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# Understanding the Mystery: Weighing Cessationist and Continuationist Debate of Prophecy in the Pauline Epistles

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UNDERSTANDING THE MYSTERY:  
WEIGHING CESSATIONIST AND CONTINUATIONIST DEBATE OF  
PROPHECY IN THE PAULINE EPISTLES

A Capstone Experience/Thesis Project

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for

the Degree Bachelor of Arts with

Honors College Graduate Distinction at Western Kentucky University

By

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2014

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## ABSTRACT

The use of spiritual gifts such as tongues and prophecy has been a major source of controversy within Christianity over the past century. As its use flourishes in Africa, Asia and South America, many in the Western Church remain skeptical of its use, some even questioning the true conversion of these "charismatic" Christians. This thesis seeks to weigh the relevance of this cessationist debate with what Paul's true concerns are in his letters. As such, it both praises and critiques cessationist and continuationist argument using modern scholarship to determine Paul's actual, intended meaning of his words. It weighs the text itself against how it is construed by both parties to make cases for an issue Paul himself did not foresee nor address. Ultimately, this thesis aims to give a broader context to prophecy in the Pauline epistles beyond the issue of cessationism.

Keywords: prophecy, prophet, reformed theology, cessationism, continuationism, Apostle Paul, New Testament prophecy, New Testament prophets

Dedicated to  
Kevin Bratcher, my deceased father, a man whose life exemplified love as the most  
excellent way

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I want to thank Dr. Joseph Trafton for his incredible amount of support in not only reading and critiquing my work but also giving it shape and substance from the outset. When I first started this thesis, I was completely unaware of where it would take me. As I began writing, I became even more perplexed as to what this thesis would become. His guidance led me to a purpose in which I could flourish as well as enjoy. He has been essential to this project's beginning and middle, not just its end.

I want to thank the Honors College for its curriculum that allows students like myself the opportunity to study subjects about which they are passionate. Education is often uniform in nature. I consider myself highly fortunate to have spent the past year learning about a subject that has great relevance to my life. Though the chosen topic may be outside popular university scholarship's emphasis on sciences and hard facts, the skills I acquired in this process are not—the importance of method, writing founded upon detailed fact instead of assertion, and the ability to craft a coherent, relevant message.

A large thank you must be extended to the WKU library for helping me obtain the copious amounts of research necessary to write this thesis. Also, thank you to my second and third readers, Dr. Stephen Kershner and Andrea Cheney respectively.

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spent writing this thesis in Virginia was, by far, the most pleasant. Hannah, your love and encouragement have meant a great deal to me. My best writing days were due in large part to your support, though I'm certain you were not aware of this. Mom, you pushed me every step of the way, even as you battled breast cancer and my dedication to this thesis prevented my routine visits. Fritz, this thesis would have meant a great deal to a young boy from Beaver Dam who wanted to make his name known to the world. It would have certainly been another good work to add to the resume. However, your leadership has taught me that knowledge is secondary to a heart cultivated by the gospel and that God's good gifts are secondary to God's goodness. Thank you so much for the work you do. It has made all the difference.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

In the Western world, the death of the miraculous and the birth of modern skepticism can be largely traced back to the Reformation and the Enlightenment. There are two main reasons this occurred. With the publication of David Hume's essay "On Miracles" in 1748, the western world seemingly put to rest the possibility of the miraculous, especially for the atheist. But Hume found favor with many theists as well. But even in exclusively Christian circles at the time, this movement against modern miracles took hold. As Protestant reformers attempted to distance themselves from the Catholic Church, one issue that aided this effort was whether the miraculous, affirmed by both the Catholic and Orthodox Churches, could continue in the present day. This anti-Catholic agenda even found its way into Hume's essay, as it includes many references to the unreliability of Catholic miracle claims.<sup>1</sup>

