argues decisively against it. (Berkhof)

Also, see Darrell Bock, *Luke (BECNT)* (Baker, 1994), 60-61 who does not even mention Lightfoot's translation as a possibility.

<sup>465</sup> Lewis, 139.

<sup>466</sup> Everett F. Harrison in *Revelation and the Bible: Contemporary Evangelical Thought*, Carl F. H. Henry, ed. (Baker, 1958), 243.

is), and of direct dependence on older written sources (as Chronicles depends on Kings), and even of wholesale borrowing (compare 2 Peter and Jude).<sup>467</sup>

Older theologians have remarked the same. William Sanday (1843-1920) from Oxford wrote:

It cannot be said that the writing of history as practiced by the Hebrews required, or that as a matter of fact it shows, signs of supernatural intervention. The Hebrew, like the Greek or Roman, made use of previously existing documents or of oral tradition.<sup>468</sup>

Finally, we will quote James Orr (1844-1913), a founder of American "fundamentalism," yet a clear thinker on the nature of divine revelation. He wrote:

It is not uncommon to hear inspiration spoken of as if it rendered the subject of it superior to ordinary sources of information, or at least was at hand to supply supernaturally all gaps or deficiencies in that information. The records of the Bible have only to be studied as they lie before us to show that this is an entire mistake. . . .

In historical matters it is evident that inspiration is dependent for its knowledge of facts on the ordinary channels of information—on older documents, on oral tradition, on public registers, on genealogical lists, etc. No sober-minded defender of inspiration would now think of denying this proposition. One has only to look into the Biblical books to discover the abundant proof of it. The claim made is that the sources of information are good, trustworthy, not that inspiration lifts the writer above the need of dependence on them. . . .

Where sources of information fail, or where, as may sometimes happen, there are lacunae, or blots, or misreadings of names, or errors of transcription, such as are incidental to the transmission of all MSS., it is not to be supposed that supernatural information is granted to supply the lack. Where this is frankly acknowledged, inspiration is cleared from a

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<sup>467</sup> J. I. Packer, *Fundamentalism" and the Word of God* (Eerdmans, 1958), 78. Insert "authoritative" at "inspired."

<sup>468</sup> William Sanday, *Inspiration* (Green & Co., 1903), 401.

great many of the difficulties which misapprehension has attached to it.<sup>469</sup>

#### **B.4.c) The biblical *research* of Solomon**

We believe much of what Solomon wrote in Proverbs was more a matter of *human research* than *divine revelation*. We gain a description of God's gift to him when we read:

**God said to him, "Because you have asked . . . for yourself understanding to discern what is right [intelligence to make judgments<sup>470</sup>], behold, I now do according to your word. Behold, I give you a wise and discerning mind [*lēb*: "mind"] so that none like you has been before you and none like you shall arise after you. (1 Kgs 3:11-12)**

Likewise, the result of Solomon's gift is described a few verses later:

**And God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding beyond measure, and breadth of mind ["mental capacity to embrace the most diverse departments of knowledge"<sup>471</sup>] like the sand on the seashore,<sup>30</sup> so that Solomon's wisdom surpassed the wisdom of all the people of the east and all the wisdom of Egypt. . . .<sup>33</sup> He spoke of trees, from the cedar that is in Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of the wall. He spoke also of beasts, and of birds, and of reptiles, and of fish. (1 Kgs 4:29-30, 33, ESV)**

In other words, instead of giving Solomon supernatural, direct *divine revelation* and knowledge regarding the practical life wisdom and scientific knowledge he wrote of, we believe that God gave him a particularly intelligent mind, or as OT scholars Keil and Delitzsch comment on the phrase, "**breadth of mind**," a "mental capacity to embrace the most diverse departments of knowledge."<sup>472</sup> It wasn't

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<sup>469</sup> James Orr, *Revelation and Inspiration* (Eerdmans, 1952), 163-5.

<sup>470</sup> Keil and F. Delitzsch, *in. loc.*

<sup>471</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>472</sup> *Ibid.*

knowledge itself that God gave him, but an extraordinary desire and ability to learn and research things.

Solomon describes the result of God's gift himself elsewhere, "**I devoted myself** [lit. "set my mind" NASB] **to study** [*darash*: "seek, inquire, search, investigate"] **and to explore** [*tur*: "seek out"] **by wisdom all that is done under Heaven**" (Eccl 1:13).

Keil and Delitzsch comment:

The synonyms [*darash*] (to seek) and [*tur*] (to hold survey over) . . . represent . . . two kinds of searching: one penetrating in depth, the other going out in extent; for the former of these verbs (from the root-idea of grinding, testing) signifies to investigate an object which one already has in hand, to penetrate into it, to search into it thoroughly; and the latter verb (from the root-idea of moving round about) signifies to hold a survey,—look round in order to bring that which is unknown, or not comprehensively known, within the sphere of knowledge . . . It is the usual word for the exploring of a country, *i.e.*, the acquiring personal knowledge of its as yet unknown condition . . . an intellectual search [including] . . . research and observation.<sup>473</sup>

In other words, the Hebrew describes the fact that Solomon's knowledge and practical wisdom regarding life came from an extraordinary thirst for knowledge, an extraordinary opportunity and financial means to obtain it, and an extraordinary intelligence to understand it. In other words, Solomon was the researcher of all researchers and God enabled him to be so.<sup>474</sup> Perhaps our claim

<sup>473</sup> Ibid.

<sup>474</sup> In fact, Solomon's relationship with the relatively ancient and advanced culture of Egypt could have been a source of research for particularly his scientific knowledge. So, even though his knowledge surpassed "**all the wisdom of Egypt**" (1 Kgs 4:30) he may have learned from it as well. Keil and Delitzsch comment:

[T]he wisdom of the Egyptians, which was so greatly renowned as almost to have become proverbial (cf. Isa 19:11; 31:2, and Acts 7:22; Joseph. *Ant.* viii. 2, 5; Herod. ii. 160), extended over the most diverse branches of knowledge, such as geometry, arithmetic, astronomy, and astrology (*Diod. Sic.* i. 73 and 81), and as their skill in the preparation of ointments from vegetable and animal sources, and their extensive acquaintance with medicine, clearly prove, embraced natural science as well, in which Solomon, according to [1 Kgs 4] v. 33, was very learned.

However, even some of his moral knowledge evidently derived from Egyptian sources. While Proverbs 22:17-23:14 (labeled "Sayings of the

that Solomon did not receive direct, divine revelation from God as a Prophet is further proven by the fact that there is no record of him predicting the future or performing a miracle, which we believe was required of anyone claiming such revelation in order to authenticate themselves. The truth of Solomon's wisdom is authenticated by life, not miracles.

### **B.5) Experienced Scripture**

This category of Scripture is reflected in those portions in which the biblical author is simply writing out of their personal life experience. Many of the Psalms would seem to be a good example of this. For example, David writes:

**He reached down from on high and took hold of me; He drew me out of deep waters. He rescued me from my**

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Wise" in the Hebrew MSS) is convincingly demonstrated to be written by Solomon by Keil and Delitzsch, OT scholar R. K. Harrison notes in his well regarded *Introduction to the Old Testament*:

The first collection of the "Sayings of the Wise" (Prov 22:17-23:14) has . . . been regarded as dependent upon the [Egyptian] *Wisdom of Amenophis*. . . [O]nly about one-third of the section corresponds at all closely with the *Wisdom of Amenophis*, and the remainder is either Israelite in origin or derived from other sources, as for example, in the case of 23:12, which is borrowed from the oriental *Sayings of Ahikar*. . . . That there is a general connection between this portion of Proverbs and the [Egyptian] *Wisdom of Amenophis* is scarcely in dispute. ([Prince, 1999], 1014-15).

At the time of Solomon there was a large collection of wisdom literature from ancient cultures that he was exposed to, such as Babylonian and Chaldean texts in addition to Egyptian ones. OT scholar Dave Hubbard notes: "Egyptian instructions [of wisdom] of Ptahhotep (ca. 2450 B.C.) and Merikare (ca. 2100 B.C.) were ancient volumes by Solomon's time" ("Proverbs, Book of" *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia (ISBE)*, Geoffrey Bromily, ed., 4 vols. [Eerdmans, 1986], III:16).

Likewise, the Hebrew culture itself had an oral tradition of wisdom that Solomon could have gained knowledge from. Dr. Harrison writes:

In common with other races of antiquity . . . the Hebrews possessed a number of wisdom-utterances that probably circulated at least partly in oral form prior to being collected and preserved in writing. These sayings enshrined certain truths gleaned from the experience of life, and while they were intended to serve as practical guides for successful living, they ultimately reached back for inspiration and vitality to the distinctive features of the Israelite faith. In this sense, therefore, they can never be regarded as purely secular in the sense in which the proverb is sometimes understood. (1010)

**powerful enemy, from my foes, who were too strong for me. They confronted me in the day of my disaster, but the LORD was my support. (Ps 8:16-18)**

How did David know these things? Not by a vision or apparition, but by experiencing a personal revelation of God in his life. Again, it is not that *researched* and *experienced* Scripture do not involve divine revelation, it is simply that such writing does not come from direct revelation from God as much of prophetic or apostolic revelation did.

*Experienced* Scripture is closely related to *researched* Scripture because the biblical authors personally experienced the history they wrote about. Nonetheless, the “we” passages in Acts which Luke personally experienced can be distinguished from, for example, the data in chapter 1 which he probably received from the Apostles themselves.

Obviously, the Apostles Matthew and John wrote out of personal experience, not historical research as did Luke. Accordingly, John writes elsewhere:

**That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. <sup>2</sup> The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. <sup>3</sup> We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. (1 John 1:1-3)**

Clearly, what John wrote of Jesus came in a significantly different way than Luke’s “investigation.” Which is another reason why describing all of Scripture as “inspired” is misleading as it implies it came by direct revelation to all. Scripture is all authoritative and inerrant, but not “inspired.” And none of these modes of writing involved, nor needed, some sort of immediate divine/human mental telepathy. Not even the parts of Scripture that God dictated to Prophets occurred in that way.

**Gauging Your Grasp**

- 1) What is our interpretation of 2 Timothy 3:16? Do you agree or disagree and why?
- 2) We claim that neither the word nor idea of "inspiration" is found in Scripture. Do you agree or disagree and why?
- 3) What is the similarity between Creation and Scripture being communicated in 2 Timothy 3:16?
- 4) Why do we claim that Scripture does not give us detailed descriptions of how Prophets and Apostles recorded their revelations? Do you agree or disagree and why?
- 5) What four kinds of Scripture do we see in Scripture? Do you agree or disagree and why? What do we mean by each of them and what are some primary examples?

**Publications & Particulars**



## Chapter 8.10

# The Incarnation of Scripture

## *The Human/Divine Mix in Creating Scripture*

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### **Table of Topics**

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#### **B) The Problems with a Mystical Understanding of How Scripture was Written**

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#### **D) What Can God Expect Humans to Do?**

- D.1) To be human is not necessarily to err
- D.2) Humans are able to record divine revelation
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- D.4) Humans are able to record divine history
- D.5) Humans are able to translate & copy divine revelation
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*Extras & Endnotes*

**Primary Points**

- The Bible is not shy about revealing its human element.
- The popular disbelief for any ability on the part of humans to accurately record divine revelation has led to the unbiblical notion of some sort of *divine manipulation* through some sort of *divine/human mental telepathy* or mind control in the writing of Scripture.
- Paul could not be certain he was writing divine revelation if it was a matter of some secret "inspiration" and *divine/human mental telepathy*.
- If supernatural "inspiration" is so critical for humans to sufficiently *record* divine revelation, then why does God remove such influence in the subsequent *transcribing, copying, translating, interpreting, and teaching* of the Scriptures, steps that are all just as vital to the accurate communication of divine revelation as its recording?
- The theological theory of "inspiration" is another example of invoking the need of the supernatural where it is not needed. God will not do for us, what He has already enabled us to do. God has already given, especially regenerated humans with *Spirit-liberated reason*, sufficient abilities for the recording,

## A) The Divine/Human Mix in Scripture

### A.1) The divine & human elements of Scripture

The central question on the issue of how divine messengers wrote the Bible concerns the relationship between its divine and human attributes. If the writing of Scripture were purely divine, then it would be a matter even beyond dictation, but one of *automatic writing* where a spirit controls the very arm and hand that is writing while the person is in somewhat of a trance.<sup>475</sup> However, there are certainly human elements in Scripture. Many of the Psalms, for example, do not appear to be divine dictation. In Psalm 6 we find a typical statement from David:

**Be merciful to me, LORD, for I am faint; O LORD, heal me, for my bones are in agony. My soul is in anguish. How long, O LORD, how long?"** (Ps 6:2-3)

This is a prayer from a person to God, not a statement of God to a person. Yet, we believe there is a divine message in the example of this man of God praying to God. Accordingly, the Bible is not shy about revealing its human element, as demonstrated in the numerous references to Scripture as what "**Moses says**" (Rom 10:19; cf. Matt 22:24; Mark 7:10; Acts 3:22; Rom 10:5) or "**Isaiah cries out**" (Rom 9:27; cf. John 1:23).

Such a human element seems particularly evident in Paul's personal remarks in his letters such as telling Timothy:

**Do your best to come to me quickly, for Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, and Titus to Dalmatia. <sup>11</sup> Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry. <sup>12</sup> I sent Tychicus to Ephesus. <sup>13</sup> When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, and my scrolls, especially the parchments.** (2 Tim 4:9-13)

This seems less a "revelation from God" and more of a man simply describing his circumstances and some personal desires. Again, however, there is a divine message here in even such "human" writing.

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<sup>475</sup> Regarding the phenomenon of *automatic writing* see section 9.5.D.

Nonetheless, this can be contrasted with the words of the Prophets. In very typical fashion, Isaiah wrote:

**This is what the LORD says concerning the king of Assyria: "He will not enter this city or shoot an arrow here. He will not come before it with shield or build a siege ramp against it. By the way that he came he will return; he will not enter this city," declares the LORD.**  
(Isa 37:33-34)

*That* seems nothing less than a direct, exact quote from the Almighty, with no "human" element whatsoever, especially since the content would have been far beyond any capabilities Isaiah had in himself to be the source of such an unlikely prediction.

In regards to the previous chapter, we pointed out four general types of writing we see in Scripture, and each of them certainly emphasizes either the divine or human element. For example, the apostolic *deposited* and prophetic *dictated* types of Scripture clearly reflect more of the divine. However, the *researched* Scripture in OT history and Acts, and the *experienced* Scripture in the Psalms generally reflect more of the human element.

## **A.2) The popular exclusion of the human element in descriptions of the writing of Scripture**

It is obvious, then, that both divine and human characteristics are found in Scripture. And this is why we refer to it as an incarnation. Could we not say of Christ that He at times displayed His divine attributes more, and at other times His human attributes? Would we not misunderstand and even malign who He was if we diminished either His divinity or humanity? And do we diminish His divinity in any way by recognizing and embracing His humanity? Of course not. And yet, Evangelical theologians are far too often guilty of diminishing the incarnation of Scripture in order to supposedly uphold its divinity. God effectively communicated His supernatural revelation through the human Jesus Christ. And He just as capable of communicating His word now through human Prophets and Apostles.

As we have noted repeatedly, the predominant approach to understanding the writing of Scripture is to insert the concept of "inspiration" into the mix in an effort to provide a "one-theory-fits-all" explanation that essentially eliminates the human elements, supposedly in order to preserve its divine authority. Accordingly, notice how the human element is excluded

and disparaged in the following explanations of "inspiration" that we have already quoted. Carl F. H. Henry has written:

By inspiration is meant that influence of the Holy Spirit on the minds of selected men which rendered them organs of God for the infallible communication of that revelation.<sup>476</sup>

If the Holy Spirit is influencing the mind of the men to this degree than we are talking about robots, not humans. Likewise, we have quoted J. I. Packer who writes:

Inspiration is a work of God terminating, not in the men who were to write Scripture (as if, having given them an idea of what to say, God left them to themselves to find a way of saying it), but in the actual written product. . . .

Scripture has a double authorship, and man is only the secondary author; the primary author is God the Holy Spirit, through whose initiative, prompting and enlightenment, and under whose superintendence [i.e. mind control] each human did his work.<sup>477</sup>

Notice the complete disbelief for any ability on the part of humans to accurately record divine revelation. And this disbelief unavoidably leads to the unbiblical notion of some sort of *divine manipulation* through some sort of *divine/human mental telepathy* or mind control. Of this we wrote earlier:

Scriptures *never* describe Apostles or Prophets experiencing such a thing. For example, there are no instances in Scripture where God subjectively and mystically gives an author of Scripture a mere inward mental impression for the sake of guidance or revelation. In fact, we have demonstrated (in chapter 7.16) that the only clear examples of such secret *divine manipulation* through *divine/human mental telepathy* occurred in the lives of pagan unbelievers, never regenerated believers.<sup>478</sup>

In other words, Evangelical authors are simply inventing a theory of "inspiration" that has no biblical basis whatsoever, and

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<sup>476</sup> R. A. Finlayson in *Revelation and the Bible: Contemporary Evangelical Thought*, Carl F. H. Henry, ed. (Baker, 1958), Henry, *Bible*, 222.

<sup>477</sup> J. I. Packer, "Inspiration" in *New Bible Dictionary* (Intervarsity, 1999), 507.

<sup>478</sup> Regarding the biblical data concerning *divine/human mental telepathy* see especially chapter 14.1.

may actually be unbiblical regarding how God works with His people.

## **B) The Problems with a Mystical Understanding of How Scripture was Written**

We see several significant problems with the popular idea that the Scriptures were recorded through some sort of mystical, subjective, "divine influence" on the minds of the writers. First, read again David's emotional cry to God or Paul's personal notes to Timothy. Do we really believe that the writing of these required, as Dr. Packer claims, that "God [could not have] left them to themselves to find a way of saying it, that the wording of these emotional and personal expressions are "a work of God" rather than the humans who are "only the secondary author"? Was the supernatural "superintendence," (which means "control") of God necessary for these men to express these things as examples of their relationship with God and men for our spiritual instruction and edification? We do not think so.

The second problem with the typical explanations of "inspiration" is that its proponents have a very difficult time explaining how these very human elements of Scripture got there. Typically, another theory is advanced, and a contradictory one that claims God simultaneously controlled the writers' minds so that they chose the exact wording He wanted, and the human writers had the freedom to express things in their own wording. That is a formal contradiction no matter how such theorists want to put it, and as such, would not even be possible for God. Do we see the trouble that we get into when we try to claim that even the *recording* of divine revelation was controlled by God?

A third problem is one we have mentioned throughout *Knowing Our God*: How would the biblical writers know when this controlling "divine influence" for writing inerrant Scripture was active, and when it was not? <sup>479</sup> When Paul was writing to a church, how did he know the controlling "divine influence" was present and he was not just writing thoughts from his head? He could not be certain he was writing divine revelation if it was a matter of some secret "inspiration" and *divine/human mental telepathy*.

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<sup>479</sup> Regarding the necessary obvious attribute of divine revelation see section 7.1.B.5.f.

On the contrary, the Apostle knew he was writing divine revelation because he had previously received it in very miraculous and obvious ways through visions or actual appearances of Christ. And from that deposit of divine revelation that he had been given, he wrote as a rather normal human being to apply that divine knowledge and wisdom to the different circumstances he encountered in the churches. That's how he knew when he was writing the Corinthians: **"What I am writing to you is the Lord's command"** (1 Cor 14:37).

Finally, let us suggest another problem with the common Evangelical view of "inspiration." An important question is this? When does the *divine manipulation* through some sort of *divine/human mental telepathy* cease in the process of God communicating His message to His people? If the supernatural mental influence of "inspiration" is so critical for humans to sufficiently *record* divine revelation, then why does God remove such influence in the subsequent *transcribing, copying, translating, interpreting, and teaching* of the Scriptures, steps that are all just as vital to the accurate communication of divine revelation as its recording? If humans cannot accurately record God's revelation then we must claim that copyists, translators, and preachers are supernaturally "inspired" as well.

Yet, no Evangelical scholar we know of has ever claimed the divine influence of "inspiration" supposedly needed to *record* revelation, is also present in any of these subsequent steps necessary to ensure the accurate and effective communication of God's word. Why do we think "inspiration" is so necessary for Jeremiah, Paul, or Peter to record divine revelation, when we do not think such a thing was operating in their scribes such as Baruch (cf. Jer 36:4), Tertius (Rom 16:22), and Silas (cf. 1 Pet 5:12) respectively? Do we think Baruch needed some sort of mystical divine influence and control on his mind when we read: **"Jeremiah called Baruch son of Neriah, and while Jeremiah dictated all the words the LORD had spoken to him, Baruch wrote them on the scroll"** (Jer 36:4). And the product of Baruch's writing was considered the word of God, as we read a few verses later, **"Baruch son of Neriah did everything Jeremiah the Prophet told him to do; at the LORD'S temple he read the words of the LORD from the scroll"** (v. 8)

Do we invoke the need for "inspiration" because *recording* revelation that God has just spoken to you or given you is more difficult and prone to error than transcribing, copying, translating, interpreting, or teaching it? We don't think so.