The effects of this conflict are still felt in the modern world, many times with Christians themselves being the *greatest* skeptics of the miraculous. Today, this heightened skepticism surfaces within the Christian tradition in the form of two groups, mainly in Reformed circles. The first group, continuationists, consists of scholars and laypeople who believe that the miraculous continues today, often in the forms of spiritual

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<sup>1</sup> D. Hume, "Of Miracles," in D. Hume (ed.), *Philosophical Essays Concerning Human Understanding* (London: A. Millar, 1777), 13-14. Hume critiques several Catholic miracle claims specifically, including those surrounding the tomb of Abbé Paris and Cardinal De Retz.

gifts such as healings, tongues speaking and prophecy. Against this group, cessationists believe that such gifts ceased with the canonization of Scripture. For simplicity's sake, this debate as a whole will be referred to as cessationism, although it could just as accurately be called the continuationist debate.

The stakes are high. The fastest growing religious movement in the Global South is Pentecostalism, growing six times in size from 1970 to 2000 to represent 60% of worldwide Christianity today.<sup>2</sup> According to some surveys, more than 90% of Christian converts in China cite healing, either personal or of a friend/family member, as the reason for their conversion<sup>3</sup> and 80-85% of all new churches in India are “planted through miracles and the like.”<sup>4</sup> This creates a great tension between the West, a people steeped in the fallout of the Reformation and the Enlightenment, and the vast majority of the world. It begs many questions. What should be done about these new converts? Should their practice of these gifts be stopped? Are they real Christians? How does one even decide such a thing?

Unsurprisingly, both groups have turned to Christianity's sacred text, the Bible, to answer these questions. Continuationists claim to have found in the New Testament a wide range of texts that support the regular use of spiritual gifts in the modern church. Interestingly, cessationists claim to have done the same to support their position, each side interpreting passages to fit their belief systems. Citing Acts as well as the writings of Paul, cessationists and continuationists alike have dug in their heels as possessing the

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<sup>2</sup> C.S. Keener, *Miracles: The Credibility of the New Testament Accounts* (2 vols.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 215-216.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 297.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 284.

more accurate interpretation of Christianity—each side often claiming to have taken the Bible more “literally” than its opponent.

However, it must be noted outright that nowhere in the New Testament will one find a detailed explanation of spiritual gifts in the first-century Church from which a modern reader might create a definitive modern paradigm. Each author wrote with specific, first-century issues in mind to a specific, first-century audience. Thus, their references to spiritual gifts, where they appear, are often laden with some sort of agenda that certainly does not provide a religious paradigm for the modern church. Ultimately, methodologically speaking, this is the great challenge of exegesis in any scholarly endeavor—staying true to the context of the book or letter and attempting to understand the author’s intended meaning instead of reading into the text a desired answer to a modern issue. Biblical scholarship in recent years has approached the Bible in this manner, often commenting upon passages with references to prophecy or tongues without once raising the question of whether Paul would advocate a continued use of these spiritual gifts past the first century.

It is in these three traditions that this thesis will focus—continuationist interpretation, cessationist interpretation, and modern biblical scholarship. Whole volumes of books could be written, and have been written, on the various interpretations of Scripture brought forth by each side on the wide range of spiritual gifts mentioned in the New Testament (and even some outside of it, such as snake-handling). However, in the interest of space and time, this thesis will examine the references to prophecy found in the Pauline epistles and how continuationists and cessationists have interpreted Paul’s letters in support of their own position and/or against the other.

There are thirty-three references to “prophecy,” “prophesy,” or “prophet” in Paul’s letters, twenty of them in 1 Corinthians 12-14. However, some of the references are not pertinent to the issue of cessationism. Four of the references, all in Romans, are references to Old Testament prophecy (Rom. 1:2, 3:21, 11:3, 16:26) and the reference in Titus 1:12 is to a Cretan philosopher. Neither side of the aisle has taken up the references in 1 Thessalonians 2:15 or 1 Corinthians 11:4-5 and 13:2 as advocating a continuationist or cessationist position. Finally, the early part of 1 Corinthians 14 is mostly left alone as well (14:1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 22, and 24), leaving thirteen references of importance to cessationism, with five references appearing in 1 Corinthians 14:29-40.