In fact, while it is doubtful that God would personally appear to a copyist, translator, interpreter, or Teacher of His word to correct any of their errors, we can certainly imagine this as a likely occurrence if a Prophet or Apostle for some reason failed to accurately record God's message in the original manuscripts. Goodness, He personally replaced a whole stone tablet of Scripture when it was broken (cf. Exod 34:1, 28; Deut 10:1-5). And because of the availability of such revelation to the writers of Scripture, this is one more reason they would not need "inspiration."

Therefore:

- If we have no biblical evidence that God was in the habit of controlling the minds of Apostles and Prophets,
- If the only biblical evidence we have of such *divine manipulation* through *divine/human mental telepathy* is in the lives of pagan leaders,
- If it is obvious that "inspiration" has nothing to do with the transcribing, copying, translating, interpreting, and teaching of God's word,

Accordingly, we see no biblical evidence, or practical need for the whole theory of "inspiration."

Why can't we simply say that God supernaturally revealed divine content to Prophets and Apostles through especially visions and even more physical means such as apparitions, and then they used the natural God-given abilities humans have to accurately record what they saw, heard, and experienced? We believe a committed and sane Evangelical can say such a thing and this is how we claim that Scripture is the word of God written by humans. And we are just as committed to its inerrancy as anyone else.

Others have said the same. Moises Silva, former NT Professor at Westminster and Gordon-Conwell quotes none other than A. A. Hodge (1823-1886) and B. B. Warfield as saying:

It is not merely in the matter of verbal expression or literary composition that the personal idiosyncrasies of each author are freely manifested . . . but the very substance of what they write is evidently for the most part the product of their own mental and spiritual activities. . . . [Each author of Scripture] gave evidence of his own special limitations of knowledge and mental power, and of his personal defects as well as of his powers.<sup>480</sup>

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<sup>480</sup> A. A. Hodge and B. B. Warfield, quoted by Moises Silva, "Old Princeton, Westminster, and Inerrancy," in *Inerrancy & Hermeneutic*, ed. Harvey Conn (Baker, 1988), 68.

Likewise, William Sanday (1843-1920), a Professor of Exegesis at Oxford and co-author of a very respected and influential commentary on Romans wrote in regard to discussing the topic of "inspiration":

To assume then this ungracious and unwelcome but I fear necessary task, I must first point out how it is probably true that the human element in the Scriptures is larger than many good people now, and nearly all good people not long ago, supposed it to be. <sup>481</sup>

In our opinion, the theological theory of "inspiration" is another example of invoking the need of the supernatural where it is not needed. God will not do for us, what He has already enabled us to do. God has already given, especially regenerated humans with *Spirit-liberated reason*, sufficient abilities for the recording, transcribing, copying, translating, interpreting, and teaching Scripture to accurately communicate His divine revelation. These tasks are not miracles. For God to speak to man in any form or fashion requires a miracle, but not the accurate recording of that revelation.

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<sup>481</sup> William Sanday, *Inspiration* (Green & Co., 1903), 18.

## C) The Differing Levels of the Human Element in the Process of Communicating Scripture

It would seem the mixture between the human and divine vary in the process by which God's word comes to us. At the beginning of the process is the fact that divine revelation is especially supernatural such that it results in a communication of God's very thoughts that have the authority of God Himself. Accordingly, a Prophet like John describes himself as being **"in the Spirit"** (Rev 1:10; 4:2; as opposed to in the body), and being **"carried . . . away [by an Angel] in the Spirit into a desert"** (17:3) or **"to a mountain great and high"** where he is given revelations. Obviously, he is describing a rather supernatural event in the process of God getting His word to His people.

But how has John's revelations come to us? Through more natural means of copying, translating, and interpreting. And the humanness of these processes is reflected in the fact that there are significant variations in the copies, translations, and especially interpretations of the original supernatural revelation that John received. And which human copyist, translator, or interpreter of Scripture would want to claim some sort of unique supernatural assistance in order to defend why their work differs from another?

As we have already noted, there are even different variations of the human and divine mix reflected in the different genres of Scripture. It would seem, for example, that a Prophet like Jeremiah received his revelation in a much more supernatural way than the historian Luke. Luke personally observed much of what he wrote, and simply recorded it. There is no mention that he ever saw a vision or received direct divine revelation as the basis for his writing. In fact, he simply says, **"I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning [and] it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account"** (Luke 1:3).

## D) What Can God Expect Humans to Do?

### D.1) To be human is not necessarily to err

Of course humans are prone to error unlike God. But that does not mean they are completely incompetent. We have already noted that a perfectly written autograph of Scripture is useless, if not even dangerous, if it is copied, translated, interpreted, or applied

incorrectly. And yet we are faced with this odd fact that God has left all of these critical tasks up to the natural abilities of spiritually regenerated human beings. Evidently, He too thinks humans are capable of sufficiently fulfilling these vital tasks for the effective communication of His word.

Nonetheless, a skepticism regarding the ability of a Prophet or Apostle to accurately record their revelations has prompted the development of theories of "inspiration." Accordingly, William Abraham remarks regarding B. B. Warfield (1851-1921):

Despite the whole structure of his positive epistemology, Warfield was a skeptic about human cognitive capacities when it came to recording the content of divine revelation. Despite all his positive talk about the cruciality and reliability of objective evidence, there was a failure of nerve when it came to the justification of theological claims. The only adequate foundation, the only resting-place, for securing the certainty he required lay with an infallible, divine inspiration.<sup>482</sup>

Along the same lines, Karl Barth (1886-1968) concluded that the Bible has errors because humans are fallible and the Bible is a human document. He wrote:

The prophets and apostles as such, even in their office, even in their function as witnesses, even in the act of writing down their witness, were real, historical men as we are, and therefore sinful in their action, and capable and actually guilty of error in their spoken and written word.<sup>483</sup>

In our opinion, the skepticism and subsequent quest for a theory of "inspiration" by both Drs. Warfield and Barth was unnecessary. Not because we don't believe in Scripture's inerrancy, but because we don't believe a theory of "inspiration" is necessary to accomplish it. Nor do we think regenerated, godly humans are as incompetent as so many assume.

Accordingly, William Dembski, Professor of Philosophy at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, and well-known proponent of "intelligent design" writes:

Error is not a necessary feature of human language use. To err is certainly human but not an essential feature of our humanity. . . . We all are capable of making true assertions

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<sup>482</sup> William J. Abraham, *Canon and Criterion in Christian Theology : From the Fathers to Feminism* (Clarendon Press, 1998), 318.

<sup>483</sup> Quoted in Sproul, "Analysis", 256.

and of stringing true assertions together. A person can even write a computer program that will generate infinitely many true assertions, none of which will be in error (e.g.,  $0 < 1$ ,  $0 < 2$ ,  $0 < 3 \dots$ ).

The wide prevalence of error in human practice is an accidental, not an essential, feature of human practice. There is therefore nothing inherently absurd about an inerrant Scripture.<sup>484</sup>

Even if the recording of its supernatural revelations were accomplished with the natural abilities of God-fearing, Spirit-filled, conscientious human beings.

Kevin Vanhoozer, Professor of Theology at Wheaton, writes:

Must humanity entail errancy? I do not see that it does. Fallibility need not entail actual fault. For example, it does not follow that just because a math textbook is written by a fallible human being, there must be mistakes in it!<sup>485</sup>

This is precisely the point that R. C. Sproul is making when he writes:

If being human demands error, is a man not a man when he speaks the truth? The term "fallible" describes an ability, not an act. To say that men are fallible is to say they are capable of error, not that they must err or that they always err.<sup>486</sup>

Finally, Erwin Lutzer, Pastor of Moody Bible Church has written:

Although we are all fallible human beings, we all have written some infallible statements (for example, "Winston Churchill was at one time the Prime Minister of England"). In the case of the Scriptures, such accurate statements are not only made about history, but theology and even science. The point, of course, is that fallible human beings can write an infallible message.<sup>487</sup>

Nonetheless, it is unlikely that all of these respected scholars would link these admissions to the conclusion that we do not need a

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<sup>484</sup> Dembski, "Problem," 92

<sup>485</sup> Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *First Theology: God, Scripture, & Hermeneutics* (Intervarsity, 2002), 138.

<sup>486</sup> Sproul, "Analysis", 256.

<sup>487</sup> Erwin Lutzer, *Seven Convincing Miracles* (Moody, 1999), 24

theory of "inspiration" that requires a supernatural explanation for how Prophets and Apostles recorded their revelations. We believe they should make that connection.

## D.2) Humans are able to record divine revelation

The numerous times in Scripture that God tells a Prophet to write or record what He is saying, implies their ability to do so. Especially since there is never any promise or description of God helping them to record the revelation. We read of Moses:

**When Moses went and told the people all the LORD'S words and laws, they responded with one voice, "Everything the LORD has said we will do." <sup>4</sup> Moses then wrote down [while being inspired?] everything the LORD had said. (Exod 24:3)**

There is no mention of "inspiration" or some other supernatural act of God between His revelation to Moses and Moses recording that revelation. Likewise we read:

**Then the LORD said to Moses, "Write down these words, for in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel." <sup>28</sup> Moses was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights without eating bread or drinking water. And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant—the Ten Commandments. (Exod 34:27-28)**

Again, no hint of divine assistance for Moses' task of recording "the Ten Commandments." And when we read them in Exodus 20:1-17 we have no problem imagining that Moses was able to record them accurately without being "inspired." We can also imagine that if Moses had made a mistake, that God would have reappeared to him and given him another *revelation* to correct it, not some mystical "inspiration."

We have already noted the example of Isaiah of whom we read: **"The LORD said to me, 'Take a large scroll and write on it with an ordinary pen: Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz'"** (Isa 8:1). There is no hint of the need or occurrence of "inspiration" to do this.

Likewise, Isaiah describes: **"An oracle concerning the animals of the Negev"** (30:6-7). Then God tells him, **"Go now, write it on a tablet for them, inscribe it on a scroll, that for the days to come it may be an everlasting witness."** There is no hint here of divine assistance or influence on the mind of Isaiah as he recorded the oracle he had just received from God.

Nonetheless, God later refers to what Isaiah wrote as, **“the scroll of the LORD”** (Isa 34:16).

We read of Daniel:

**In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon, Daniel had a dream, and visions passed through his mind as he was lying on his bed. He wrote down the substance of his dream.** (Dan 7:1)

Something, it would seem he was quite capable of doing (cf. Dan 7:2-28).

We see the same with the NT Prophet John who writes:

**On the Lord’s Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet,<sup>11</sup> which said: “Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches”** (Rev 1:10-11).

We believe John was able to do that with the revelation he had received without some sort of “inspiration.”

In all of these cases, we believe we have the occurrence of a supernatural revelation given by God and then the subsequent natural human recording of that supernatural revelation. These are not instances of “inspiration” which somehow mystically combines the two events (revelation and recording) and the two actors (God and Prophet) as occurring and working simultaneously such that God is supposedly directly influencing the writer’s mind in some sort of telepathic way.

### **D.3) Humans are able to remember divine revelation**

We have written elsewhere regarding Christ’s promise to supernaturally enable the Eleven to remember His teachings (cf. John 14:25-26).<sup>488</sup> However, this supernatural assistance was not intended to help them remember it minutes, hours, or even days after He had spoken. Remember that the Apostle John, for example, probably wrote his Gospel more than 60 years after Christ had spoken the long discourses John records. In such a case it is reasonable to understand why a supernatural reminder from the Holy Spirit would be needed, and why John recorded this very promise from Christ.

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<sup>488</sup> Regarding the nature of Christ’s promise to His disciples to enable them to remember His teaching see section 8.3.C.3.

However, John did not need supernatural assistance to remember what he recorded in the Revelation. He was simply told, **“Write on a scroll what you see”** (Rev 1:11, 19; cf. Hab 2:2), and he did.

Likewise, we read in Jeremiah:

**In the fourth year of Jehoiakim son of Josiah king of Judah, this word came to Jeremiah from the LORD: <sup>2</sup> “Take a scroll and write on it all the words [*dabar*] I have spoken to you concerning Israel, Judah and all the other nations from the time I began speaking to you in the reign of Josiah till now [about 23 years]. . . .**

**So Jeremiah called Baruch son of Neriah, and while Jeremiah dictated all the words [*dabar*] the LORD had spoken to him, Baruch wrote them on the scroll. <sup>5</sup> Then Jeremiah told Baruch, “I am restricted; I cannot go to the LORD’S temple. <sup>6</sup> So you go to the house of the LORD on a day of fasting and read to the people from the scroll the words [*dabar*] of the LORD that you wrote as I dictated. (Jer 36:1-2, 4-6)**

A few verses later we read:

**After the king burned the scroll containing the words that Baruch had written at Jeremiah’s dictation, the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah: <sup>28</sup> “Take another scroll and write on it all the words [*dabar*] that were on the first scroll, which Jehoiakim king of Judah burned up. . . .**

**So Jeremiah took another scroll and gave it to the scribe Baruch son of Neriah, and as Jeremiah dictated, Baruch wrote on it all the words [*dabar*] of the scroll that Jehoiakim king of Judah had burned in the fire. And many similar words [*dabar*] were added to them. (Jer 36:27-28, 32)**

Our question is whether or not Jeremiah needed some sort of “divine influence” or even supernatural remembering to dictate to Baruch the revelation he possessed. John Calvin (1509-1564) thought so and wrote:

Here the prophet declares that he dictated to Baruch, a servant of God, what he had previously taught. But there is no doubt that God [directly] suggested to the [mind of the] prophet what might have been effaced from his memory; for not all things which we have formerly said always occur to us: therefore the greater part of so many words must have

escaped the prophet had not God dictated [*dictasset*] them again to him.

Jeremiah, then, stood between God and Baruch, for God, by his Spirit, presided over and guided the mind and tongue of the prophet. Now the prophet, the Spirit being his guide and teacher, recited what God had commanded. . . . Jeremiah repeats again that nothing came from himself. We see, hence, that he did not dictate according to his own will what came to his mind, but that God suggested whatever he wished to be written by Baruch.<sup>489</sup>

Obviously Calvin assumed that the Prophet Jeremiah needed supernatural assistance to record the revelation God had given him. As noted above, God was asking Jeremiah to record the revelation he had received over a span of 23 years. Calvin described this supernatural assistance at one point as "God dictated" the revelation "again to him." If we understood this as the same kind of objective, physical, even visionary dictation that Prophets usually experienced, we would see no problem here. However, Calvin describes this act of dictation elsewhere as the "Spirit presided over and guided the mind and tongue of the prophet" and "God suggested whatever he wished to be written by Baruch." Such descriptions imply some sort of possession and *automatic writing* or *divine/human mental telepathy*, neither of which are described in Scripture as occurring with God's people. In our opinion, Calvin's possibly erroneous assumption that Jeremiah needed supernatural assistance to record his revelation led him to assert an instance of mystical "inspiration."

On the contrary, it is not at all clear that Jeremiah needed such divine assistance. It is possible that God simply gave him another revelatory experience as a vision in order to record past revelations. But the text does not suggest this and God's simple command for Jeremiah to: "**Take a scroll and write on it all the words [*dabar*] I have spoken to you concerning Israel, Judah and all the other nations from the time I began speaking to you in the reign of Josiah till now**" suggests Jeremiah was able to do so with his God-given human faculties.

This is supported by the fact that the Hebrew word *dabar* ["event"] is used to describe what Jeremiah was to write. As described elsewhere,<sup>490</sup> *dabar* does not mean that God was

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<sup>489</sup> John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries*, Jer 36; online at [www.ccel.org](http://www.ccel.org).

<sup>490</sup> Regarding the meaning of the Hebrew word *dabar* see section ?

expecting a word for word recording of the revelation, but something that simply and faithfully reflected the general content of those revelations. Accordingly, Keil and Delitzsch, who are no liberal scholars by any means, comment on Jeremiah's action:

It is not a copying, word for word, of every separate address that is meant, but merely a writing down of the essential contents of all his oral discourses. This is quite clear, not merely from what is stated in v. 3 as the object of this command [*dabar*], but also from the character of these collected addresses, as they are preserved to us.

That the expression "all the words" is not to be understood in the most rigid sense, follows from the very fact that, when Jeremiah anew wrote down his prophecies, v. 32, he further added "many similar words" [*dabar*] to what had been contained in the first book-roll, which was burned by Jehoiakim. But Jeremiah might perhaps be able to retain in his memory the substance of all the addresses he had delivered during the twenty-three years, since all of them treated of the same subjects—reproof of prevailing sins, threat of punishment, and promises.<sup>491</sup>

#### **D.4) Humans are able to record divine history**

Likewise, H. B. Swete (1835-1917), successor of the more famous B. F. Westcott as Professor of NT at Cambridge, wrote:

The historical books of the New Testament from the nature of their contents show fewer signs of spiritual influence exerted upon their writers. They deal not with revelations but with facts, which could be collected and verified by the ordinary processes of memory or research.<sup>492</sup>

Dr. Swete's contemporary at Oxford, William Sanday (1843-1920), wrote in his book on "inspiration" after giving several examples:

Where the [biblical] history contains doctrine, there we have every reason to suppose that the doctrine rests upon the same supernatural basis, that it is as intimately connected with the great Messianic outpouring of the Spirit as it is elsewhere. But

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<sup>491</sup> C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, Electronic Edition STEP Files CD-ROM (Findex.com, 2000), Jer 36:2, 32.

<sup>492</sup> H. B. Swete, *The Holy Spirit in the New Testament* (MacMillan, 1909), 335.

the history as history, as a narrative of events, appears to proceed upon ordinary methods. . . .

In other words, there are some books in which the Divine element is at the maximum and others in which it is at the minimum. . . .

It cannot be said that the writing of history as practiced by the Hebrews required, or that as a matter of fact it shows, signs of supernatural intervention. The Hebrew, like the Greek or Roman, made use of previously existing documents or of oral tradition.<sup>493</sup>

And they were able to do so without some sort of divine manipulation or "inspiration."

Before Swete and Sanday, in America, James Strong (1822–1894) and John McClintock (1814–1870) had written in their highly respected *Cyclopaedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature*:

[I]t is not true that all the subject matter [of Scripture] is equally revealed; for some of the facts, doctrines, and views were known to the writers in their ordinary intelligence, while others were specially communicated by immediate divine afflatus. In other words, all is inspired [i.e. authoritative<sup>494</sup>], but not all revealed.<sup>495</sup>

More recently, Dr. Lutzer has written:

We can identify at least three different kinds of inspiration. For example, some things the authors wrote they knew by ordinary means. Luke, for example, said that he did careful research before he wrote his account of the life of Christ, just as did others who were eyewitnesses of Jesus.<sup>496</sup>

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<sup>493</sup> Sanday, *Inspiration*, 72, 398, 401.

<sup>494</sup> Regarding the unbiblical and confusing nature of the term "inspiration" see chapter 8.9.

<sup>495</sup> "Inspiration" McClintock, John, James Strong, CD-ROM (Ages Software, 2000).

<sup>496</sup> Lutzer, 22-3.

Finally, the Reformed scholar Sinclair B. Ferguson has written of Scripture: "While there are no degrees of inspiration [i.e. authority], there are degrees of revelation."<sup>497</sup>

### **D.5) Humans are able to translate & copy divine revelation**

The rightly respected NT scholar F. F. Bruce expressed a common perspective when it comes to the copying of Scripture over the millennia it has existed:

By the singular care and providence of God the Bible text has come down to us in such substantial purity that even the most uncritical edition of the Hebrew or Greek . . . cannot effectively obscure the real message of the Bible or neutralize its saving power.<sup>498</sup>

Indeed, we do not believe *any* meaning has been lost from the autographs that Moses and Paul wrote to what we read in our Bibles today? But has that required "the singular care and providence of God"? This suggests that God has miraculously intervened in the minds of men as they copied manuscripts. Has such intervention been necessary? Perhaps. But we would remind us again that conscientious God-fearing humans are able to accurately copy Scripture. And we can prove this. Norman Geisler writes:

With the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, scholars have Hebrew manuscripts 1000 years earlier than the great Masoretic Text manuscripts, enabling them to check on the fidelity of the Hebrew text. There is a word-for-word identity in more than 95 percent of the cases, and the 5 percent variation consists mostly of slips of the pen and spelling.

The Isaiah scroll from Qumran led the Revised Standard Version translators to make only thirteen changes from the Masoretic Text; eight of those were known from ancient versions, and few of them were significant. Of the 166 Hebrew words in Isaiah 53, only seventeen Hebrew letters in the Isaiah B scroll differ from the Masoretic Text. Ten letters are a matter of spelling, four are stylistic changes, and the other

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<sup>497</sup> Sinclair B. Ferguson, "How Does the Bible Look at Itself? in *Inerrancy & Hermeneutic*, ed. Harvey Conn (Baker, 1988), 56.