These references will all be examined in turn, each having its own section enumerated below.<sup>5</sup> For each passage the cessationist and/or continuationist usage of the text will be summarized, and these usages will be weighed against modern scholarship to examine Paul’s intended meaning of the text, critiquing or commending continuationist or cessationist points about the text when possible. Moreover, this thesis will seek to gain a fuller understanding of Paul’s view of prophecy in the 1<sup>st</sup> century by weighing the issue of cessationism against the text itself.

The prominent cessationist scholars discussed in this paper are Richard B. Gaffin, Jr. and O. Palmer Robertson. Gaffin is a Calvinist scholar of theology, Presbyterian minister, and professor of Biblical and systematic theology at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Robertson is an American-born pastor and seminary teacher who serves as current director of African Bible College in Uganda. He has taught courses at Reformed Theological Seminary, Westminster Theological

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<sup>5</sup> 1 Corinthians 14:29-40 will be treated as one final discussion due to the breadth of arguments surrounding the chapter as a whole as well as the clustered nature of the references. It would be difficult, and unfair exegetically, to treat them verse-by-verse.

Seminary, Covenant Theological Seminary, and Knox Theological seminary in the United States.

The prominent continuationist scholars in this paper are Wayne A. Grudem, D. A. Carson, Douglas A. Oss, and C. Samuel Storms. Grudem, a graduate of Harvard University (BA), Westminster Theological Seminary (M.Div.) and the University of Cambridge, England (Ph.D.), is currently a research professor of Bible and theology at Phoenix Seminary in Phoenix, Arizona. Carson, who also earned his Ph.D. at the University of Cambridge, is a professor of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois. Oss, who obtained his Ph.D. from Westminster Theological Seminary, is a professor of Biblical theology and New Testament interpretation at the Assemblies of God Theological Seminary. Storms, who obtained his PhD at the University of Texas at Dallas, is a Calvinist author and pastor of Bridgeway Church in Oklahoma City.

Scholars who do not bring the issue of cessationism to bear on the text will represent modern scholarship. Gordon D. Fee, James D. G. Dunn, Luke T. Johnson, and Douglas J. Moo will be used for the Romans passage. Fee, an ordained minister of the Assemblies of God, is a professor of New Testament studies at Regent College in Vancouver, Canada. He has written extensively for the New International Commentary on the New Testament as well as published a book about the Holy Spirit in the New Testament, *God's Empowering Presence*, so he will be cited in many of the sections beyond Romans. Dunn, a British scholar, is a divinity professor at Durham University in England. He is also a prominent scholar of the New Perspective on Paul that emphasizes the contextual nature of Paul's letters as a first century Jew. Johnson served as a

Benedictine monk for nearly a decade before earning his Ph.D. in New Testament from Yale University. He now teaches New Testament and Christian origins and is a senior fellow at the Center for the Study of Law and Religion at Emory University, a Methodist university. Moo, who earned his Ph.D. from the University of St. Andrews in Scotland, is a professor of Biblical studies at Wheaton College in Illinois. Interestingly, Moo taught at Trinity alongside Carson for twenty-three years before moving to Wheaton in 2000.

Commentaries from Markus Barth, F. F. Bruce, and A. T. Lincoln will be used for the Ephesians passages. Barth, the son of prominent theologian Karl Barth, studied Protestant theology in Switzerland, Germany and Scotland. After pastoring in Basel, Switzerland for over a decade, he received a doctorate in New Testament from the University of Göttingen in 1947 and spent the remainder of his life teaching New Testament in the United States and Germany until his death in 1994. Bruce, born in Scotland, served as general editor for the New International Commentary on the New Testament. He was a professor of Biblical criticism and exegesis at the University of Manchester in England and wrote more than 40 published books before his death in 1990. Lincoln, is a professor of New Testament studies at the University of Gloucestershire, England and has also written commentaries on Colossians and the Gospel of John.