<sup>498</sup> J. I. Packer, "*Fundamentalism" and the Word of God* (Eerdmans, 1958), 90

three compose the word for "light," (added in verse 11), which does not affect the meaning greatly.<sup>499</sup>

In addition, as we argue in the next chapter (8.11) regarding a critique on the theory of *verbal inspiration*, God intended to reveal *ideas* in Scripture, not just individual and specific or unique words and grammar that must be maintained with perfect precision or the meaning is lost. God's word is more flexible than that, because there is normally more than one way to communicate the intended meaning of the ideas God desired to communicate.

This is certainly demonstrated in the translations of Scripture. We are not aware of anyone claiming any kind of "singular care and providence of God" over the translation committees who put the Bible in languages we can understand. We, and God, for that matter, rely on their expert knowledge of these languages and their God-fearing and loving concern to accurately translate the meaning of Scripture. And thank God that meaning is not dependent on individual, specific words themselves, but on ideas communicated with a cluster of words, and that even those words normally have a number of suitable synonyms.

What we are trying to say is that because the message of Scripture is bound up in *ideas* rather than *words*, it is even easier to preserve its meaning through copying and translation, because while a single word might be missed or mistaken, a whole idea likely would not. Because God knew Scripture would be handled by humans He did not create any of its message to depend on one little word, and even repeated the messages and ideas of Scripture several times in several places. Nonetheless, we would claim that accurately copying and translating Scripture is something God has made humans capable of doing with no need of miraculous intervention. This is why God did not drop the Bible from the sky in a multitude of copies in a multitude of translations. He trusted His people to do that.<sup>500</sup>

## D.6) Humans are able to teach divine revelation

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<sup>499</sup> Norman Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Apologetics* (Baker, 1999), 553

<sup>500</sup> Regarding the "thought-for-thought" ("dynamic) approach to Bible translation as opposed to the "word-for-word" approach, see chapter 15.2.

God told the Prophet Jeremiah: **“Let the Prophet who . . . has My word speak it faithfully”** (Jer 23:28). It would seem God expected a Prophet to do so, because they were able to do. And if humans are not able to **“faithfully”** and accurately **“speak”** the word of God, then all of the care, work, and even divine providence invested in getting that word to the people is for nothing. When a correctly recorded, copied, and translated Scripture is wrongly interpreted and taught, it is no longer the Word of God anyway. And this, again, demonstrates the great responsibility (and ability!) that God has given humans in the delivery of His divine revelation.

In the end, then, if God deems humans capable of accurately copying, translating, and teaching His word, do we still doubt that He deems Prophets and Apostles *incapable* of recording His word?

Along these lines, David Jensen has written:

When we consider how the gospel was actually transmitted by Jesus and the apostles, we see that human effort, whether physical, personal or intellectual, is not bypassed. On the contrary, in accordance with the incarnation itself, the human is regarded as fit to communicate the divine message. In the words of Paul, 'we have this treasure in jars of clay' (2 Cor. 4:7). . . . The biblical writers, then, are not in the slightest embarrassed by the human involvement in the transmission of revelation. For them, God uses human nature without abusing it to accomplish his ends.<sup>501</sup>

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## ***Extras & Endnotes***

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### ***Gauging Your Grasp***

- 1) What evidence is there for the claim that the Bible is not shy about revealing its human element?
- 2) What do we believe the popular disbelief for any ability on the part of humans to accurately record divine revelation has led to? Do you agree or disagree and why?

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<sup>501</sup> Peter Jensen, *The Revelation of God* (Intervarsity, 2002), 38-9.

- 3) Why do we claim that Paul could not be certain he was writing divine revelation if it was a matter of "inspiration"? Do you agree or disagree and why?
- 4) What aspects of the copying, translating, interpreting, and teaching of Scripture suggest to us that divine control over the recording of revelation is unnecessary? Do you agree or disagree and why?

### **Publications & Particulars**



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## Chapter 8.11

# The Flexibility of Scripture

*A Critique of Verbal Inspiration*

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C.4) Did Christ & the Apostles depend on *verbal inspiration* in the OT?

C.5) Does meaning depend on specific words?

C.6) Did Christ teach *verbal inspiration*? *Matt 5:18; John 10:35*

C.7) Did the Apostle teach *verbal inspiration*? *1 Cor 2:7-13*

*Extras & Endnotes*

### Primary Points

- *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* on verbal inspiration: "All the words and all the verbal relationships [grammar] are inspired by God. This includes all seemingly peripheral [personal] statements. Even historical accounts known beforehand by the writers from other sources are inspired in the same verbal way for inclusion in the Bible."
- Such a claim is unnecessary to maintain the authority of Scripture.
- Packer: "Words are not magic. To be so tied to particular words such that no other words could possibly express the same meaning is superstition."
- Lutzer: "In some instances God endowed the biblical authors with ideas that they were allowed to write in their own words."
- The different wording of the speeches of Christ recorded in the Gospels, the flexibility with which NT authors quoted the OT, and the very personal prayers and anecdotes in Scripture, argue against *verbal inspiration*.
- God intended to reveal *ideas* in Scripture, not just individual and specific or unique words and grammar that must be maintained with perfect precision or the meaning is lost.
- Thank God, in fact, that *verbal inspiration* is a farce, and that therefore, Scripture's full meaning can be conveyed in all human languages using an "idea-for-idea" translation

## A) Defining Verbal & Plenary Inspiration

The concept of *verbal inspiration* is described in the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* as follows:

All the words and all the verbal relationships [grammar] are inspired by God. This includes all seemingly peripheral [personal] statements as well as those more obviously germane to the matter under consideration. . . . Even [historical] accounts known beforehand by the writers from other sources are inspired in the same verbal way for inclusion in the Bible. Thus the totality of Scripture partakes of uniform verbal inspiration.<sup>502</sup>

Such a perspective on how Scripture was created is not new. It would be presumptuous to think that Origen (c. 220) was exaggerating his belief when he wrote:

With complete and utter precision the Holy Spirit supplied the very [words of Scripture] through His subordinate authors, so that you might ever bear in mind the weighty circumstance of their writing, according to which the wisdom of God pervades every divinely inspired writing, reaching out to each single letter. Perhaps it was on account of this that the Savior said: "Not one iota nor even a serif thereof shall be lost from the word until all is accomplished."<sup>503</sup>

Related to *verbal inspiration* is the idea of *plenary inspiration* which essentially means all of Scripture is *verbally inspired*, not just parts of it. Accordingly, the "Chicago Statement of Biblical Inerrancy" puts the two together in article XI:

"We affirm that the whole of Scripture and all its parts, down to the very words of the original, were given by divine inspiration."

We deny that the inspiration of Scripture can rightly be affirmed of the whole without the parts, or of some parts but not the whole.<sup>504</sup>

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<sup>502</sup> I. S. Rennie, "Verbal Inspiration," *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Baker, 1984), 1139.

<sup>503</sup> Origen, *Commentaries on Psalms*, Ps. 1, no. 4; online at [www.ccel.org](http://www.ccel.org).

<sup>504</sup> "Chicago Statement of Biblical Inerrancy"; online at <http://www.spurgeon.org/~phil/creeds/chicago.htm>.

Along these lines, J. I. Packer writes:

The point that plenary and verbal [inspiration] make is that the biblical words themselves (in Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek) are to be seen as God-given. Men were not left to articulate information about, and interpretations of, God's ways with men apart from His superintending providence. On the contrary, the Lord who gave the Word also gave the words. It was not just the writers' thinking but "all Scripture," the written product, that is inspired by God (2 Tim. 3:16; cf., 2 Peter 1:21).<sup>505</sup>

We have pointed out elsewhere the contradiction that occurs when proponents of *verbal inspiration* insist they are not speaking of dictation.<sup>506</sup> On the contrary, there is no other way to view or understand it. If God, in fact, provided the biblical authors with every word of Scripture to be written, then it is impossible to distinguish that from any understanding of what dictation is.

Obviously, good men have invented the theory of *verbal* and *plenary inspiration* to protect the divine authority of God's word. While this is a commendable perspective, the theories are not necessary to uphold the authority of Scripture, nor do they bear up under scrutiny. Even B. B. Warfield (1851-1921) who practically invented the current theories of "inspiration" wrote:

Let it not be said that thus we found the [authority of the] whole Christian system upon the doctrine of plenary inspiration. We found the whole Christian system on the doctrine of plenary inspiration as little as we found it on the doctrine of angelic existences . . .

Inspiration is not the most fundamental of Christian doctrines, nor even the first thing we prove about the scriptures. It is the last and crowning fact as to the Scriptures. These [Scriptures] we first prove authentic, historically credible, generally trustworthy, [i.e. authoritative] before we prove [really theorize] them inspired. And the proof of their authenticity, credibility, general trustworthiness would

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<sup>505</sup> J. I. Packer, "The Adequacy of Human Language", in *Inerrancy*, Norman Geisler ed. (Zondervan, 1979), 211.

<sup>506</sup> Regarding contradictions in popular theories of "inspiration" see sections 8.8.D.4-5.

give us a firm basis for Christianity prior to any knowledge on our part of their [or our theory of] inspiration.<sup>507</sup>

Nonetheless, the theories of *verbal* and *plenary inspiration* have become a test of Evangelical orthodoxy, as the “Chicago Statement of Biblical Inerrancy” implies. First, however, we have pointed out that historically, the Church has never had an orthodox specific view on *how* Apostles and Prophets wrote the word of God.<sup>508</sup> Secondly, when proponents of such theories encounter legitimate critiques of their theories, they begin to add significant qualifications to their view making it less dogmatic. Thirdly, many Evangelicals have recognized the weaknesses in such theories and have begun to say so.

Maybe we could begin by stating our own view on this matter. First, for reasons given elsewhere, we don’t like the word “inspiration” at all. Regardless of how one understands the “verbal” and “plenary” part of the theories, they are still dependent on language that Scripture itself never uses and that requires divine revelation through a kind of *divine/human mental telepathy* for which we have no biblical examples of. It is the unbiblical notion of God directly manipulating people’s minds and planting thoughts, even specific words, into people’s minds as a mode of divine revelation, that is the most fundamental error of the theories of *verbal* and *plenary inspiration*.

Secondly, if *plenary inspiration* were understood as plenary *authority*, we would be in agreement. All of Scripture is divinely authoritative as the human recording of divine deeds or revelation. But to claim that all of Scripture is the result of some sort of *divine/human mental telepathy* in which God virtually dictated it word for word is ludicrous, and unnecessary to maintain the plenary authority of Scripture.