For 1 Thessalonians, Fee, I. Howard Marshall, and Leon Morris will be consulted as modern scholars. Marshall, an Evangelical Methodist, is a professor of New Testament Exegesis at the University of Aberdeen in Scotland. Morris, born in Wales, was ordained as an Anglican minister before accepting a position as a professor of New Testament at the University of Aberdeen, where he taught until his death in 2006. He was once a visiting professor at Trinity while Moo and Carson taught there.



Finally, the commentaries of Fee, Charles H. Talbert, William F. Orr, and James A. Walther will be used to analyze Paul's true purpose in 1 Corinthians. Talbert is a distinguished professor of religion at Baylor University in Waco, Texas. Talbert served as president of the National Association of Baptist Professors of Religion and the Society of Biblical Literature and is only the second Protestant in history to have served as President of the Catholic Biblical Association. Orr and Walther are, respectively, professor emeritus and associate professor of New Testament at the Pittsburgh Theological Seminary.

## CHAPTER 2

### ROMANS 12:3-8

*3 For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. 4 For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, 5 so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. 6 We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; 7 if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; 8 if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.*

Not much has been made of this passage from either side of the cessationism debate. This passage is mostly used alongside other gift lists in a debate that will be addressed below. However, based upon this passage, O. Palmer Robertson, a cessationist scholar, notes that Paul believes the use of the gift to be voluntary.<sup>6</sup> If he can encourage his readers to use the gift, they must have some control over its use, arguing against some sort of frenzied, ecstatic state during prophecy. However, the opposing side does not dispute this and even finds further evidence for such an understanding elsewhere in Paul (1 Cor. 14:29-32).<sup>7</sup> Continuationists suggest that this passage helps support modern miraculous gifts because the text gives no indication of some approaching termination of any of these gifts mentioned in this list. Instead, as Douglas Oss writes, Paul assumes their continuing operation “as if it is as normal a part of Christian life as having sanctified

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<sup>6</sup> O.P. Robertson, *The Final Word: A Biblical Response to the Case for Tongues and Prophecy Today* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2011), 74.

<sup>7</sup> W.A. Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2000) 103-108.

attitudes (v. 9-21), being good citizens (13:1-7), and living righteously (13:8-14), and so on.”<sup>8</sup> However, a lack of reference to future cessation does not spell a definitive conclusion. The entire cessationist argument centers on the idea that the New Testament church was unique in that some of its gifts that happened in its time no longer continue today. Obviously, there will be some passages where prophecy is assumed to occur regularly by Paul because that was the case at the time of the letter’s writing. Observing the church’s uniqueness in the first century, as is found in this passage, does not spell a definitive blow to the cessationist argument.<sup>9</sup> It simply postpones it to another reference where a better case may be made.

Modern biblical scholarship paints a far more robust understanding of prophecy in this reference. This seems rather logical in reading the passage. Unlike other references in 1 Corinthians, Ephesians and 1 Timothy, it is quite difficult for either side to use the reference to make any sort of bold claim in cessationist theology. It falls on deaf ears in the cessationism debate, though it gives great insight into Paul’s understanding of prophecy for the willing exegete.

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<sup>8</sup> D. A. Oss, “A Pentecostal/Charismatic View,” in W. A. Grudem (ed.), *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 275-276. Oss expounds upon this idea by referring to Galatians 3:5, emphasizing that Paul “*assumes* the normalcy of miracles” in the regular life of the church. However, this is highly misleading. Paul established the Galatian churches himself (Gal. 4:12-14), so he is certainly assuming nothing about their regular activity. The reason he can make such an illustration that refers to miracles as occurring regularly is because he is familiar with the work of the church, not because he assumes all churches conduct themselves in such a way.

<sup>9</sup> So also W.A. Grudem, “Conclusion,” in W. A. Grudem (ed.), *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 345-346. One of the major tensions in the cessationism debate surrounds the issue of the New Testament church as a definitive paradigm for modern experience. To the chagrin of continuationists, cessationists claim Scripture to be the final authoritative word of God, yet they refuse to apply all the spiritual gifts mentioned in that text to today’s church. However, cessationists are equally frustrated with the widely held belief amongst continuationists that spiritual gifts such as apostleship ceased due to their first-century nature but not others, such as prophecy.

Paul's purpose for writing Romans is the subject of great debate, and therefore, the context of this gift list is contested.<sup>10</sup> For the purpose of this thesis, developing a stance is not necessary. However, Johnson notes that regardless of Paul's reason for writing or his purposes in its structure, it seems that he could move into chapter 12 from chapter 8, following his usual format of theological teaching then exhortation to enact his previously expounded thought. Instead, one finds in chapters 9-11, "Paul's anguished wrestling with Israel's unbelief" in order to resolve the aforementioned tension.<sup>11</sup> It is with this tension-resolving purpose in mind that Paul moves into chapter 12 with hopes of establishing a closing note on this Gentile-Jewish conflict and moving into his usual exhortations.

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<sup>10</sup> L. T. Johnson, *Reading Romans: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (Macon: Smyth and Helwys, 2001), 4-8. As Johnson notes, it is widely debated whether Paul is responding to issues he has already heard existing in Rome or if the loose ends of his own theological treatise cause the apostle to seemingly tackle problems that exist in the Roman church. See also D.J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (New International Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 547-549. Moo notes that Paul's stress of salvation resting upon adoption (8:14-17), becoming heirs of Abraham (chapter 4) and becoming heirs of God's own glory (5:4; 8:18—30) alongside his denial of Jewish salvation through the Mosaic covenant in chapter 2 would create such a tension in the letter itself. This is a lively debate, but for this commentary's purposes, Paul's knowledge of the Roman church is not a vital issue. What is clear is that Paul has just moved into a new segment of a letter to the Roman church that he has yet to visit personally (1:10-13; Acts 28:15) to ask for support in an upcoming missionary journey to Spain (15:24), as well as to weigh in on some relevant issues in the church (as evidenced by Paul specifically addressing groups in the church such as Gentiles in 11:13-24). One such issue was the place of Jews and Gentiles in the church, either existing as a full-blown problem in Rome before the letter or created due to Paul's writing in the previous chapters and warranting further discussion in the letter as a means of tying up loose ends. According to Moo, Paul labors through the first eight chapters to explain Gentile inclusion into God's new kingdom. Regardless of the reason for this laboring, a tension is created for Jews reading the apostle's letter. Paul could move into chapter 12 from chapter 8, following his usual format of theological teaching then exhortation to enact his previously expounded thought, but instead one finds in chapters 9-11 "Paul's anguished wrestling with Israel's unbelief" in order to resolve the aforementioned tension. It is with this tension-resolving purpose in mind that Paul moves into chapter 12 with hopes of establishing a closing note on this Gentile-Jewish conflict and moving into his usual exhortations.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 150-153.

After carefully describing individually both parties' roles in the newly revealed redemption narrative, Paul uses chapters 12-13 to exhort the two factions collectively to pursue unity despite differences.<sup>12</sup> The passage functions as an elaboration upon his arguments for unity and connects chapters 1-11 to 14-15.<sup>13</sup> This is the backdrop against which Paul chastens every individual, from both groups, to consider himself/herself "with sober judgment" (v. 3) in humility. It is with this intended humility in mind that Paul introduces the metaphor of the church<sup>14</sup> as one body (vv. 4-5). This illustration is the apostle's attempt to cement the *necessity* of individual differences within the church, moving even beyond Jew-Gentile relations to introduce his list of gifts in vv. 6-8 as a practical example of cooperation.<sup>15</sup>