## **B) Evangelical Disclaimers & Critiques Regarding *Verbal Inspiration***

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<sup>507</sup> B. B. Warfield, “The Real Problem of Inspiration”, in *Revelation & Authority*, Vol. 1 of *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield* (Baker, 2000), 1.210.

<sup>508</sup> Regarding the fact that historically, the Church has never had an orthodox specific view on *how* Apostles and Prophets wrote the word of God see section 8.8.B.

Along these lines, James Strong (1822–1894)<sup>509</sup> and John McClintock (1814–1870) in their well regarded *Cyclopaedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature* wrote:

Within the bounds of the orthodox view of inspiration, as above stated, there are two epithets currently employed which seem to border too closely upon the extravagant, and are equally unnecessary and incorrect [*verbal* and *plenary inspiration*]. "*Plenary Inspiration*" is a phrase nowhere warranted by the Scriptures as predicated of themselves. Christ alone was plenary inspired (John 3:34) of all human beings. The term *plenary authority* would be far more scriptural and definite.<sup>509</sup>

Likewise, others have been skeptical of these theories as well, the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* noting:

[I]n recent years, as evangelicalism has grown and lost something of its siege [*fundamentalist?*] mentality, there are many voices within the movement advocating a rethinking of inspiration. And even among scholars who profess to wish to maintain verbal inspiration and inerrancy, many appear to be adopting a sophisticated posture in relation to the language and literary forms of Scripture.<sup>510</sup>

Don't misunderstand us. We love "fundamentalism" apart from its legalistic and anti-intellectual tendencies. More specifically, we love the effort of "fundamentalism" to defend the divine authority and inerrancy of Scripture against liberal scholars. We just don't think they need the theory of *verbal inspiration* to do so.

Accordingly, while Dr. Packer has certainly been a foremost proponent for *verbal inspiration* as discussed elsewhere,<sup>511</sup> he has enough good sense to write elsewhere on a different matter:

Words are not magic. They are the raw material of language, God-given tools for conceptualizing and communicating. . . . But to be so tied to particular words as to think that no other words could possibly express the same

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<sup>509</sup> John McClintock and James Strong, "Inspiration" in the *Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature*, CD-ROM (Ages Software, 2000).

<sup>510</sup> Rennie, 1140.

<sup>511</sup> Regarding J. I. Packer's support of *verbal inspiration* see quotes in chapter 8.8 sections D.3, D.5, and especially D.6

meaning is superstition. Focusing on words must not be allowed to bog us down in that. . . .

[W]e have to remember that words (apart from publicly defined technical terms) are regularly flexible, and gain their precise meaning each time they appear only as part of larger units of sense [context] - sentences, paragraphs, lines of argument, chapters, books. Most words carry a cluster of possible meanings and nuances (see the dictionaries), so that you have to check the context each time to see which precisely is meant.<sup>512</sup>

Accordingly, if we are saying that God needed to reveal the whole context of a truth instead of just the words in order to ensure the correct meaning, then we are right back to saying that He revealed *ideas* and messages, not just words.

We have stated that Dr. Packer seems contradictory to us on this matter.<sup>513</sup> Likewise, Erwin Lutzer seems slightly the same way, but says much to support our own critique of *verbal inspiration*:

[I]n some instances God endowed the [biblical] authors with ideas that they were allowed to write in their own words. This freedom allowed Paul, for example, to not only write with his own style, but to transition from doctrinal to personal matters. In his second letter to Timothy he could speak with authority about God's knowledge of us in eternity past (2 Timothy 1:9) and yet later say, "When you come bring the cloak which I left at Troas with Carpus, and the books, especially the parchments" (2 Timothy 4:13). God's ideas were written in Paul's style and in line with his interests and ability.<sup>514</sup>

Elsewhere, Dr. Lutzer has written:

[W]e must understand that the very words of Scripture are important. We cannot say, as some have, that the ideas are inspired but the words are not. Linguistic analysis has demonstrated that every genuine word carries a genuine meaning; a wrong word, therefore, carries a wrong meaning. No wonder Christ said, "For truly I say to you, until heaven

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<sup>512</sup> J. I. Packer, *God's Words: Studies of Key Bible Themes* (Intervarsity, 1981), 10-11.

<sup>513</sup> Regarding the contradictions we see in Dr. Packer's view of "inspiration" see section 8.8.D.5.

<sup>514</sup> Erwin Lutzer, *Seven Convincing Miracles* (Moody, 1999), 22-3.

and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the Law, until all is accomplished" (Matthew 5: 18).

Often the writers of Scripture were free to choose their own words, as long as the meaning of those words was within the bounds of truth. This explains why different words might be used to explain the same event. Matthew, when describing the reaction of the disciples to Christ's walking on the water, used the word *proskuneo*, meaning "to worship" (14:3 3). Mark recording the same event, used the word *existimi*, which means "to be amazed" (Mark 6:5 1). Each word gives a different meaning, but both are accurate.<sup>515</sup>

The "fundamentalist" James Orr (1844–1913) essentially rejected the idea of *verbal inspiration* and wrote:

A very evident illustration of the untenableness of this theory is in the reports of the Lord's own sayings in the Gospels. It is well known that in the reports of Christ's words in the Synoptic Gospels there is often a very considerable variation in expression—a difference in phraseology—while yet the idea conveyed in all the forms is the same. At most one side or another of the truth is brought out with slightly different emphasis. In illustration, let the version of the Lord's sayings in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew be compared with that in Luke, and the wide divergence in expression, with identity in idea, will at once be seen.

Here the advocates of verbal inspiration are themselves compelled to recognize that absolute literality is not of the essence of inspiration—that the end is gained if the meaning of the saying is preserved, though the precise form of words varies. There may be compression, combination, change of construction even (as in John) interpretation; but the truth is purely given.<sup>516</sup>

In other words, the different wording used between Gospels recording the words of Christ lead to some possible solutions: 1) Only some of the Gospels accurately communicate what Christ said, 2) The Holy Spirit chose to "inspire" each Gospel writer with

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<sup>515</sup> Erwin Lutzer, *Seven Reasons Why You Can Trust the Bible* (Moody, 1998), 28.

<sup>516</sup> James Orr, *Revelation and Inspiration* (Eerdmans, 1952), 212.

different words, or 3) *Verbal inspiration* was not continually operating, nor was needed. We would prefer the latter view.

Finally, we can quote Bernard Ramm (1916-1992), a respected authority in twentieth century Evangelicalism particularly on the issue of Scripture's "inspiration" and inerrancy. Writing specifically about John Calvin's view, Dr. Ramm wrote:

The authority of the Bible as God's Word and the source of indisputable truth is never called in question by Calvin, and he assumes that his readers share this assurance. Yet he is not concerned to assert what in later controversy has been spoken of as "verbal inerrancy." His whole emphasis is thrown on the message or content of Scripture rather than on the words. It began in the oracles and visions that God imparted to the patriarchs, whose minds were so impressed with their truth that they passed them down orally to their descendants, until at length God brought it about that the revelations were recorded for the use of later generations.

The human writers are not automatons but persons whose minds and hearts have embraced the truth of what they write. Even when he is stressing the point of the authority of the sacred writings, he usually appears to have in mind the writer, and he seeks to expound the message itself, not merely the words that convey it. Thus in the oft-quoted description of the apostolic writers as "sure and genuine scribes" (in the French text, "sworn notaries") of the Holy Spirit, the context does not bear upon the Scripture words as such but refers rather to the inspired teaching they express. He has, in fact, no systematic treatment of the manner of inspiration.<sup>517</sup>

Nonetheless, there are, and have been, many more in the last century who have demanded that the theory of *verbal inspiration* is necessary. Rene Pache (1904-1979) has written: "We shall never feel certain of what the Spirit of God means in the Scripture unless we can be sure that the words of the text were expressly given by him."<sup>518</sup> On the contrary, we are quite content to believe that the human authors of Scripture were merely working with concepts of new divine revelation and putting things in their own words, although accurately communicating God's meaning.

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<sup>517</sup> Bernard Ramm, *Special Revelation and the Word of God* (Eerdmans, 1961), 54-55.

<sup>518</sup> Rene Pache, *The Inspiration and Authority of Scripture* (Moody, 1969), 74.

Support for *verbal inspiration* began in earnest particularly from the rightly respected “Old Princeton” theologians including Alexander, Hodge, and Warfield. Archibald Alexander (1772-1851) at least distinguished between the writing of doctrine and history. In terms of the former he wrote: “It is necessary to suppose that the words as well as ideas were immediately suggested by the Holy Spirit.” However, he continued:

[I]n the narration of well-known facts, the writer did not need a continual suggestion of every idea, but only to be so superintended, as to be preserved from error; so in the use of language in recording such familiar things, there existed no necessity that every word should be inspired; but there was the same need of a directing and superintending influence as in regard to the things themselves.<sup>519</sup>

In our opinion, it is true that for the reception and knowledge of “new doctrine” a supernatural act would be necessary, but not for recording it. And like many proponents of *verbal inspiration* Dr. Alexander seems contradictory to require some sort of mystical “superintending influence” by God on the writer, but not a “continual suggestion of every idea.” How else in his view could God ensure the writing was “preserved from error?” Proponents of these theories want to claim the writers had freedom because this is evident in their writings, but to also claim God controlled them. Which one is it? They cannot clearly explain how both can be true.

## C) Answering Arguments for *Verbal Inspiration*

### C.1) Humans are able to accurately record revelation, but sometimes God dictated to them.

Like Dr. Alexander, Charles Hodge (1797-1878) supported the theory of *verbal inspiration* in his *Systematic Theology*. The five arguments he gave are the same used today and include: “A mere human report or record of a divine revelation must of necessity be not only fallible, but more or less erroneous.”<sup>520</sup> As argued in the previous chapter (8.10), we believe this is unnecessary skepticism

<sup>519</sup> Quoted by B. B. Warfield in *Studies in Theology* (Oxford, 1932), 320.

<sup>520</sup> Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols., reprint (Hendrickson, 2003), I:84-6.

about the ability of a Prophet or Apostle to record the supernatural revelation he had received.

Secondly, Dr. Hodge wrote:

The very form in which the doctrine of inspiration is taught in the Bible assumes that the organs of God in the communication of His will were controlled by Him in the words which they used. "I have put my words in thy mouth" (Jer. 1:9). "It is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you" (Matt. 10:20). They spake as the Spirit gave them utterance" (Acts 2:4). "Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost" (2 Peter 1:21). All these and similar modes of expression with which the Scriptures abound imply that the words uttered were the words of God.

This, moreover, is the very idea of inspiration as understood by the ancient world. The words of the oracle were assumed to be the words of the divinity, and not those selected by the organ of communication. And this, too, as has been shown, was the idea attached to the gift of prophecy. The words of the prophet were the words of God, or he could not be God's spokesman and mouth.<sup>521</sup>

Then why not admit that there is dictation in Scripture? Because this is precisely what Dr. Hodge is describing. As for us, we have argued that dictation does exist in parts of Scripture, but we would not contend that all of it was written in this way, nor that the above verses describing specifically prophetic revelation apply to how all of Scripture was written.<sup>522</sup>

## C.2) Scripture does not reflect *verbal inspiration*

When the psalmists frequently ask God a question like: "**I say to God my Rock, "Why have You forgotten me? Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy?"**" (Ps 42:9), is it likely that they were "controlled by [God] in the words which they used" and "the words uttered were the words of God" as Dr. Hodge claimed? Weren't they simply and completely speaking out of their own heart and experience? Did they need God to give them the exact words they spoke as the theory of *verbal inspiration* insists?

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<sup>521</sup> Ibid.

<sup>522</sup> Regarding dictation in the creation of Scripture see chapter 9.5.C.

When the Apostle wrote Timothy the following, was God “inspiring” Him?:

**Do your best to come to me quickly, <sup>10</sup> for Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, and Titus to Dalmatia. <sup>11</sup> Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry. <sup>12</sup> I sent Tychicus to Ephesus. <sup>13</sup> When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, and my scrolls, especially the parchments. (2 Tim 4:9-13)**

This was simply a man of God, who had been given knowledge of divine revelation, writing some personal remarks to his ministry partner.

### **C.3) God did not design Scripture to depend on *verbal inspiration***

In the previous chapter we wrote:

God intended to reveal *ideas* in Scripture, not just individual and specific or unique words and grammar that must be maintained with perfect precision or the meaning is lost. God’s word is more flexible than that, because there is normally more than one way to communicate the intended meaning of the ideas God desired to communicate.

This is certainly demonstrated in the translations of Scripture. We are not aware of anyone claiming any kind of “singular care and providence of God” over the translation committees who put the Bible in languages we can understand. We, and God, for that matter, rely on their expert knowledge of these languages and their God-fearing and loving concern to accurately translate the meaning of Scripture. And thank God that meaning is not dependent on individual, specific words themselves, but on ideas communicated with a cluster of words, and that even those words normally have a number of suitable synonyms.

What we are trying to say is that because the message of Scripture is bound up in *ideas* rather than *words*, it is even easier to preserve its meaning through copying and translation, because while a single word might be missed or mistaken, a whole idea likely would not. Because God knew Scripture would be handled by humans He did not create any

of its message to depend on one little word, and even repeated the messages and ideas of Scripture several times in several places.<sup>523</sup>

#### **C.4) Did Christ & the Apostles depend on verbal inspiration in the OT?**

Thirdly, Dr. Hodge wrote:

Christ and His apostles argue from the very words of Scripture. Our Lord says that David by the Spirit called the Messiah Lord, i.e., David used that word. It was in regard to the use of a particular word that Christ said (John 10:35) that the Scriptures cannot be broken: "if he call them gods unto whom the word of God came, and the Scripture cannot be broken." The use of that word, therefore, according to Christ's view of the Scripture, was determined by the Spirit of God. Paul in Galatians 3:16 lays stress on the fact that in the promise made to Abraham a word used is singular and not plural, "seed," "as of one," and not "seeds, as of many." Constantly it is the very words of Scripture which are quoted as of divine authority.

First of all, this phenomena is actually quite rare. What is much more common is that the NT writers *ignore* or *change* the wording of the OT when quoting it. Louis Gaussen (1790-1863) in his classic text, *The Inspiration of the Holy Scriptures*, relates what all modern NT scholars know:

[There are] eighty-eight verbal quotations [in the NT] that agree with the [Greek Septuagint] Alexandrine translations [not even the Hebrew Bible!]; sixty-four more that are borrowed from them, but with some variations; thirty-seven [NT quotations] that adopt the same meaning with [the Septuagint translation] without employing their words; sixteen that differ from them in order to agree more nearly with the Hebrew; and, finally, twenty that differ from both the Hebrew and the Septuagint, but in which the sacred authors have paraphrased the Old Testament, in order that the sense in which they quote it may be better understood.<sup>524</sup>

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<sup>523</sup> Excerpt from section 8.10.D.5.

<sup>524</sup> Louis Gaussen, *The Inspiration of the Holy Scriptures*, trans. David D. Scott (Kregel, 1971) 163-4.

In other words, in the vast majority of instances in which the NT writers are quoting or referring to an OT text, the exact wording of the original Hebrew *did not matter*, but rather, the meaning is what mattered, regardless of the wording used. Accordingly, any theory of "inspiration" that is to apply to all of Scripture cannot promote the examples that seem to support their theory and ignore others that do not.

Perhaps an example will help. In Ephesians 4:8 the Apostle Paul quotes Psalm 68:18 as follows: "**Therefore it [OT Scripture] says, 'When He ascended on high, He led captive a host of captives, and He gave gifts to men'**" (Eph 4:8 NASB). This is considerably different than the actual statement in Psalm 68:18 which reads: "**You have ascended on high, You have led captive *Your* captives; You have received gifts among men"** (Ps 68:18 NASB). Whatever the explanation of the Apostle's

departure from the original OT wording,<sup>525</sup> it demonstrates some of

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<sup>525</sup> As Harold Hoehner points out regarding Paul's use of Psalm 68:18 in Ephesians 4:8:

Basically, there are two [changes]: (1) he has changed the second person singular "you ascended" to the third person singular "he ascended"; and (2) he has changed the action from the receiving of gifts from among the . . . defeated foes (in Psalm 68), to the giving of gifts to the people, the believers. (*Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* [Baker, 2002], 525)

The best explanation is that the Apostle simply didn't use the standard Hebrew (Masoretic Text-MT) or the standard Greek translation (Septuagint-LXX) available at the time. But rather, an ancient Jewish translation referred to as the Targum. NT scholar Peter O'Brien writes in his well-regarded commentary on Ephesians:

The key clause, 'and he gave gifts to men,' is a notorious crux. . . . The major difficulty, is that both the Hebrew text and the LXX read 'you received gifts' rather than 'gave gifts,' and it appears at first glance that Paul has turned the original meaning of the Psalm on its head. . . .

A . . . serious attempt to solve the dilemma takes its starting point from a variant form of the old testament textual tradition. The Syriac Peshitta rendering of Psalm 68:18 is 'you have *given* gifts', and although there is a difference of scholarly opinion as to its value as evidence, it may reflect a textual tradition different from that represented by the NT and the LXX.

Furthermore the paraphrase of Psalm 68:18 in Aramaic Targums is remarkable, for like the Peshitta it reads 'you gave' rather than 'you received' (as in the MT). It is unlikely that the new testament wording of the passage has influenced the Targum, and even though the Targum on the Psalms is late, it reflects a tradition in text form that are much earlier.

M. Wilcox has cautiously concluded that the author of Ephesians 'was here quoting either from, or in the light of, and Old Testament textual tradition resembling that of the Targum, but disagreeing with the tradition preserved in the LXX and MT at this point.'

Accordingly, it has been claimed that Paul has taken over the textual tradition as reflected in the Targum ('you gave'), and employed a common technique of early Jewish hermeneutics known as *midrash peshet*, in which his exposition of the text in light of its fulfillment in Christ is integrated into the actual quotation. This procedure, which appears elsewhere in the New Testament use of the Old, would account for the differences present in Ephesians 4:8. (*The Letter to the Ephesians* (Eerdmans, 1999), 290. See also: F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians* (NICNT) (Eerdmans, 1984), 342-44; R. A. Taylor, "The Use of Psalm 68:18 in Ephesians 4:8 in Light of Ancient Versions," *Bsac* 148 (1991), 319-36, esp. 320-23)

the “flexibility” that NT authors commonly used when quoting the wording of the OT. Which, again, is evidence *against* the need or occurrence of *verbal inspiration*. Others have made the same point.

Dr. Orr wrote:

Another palpable illustration of this freedom in regard to the letter, while the sense is accurately conveyed, is found in the New Testament quotations from the Old Testament. In these, it is again well known, great variety in the method of quotation prevails. Sometimes, where the end is better served, the quotation is taken directly from the Hebrew (e.g., Matt. ii. 15); occasionally the translation is free (Matt. ii. 6); ordinarily the quotation is made with more or less exactness from the Greek version, this even where the Hebrew is somewhat widely departed from (Matt. xii. 17-21 ; Rom. ix. 33; 1 Pet. ii. 6; Heb. x. 5-7, etc.). Inspiration here again must be held compatible with a want of literality in the words.<sup>526</sup>

Likewise, more recently, Dr. Packer has written:

The freedom with which New Testament writers quote the Old Testament (following the Septuagint, Targums, or an ad hoc rendering of the Hebrew, as best suits them) has been held to show that they did not believe in the inspiredness of the original words. But their interest was not in the words, as such, but in their meaning; and recent study has made it appear that these quotations are interpretative and expository—a mode of quotation well known among the Jews. The writers seek to indicate the true (i.e., Christian) meaning and application of their text by the form in which they cite it.<sup>527</sup>

As for the use of particular words from the OT by NT writers, there are other possibilities other than *verbal inspiration*. It could be that both Christ and the Apostles were simply taking the OT text as they had it, as they had even memorized it, and used specific words from the accepted texts to make points. The examples above may prove nothing more than that they confined themselves to the accepted, current text of the OT to make their points.

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<sup>526</sup> Orr, 212-14.

<sup>527</sup> J. I. Packer, “The Inspiration of the Bible”, in *The Origin of the Bible*, ed. Philip W. Comfort (Tyndale, 1992), 34-5.