It should also be noted that Romans 12:3-5 is not the last time that Paul will use a gift list that includes the gift of prophecy to introduce or elaborate upon the idea of the Church as one body. A parallel exists in Ephesians 4:11-16 and in Paul's in-depth

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<sup>12</sup> Moo, *Romans*, 759, sees no connection in chapter 12 to the previous chapters though he agrees that the main subject of the previous eleven chapters has been Israel's place in redemptive history and Gentile inclusion in Israel. Instead, he posits that Paul is simply describing "the way the gospel was to transform lives." However, there is no obvious reason why Paul has suddenly introduced a new topic. It is far more likely that he is elaborating on these principles that he's already tackled individually (Gentiles in chapters 1-8 and Jews in chapters 9-11), now collectively.

<sup>13</sup> Johnson, *Reading Romans*, 187-188. Johnson notes four reasons that this passage should be understood as internally coherent with the rest of Romans. First, the *oun* in verse 1 signals a continuation of thought from chapter 11. Second, chapters 14-15 specifically return to the issue of Jew-Gentile relations. Third, it builds upon the issue examined in 2:1-10 and 5:5 that God judges the unrighteous but that the Holy Spirit aids the believer in becoming righteous. Paul is elaborating in these chapters on what that looks like practically. Fourth, thematic links such as "lowly-mindedness" resurface (11:18-25; 12:3, 16) and tie the passage into the broader purpose of the letter.

<sup>14</sup> Moo, *Romans*, 763. Given Paul's omission of "apostles" from the gift list in vv. 6-8, it is likely that he has just the Roman church in view.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, This is why Moo finds chapter 12 to be disjointed from the rest of the argument; it is broader in scope and more practical in its address to general believers in the church instead of its subgroups, but it reflects the continuing theme of Romans for unity.

handling of prophecy and tongues in 1 Corinthians 12:8-11 and 12:28.<sup>16</sup> All of these gift lists will be dealt with in full below as to avoid repetition and in order to have the full array discussed individually prior to their significance collectively.

To speak more specifically on the reference to prophecy at hand in verse 6, there are two main observations to make. First, Paul's preface to his listing of gifts serves as a framework for understanding what follows; though Paul stresses the differentiation of gifts within the Church body (vv. 4-5), it must not be overlooked that Paul is operating on the premise that each Christian is indeed given a gift. As Moo points out, Paul's "assumption that these gifts are active within the Roman church, which Paul has neither founded nor visited, shows that the operation of gifts was widespread, if not universal, in the early church."<sup>17</sup> This assumption of various giftings is the lens through which Paul desires his readers to read his forthcoming words on Christian gifting—that in some way, all Christians have something to contribute to the Church. Not only this, but that as with the body, the loss of one of its members, regardless of its size or seeming importance, means a loss to the entire body. Each is vital to its holistic functioning.

Second, Paul advises prophets to prophesy "in accordance with the *analogia* of faith." *Analogia*, being a mathematical term meaning the correct proportion or right

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<sup>16</sup> J.D. Dunn, *Romans 9-16* (Word Biblical Commentary 38B; Dallas: Word, 1990), 735. The latter references are fitting, perhaps, for Corinth is where Paul writes this letter to the Romans. The apostle might even be dealing with the Corinthian issues of the elevation of certain gifts above others at the time of this writing. This would argue in favor of chapters 12-13 being incoherent with the rest of Romans because Paul would then be inserting these ideas from his current personal experience. However, there is not much support for Corinth's issues greatly influencing this letter. As Dunn point out, given that the gift list that Paul sets forth in 1 Corinthians 12:8-11 and 1 Corinthians 12:28 varies drastically from this list in Romans, to correlate the two churches' issues is a stretch. See also Moo, *Romans*, 759.