### C.5) Does meaning depend on specific words?

Fourth, Dr. Hodge wrote:

The thoughts are in the words. The two are inseparable. If the words priest, sacrifice, ransom, expiation, propitiation, purification by blood, and the like, have no divine authority, then the doctrine which they embody has no such authority.<sup>528</sup>

On the contrary, as argued elsewhere regarding modern Bible translations, "expiation," and "propitiation" have no authority for most twenty-first century Americans because the meaning of such words is fairly unclear to most. Accordingly, neither the meaning or the authority *can* be tied up in one particular word because often times English does not have one word that corresponds to the original Greek or Hebrew word. This is precisely why a more dynamic "thought-for-thought" translation philosophy is superior to a more "literal" "word-for-word" philosophy. This is the nature of the human languages that the word of God must come in, in order to accomplish God's purpose for it.<sup>529</sup>

If the full meaning of the divine revelation given to Apostles and Prophets is completely tied to a specific Greek or Hebrew word then we must settle for the rather alarming statement by Larry Walker: "No translation can replace the original languages of the Bible in primary importance for conveying [the meaning] and perpetuating divine revelation."<sup>530</sup> This had better be nonsense, or only the autographs fully convey divine revelation. And even with the best copies we can muster, only those having an expert understanding of ancient Hebrew and Greek will possess the full meaning of God's revelation to His people. *Verbal inspiration* had better be nonsense as well because there are a number of particularly Hebrew words that no one living can dogmatically claim to understand. Likewise, if translation necessitates losing meaning than the fact that the Apostles used the Septuagint Greek translation for the great majority of their quotes, means they were not using a text that fully conveyed the word of God either. And in fact, modern scholars have found many translation errors in the Septuagint, compared with the ancient Hebrew manuscripts we now possess.

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<sup>528</sup> Hodge, 85.

<sup>529</sup> For further on "dynamic" as opposed to "literal" Bible translation see chapters 15.1-15.2.

<sup>530</sup> Larry Walker, "Biblical Languages", in *The Origin of the Bible*, ed. Philip W. Comfort (Tyndale, 1992), 211.

Thank God, in fact, that *verbal inspiration* is a farce. Thank God that He designed His revelation to be communicated in *ideas* rather than specific words, so that its full meaning could be conveyed in all human languages using dynamic translation. Thank God that He revealed *ideas* rather than mere words so that we need not be alarmed by the fact that copyists throughout the centuries have made some mistakes in copying those words and there are places where we cannot be certain of the wording in the original. But nonetheless the meaning is clear. Thank God that He did not use *verbal inspiration* to create Scripture so that, in fact, the NASB translation is just as much the word of God as the NIV, even though they use different wording. Do you see the unnecessary trouble that the theory of *verbal* and *plenary inspiration* gets us into? Thank God that the following from Dr. Packer is true, and dispels the need for a theory of *verbal inspiration*:

[A]t a deeper level, there is the magic-word mentality, which insists that revealed truths can only be affirmed by using particular familiar words for them. Logicians and theologians know that no single verbal formula is necessary for expressing a particular truth, as long as the point is made.<sup>531</sup>

Admittedly, Dr. Packer is discussing the fact that particular traditional words are not necessary in the Church's liturgy and its wording can be updated. Nonetheless, if this is true of liturgy, than it is true for any communication to humans including the word of God.

### C.6) Did Christ teach *verbal inspiration*? Matt 5:18; John 10:35

Many advocates of *verbal inspiration* quote the following in support. Jesus said:

**Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. <sup>18</sup> I tell you the truth, until Heaven and Earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. <sup>19</sup> Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the Kingdom of Heaven, but whoever practices and teaches**

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<sup>531</sup> J. I. Packer, *Truth & Power* (Harold Shaw, 1996), 294.

**these commands will be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven.** (Matt 5:17-19)

For this statement to provide any support for *verbal inspiration*, its proponents must admit that Jesus was actually saying that not only the specific *words* of OT Scripture were “inspired,” (dictated), but every “**stroke of a pen.**” Does anyone really want to claim that? If not, then they need to agree with us that Jesus is using hyperbole to describe the enduring authority of the OT, not the nature of how it was written.

Likewise, it is not the text or wording of Scripture that Christ is speaking of, but its *authority* when we read:

**Jesus answered them, “Is it not written in your Law, ‘I have said you are gods’? <sup>35</sup> If He called them ‘gods,’ to whom the word of God came—and the Scripture cannot be broken— <sup>36</sup> what about the One Whom the Father set apart as His very own and sent into the world? (John 10:34-36)**

As we have argued above, Jesus was quoting from the accepted text of OT Scripture, what was “**written in your Law.**” And what “**cannot be broken**” is the *authority* of that law, not what words are used to convey it. We realize that many use this very example as proof that every word of Scripture must be exactly the word given in the original autographs or the meaning that God wants to communicate is lost. However, all that Christ’s argument proves is that He used the wording of the accepted text of Scripture in His day.

### **C.7) Did the Apostle teach *verbal inspiration*? 1 Cor 2:7-13**

Finally, Dr. Hodge wrote in support of *verbal inspiration*:

It has also been shown that in the most formally didactic passage in the whole Bible on this subject (1 Cor. 2:10-13), the apostle expressly asserts that the truths revealed by the Spirit are communicated in words taught by the Spirit. <sup>532</sup>

In this passage, the Apostle writes:

**[W]e speak God’s wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God predestined before the ages to our glory; <sup>8</sup>the wisdom which none of the rulers of**

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<sup>532</sup> Hodge, 86.

**this age has understood; for if they had understood it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory; <sup>9</sup>but just as it is written,**

**"THINGS WHICH EYE HAS NOT SEEN AND EAR HAS NOT HEARD,  
AND WHICH HAVE NOT ENTERED THE HEART OF MAN,  
ALL THAT GOD HAS PREPARED FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM."**

**<sup>10</sup> For to us God revealed *them* through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God.**

**<sup>11</sup>For who among men knows the *thoughts* of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the *thoughts* of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. <sup>12</sup>Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit Who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God, <sup>13</sup>which things we also speak, not in words [*logois*] taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual *thoughts* with spiritual words. (1 Cor 2:7-13)**

Again, the claim is that when God revealed, and the Apostle spoke or wrote that revelation, that the Spirit gave the Apostle the exact *words* to be spoken or written, apparently through some sort of divine/human mental telepathy. But the whole argument for *verbal inspiration* here falls apart with a proper understanding of the Greek word *logos*.

Vine's give the meaning of *logos* as: "the expression of thought. . . . as embodying a conception or idea . . . . a saying or statement . . . . discourse, speech, instruction."<sup>533</sup> The meaning of *logos* is widely varied, NT scholar Anthony Thiselton remarking: "the semantic scope of *logos* is vast and needs to be contextually determined in most cases."<sup>534</sup> Accordingly, *logos* typically meant much more than a single word, but an idea that might require several words to express, much like the common OT word *debar*.<sup>535</sup>

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<sup>533</sup> W. E. Vine, *Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Nelson, 1996), 683.

<sup>534</sup> Anthony Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians (NIGTC)* (Eerdmans, 2000), 153.

<sup>535</sup> Regarding the meaning of *debar* and *logos* NT scholar Raymond F. Collins writes:

One must begin with the realization that "word of God" is a biblical concept. Our English expression renders the *logos tou theou* of the Septuagint and the New Testament as well as the Hebrew phrase

This is demonstrated in John's use of *logos* to refer to Christ (John 1:1). Jesus was more than just a word. In fact, if the Apostle had wanted to express that the Spirit gave him revelation with specific words that needed to be maintained, it is likely he would have used the Greek *rhēma*, of which William Mounce relates:

Although *rhēma* overlaps semantically with *logos* even in the LXX, the terms in the NT can have distinct nuances depending on context. "Whereas *logos* often designates the Christian proclamation as a whole, *rhēma* usually relates to individual words and utterances" (*NIDNTT-A*, 509).<sup>536</sup>

Commenting on Paul's use of *logois* in 1 Corinthians 2:13, Gordon Fee rightly relates: "'Words' of course does not mean simply language itself, but the meaning, or message, contained in the words as they give expression to the gospel."<sup>537</sup> Such a

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*dabar* Yahweh. *Dabar* is not simply equatable with the notion of "word," in the sense of spoken or written words. Such a concept is somewhat inspired by Hellenistic philosophy. The Hebrew *dabar* (and, to a lesser degree, the Greek *logos* as well) bears the connotation of "reality." Occasionally the most appropriate translation of *dabar* is "event." Perhaps one might say that the expression "word of God" conveys an ambivalent notion. Ultimately the expression simply indicates God's self-communication. (*Introduction to the New Testament* [Doubleday, 1983], 349)

<sup>536</sup> William Mounce, *Mounce's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old & New Testament Words* (Zondervan, 2006), 803.

<sup>537</sup> Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Eerdmans, 1987), 114. Neither Thiselton nor Barrett really discuss the matter. Albert Barnes interpreted 1 Cor 2:13 in this manner:

Paul claims that his very words are inspired. Hence, inspiration is "verbal," extending to the very words chosen by the authors of Scripture under the direction of the Holy Spirit. This is not a "mechanical dictation" theory, nor does it nullify the personality of the author involved. On the other hand, Paul's affirmation does guarantee that when the Bible is heard, God is heard. (*Barnes' Notes on the NT*; online at [www.ccel.org](http://www.ccel.org))

Likewise, Leon Morris comments:

The Spirit's activity extends to providing the actual words used, and is not confined to the supplying of general ideas (cf. Mk. 13:11). As Moule says, the expression 'is a very bold but quite unambiguous use of the Subjective Genitive' (*IBNTG*, P. 40); the Spirit teaches the words. (*1 Corinthians* (*TNTC*) (Eerdmans, 1985), 58)

meaning is conveyed a few verses earlier in 1 Corinthians when the Apostle writes: **“For the message [*logos*] of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing”** (1:18). By using “*logos*” Paul is not referring to the specific word “**cross**” but the “**message**” or ideas it conveys. Accordingly, translating *logos* in this passage as merely “words” is not a good English translation (cf. NIV, NASB, NLT, etc.), nor does this passage give any support for the theory of *verbal inspiration*.

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## ***Extras & Endnotes***

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### **Gauging Your Grasp**

- 1) What is a typical Evangelical definition of *verbal inspiration*?
- 2) Why do we claim that such a theory is unnecessary to maintain the authority of Scripture? Do you agree or disagree and why?
- 3) What evidence against *verbal inspiration* do we find in the Gospels? Do you agree or disagree and why?
- 4) What evidence against *verbal inspiration* do we find in the NT authors’ quotes of the OT? Do you agree or disagree and why?
- 5) What evidence against *verbal inspiration* do we find in the personal prayers or anecdotes in Scripture? Do you agree or disagree and why?
- 6) What God-intended attribute of Scripture do we also think denies the need for *verbal inspiration* to maintain the accuracy with which Scripture communicated divine revelation? Do you agree or disagree and why?
- 7) What evidence against *verbal inspiration* do we find in the process of translating Scripture? Do you agree or disagree and why?
- 8) What is our interpretation of Matthew 5:18? Do you agree or disagree and why?

- 9) What is our interpretation of John 10:35? Do you agree or disagree and why?
  
- 10) What is our interpretation of 1 Corinthians 2:13? Do you agree or disagree and why?

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