<sup>17</sup> Moo, *Romans*, 764. He continues, "Believers possess different *charismata* ('gifts'); but each one is the product of God's *charis* ('grace'), which all believers have in common." Moo eloquently expounds upon Paul's notion that the unity of the church exists in its members' variety of gifts.

relationship,<sup>18</sup> encourages the reading to be understood as, “in accordance with the right proportion of faith.” Some have argued that this “faith” refers to a special charismatic faith that only prophets would have possessed. In essence, Paul was exhorting prophets to prophesy what God revealed to them; this revelation would reflect the amount of special faith he had given them, whether God trusted them with much or little.<sup>19</sup> However, this understanding of a “special faith” has very little support elsewhere in Paul.

Moo notes that the Reformers used this passage as a platform to promote an objective sense of faith, coining the phrase “analogy of faith” to mean weighing an interpretation of Scripture with other Scripture because Scripture (the orthodox) was the best place to weigh supposed revelation. In essence, from this passage’s tying of prophecy to the bounds of existing Christian orthodoxy, the Reformers derived the notion of a fixed, “objective faith” that all true believers possess. Their agenda may have been to liken this kind of practice in prophecy unto modern teaching, forcing it to confine itself to the orthodoxy of the established canon. Elsewhere, in Paul’s Pastoral Epistles, this “objective faith” does seem present (1 Tim. 1:4, 14; 3:9; 4:1, 6; 6:21).<sup>20</sup> However, this understanding of faith is not really echoed in the rest of the letter at hand and the Pastorals were written several years after Romans.

It is more likely that Paul is simply talking about saving Christian faith. A definite parallel exists to verse 3, where Paul is obviously referring to the giving of saving faith to believers without distinction of spiritual gifts.<sup>21</sup> In this same manner, Paul is suggesting

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 765. Moo consults the Liddell-Scott-Jones Greek English Lexicon and points out that Josephus employs this understanding when he uses the word in describing the Jerusalem temple’s porticos as being in “right proportion” to the temple as a whole.

<sup>19</sup> See G.D. Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 608-609.

<sup>20</sup> Moo, *Romans*, 765-766.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 766.

that prophets, like all believers when exercising their spiritual gifts, should exercise their gift in conjunction with the faith they possess.<sup>22</sup> The mathematical term *analogia* makes good sense in this respect. Any use of spiritual gifts is impossible without first having this faith, so the employment of prophecy would naturally be contingent upon the “right proportion” of faith. This also fits the context of the list in which each exhortation is contingent upon the gift being mentioned (e.g., the exhortation to the act of teaching is contingent upon the gift of teaching and the exhortation to the act of giving generously is contingent upon the gift of giving).<sup>23</sup>

In sum, there are two discernable notions exposed about Paul’s understanding of prophecy in this passage. First, prophecy was one of many spiritual gifts exercised in the New Testament church. Second, its useful operation was reliant on the right proportion of faith, most easily understood to be basic Christian faith. To posit a special faith given to prophets or to claim that Paul was advocating an objective faith (re: orthodoxy) within which prophets could prophesy is an exegetical stretch.

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<sup>22</sup> So also Johnson, *Reading Romans*, 193. Johnson points out that with Paul’s emphasis of faith here and edification elsewhere (1 Cor. 14:4), prophecy “should at least be an expression of faith, and in all likelihood also speech that builds up the community’s faith.”

<sup>23</sup> So also Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, 734. Dunn notes that Paul’s emphasis is on the action of the gift, not on the office itself.



## CHAPTER 3

### EPHESIANS 2:19-22

*19* Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, *20* built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. *21* In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. *22* And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

Cessationists have found major ground in the Ephesians passages, and continuationists take on a more defensive position here for reasons that will be addressed in modern scholarship. Specifically, Richard Gaffin uses Paul's depiction of apostles and prophets as the chronological foundation of the church (v. 20) to articulate a case that these offices ought to cease after the Apostolic age.<sup>24</sup> He appeals to Paul's other metaphor of the Church as a building in 1 Corinthians 3:11, citing Jesus's death and resurrection as the finished foundational work "already laid." Because the purpose of apostles and prophets, to Gaffin, was to "bear authoritative testimony to his resurrection and his implications,"<sup>25</sup> it should come as no surprise that these gifts have since ceased with the completion of the New Testament canon. He writes:

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<sup>24</sup> Gaffin's assertion that Paul uses "foundation" as chronological will be treated below. For now, it is simply assumed.

<sup>25</sup> R. B. Gaffin, Jr., "A Cessationist View," in W. A. Grudem (ed.), *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996). 43. It should be noted that the verses Gaffin lists in support of this definition strictly concern the role of apostle in the New Testament. None are given that even refer to the gift of prophecy or prophets. It flies in the face of the definition Grudem finds for prophecy in 1 Cor 14:29-30. Furthermore, Carson demonstrates that though Paul unites the two roles here, he separates them elsewhere (1 Cor 12:28). See W.A. Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in 1 Corinthians*, (Washington: University Press of America, 1982) 139-143;

In any construction project (ancient or modern), the foundation comes at the beginning and does not have to be relaid repeatedly... In terms of this dynamic model for the church, the apostles and prophets belong to the period of the foundation. In other words, by the divine architects design, the presence of apostles and prophets in the history of the church is temporary.<sup>26</sup>

From the continuationist perspective, there are four major issues with Gaffin's claim. First, Grudem has extensively argued that the words *tōn apostolōn kai prophetōn* (rendered "apostles and prophets" by the NIV) in 2:20 and 3:5 can also be rendered "apostles who are prophets."<sup>27</sup> There is much more to this argument than will be articulated here, but essentially Grudem posits that when two substantive nouns are grouped together the two *can be* understood as a single referent (e.g., Col. 1:2). They can also maintain separate identities (e.g., Acts 23:7). The context informs the reader of the meaning. Grudem cites over twenty examples of such an understanding elsewhere in the New Testament. Given the context of this verse, this is certainly a plausible reading of

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Carson, D. A., *Showing the Spirit: A Theological Exposition of 1 Corinthians 12-14* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987) 88-100

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Grudem, *Gift of Prophecy*, 329-346. Most of Grudem's examples are not quite analogous to 2:20 and 3:5 where both substantives are plural nouns. As noted by Carson, even in the cited reference of Colossians 1:2 one of the substantives functions as an adjective. Also, the context for some of the examples Grudem gives is still more easily read as maintaining the original, separate understanding of the two nouns. For example, he applies this understanding of grouped nouns as a single referent to 4:11, but such an understanding is the more difficult of the two readings given the structure of the list. Paul's purpose in the ordering is to demonstrate the unifying nature of the hierarchical structure in the New Testament Church. The easiest reading of the text is that pastors and teachers represent the bottom rung of the structure, not that they are the same office. To cement this point, in 1 Cor 14:29 pastor is notably absent from Paul's discussion on various gifting. If all pastors were teachers in the same way that Grudem insists all apostles were prophets, we would expect to find the position of pastor in that verse to make the two congruous because it is the more-encompassing office just as apostle is to prophet. However, some of Grudem's notes are at least worth examination. For more on shortcomings and amendments to Grudem's thesis, see Carson, D.A. *Showing the Spirit*, 96-97

both 2:20 and 3:5, but the argument truthfully just serves to give pause to any reader trying to place too much weight on these verses in establishing a particular paradigm.<sup>28</sup>

Second, Gaffin's further point, though it correctly emphasizes chronology as will be argued below, ignores Paul's purpose in this passage. As Carson argues, Paul is *not* prescribing the future building of the church. He is *describing* its current, active status in the first century with apostles and prophets playing a part in the formation of the church as forbearers of the gospel.<sup>29</sup> Gaffin reads into the text his premise of a building process that does not require rebuilding multiple foundations.<sup>30</sup>

Third, opponents to this second objection would point to verse 22 as justification for Paul's description of an ongoing building process that prescribes a role for prophecy as ceased. After all, if new members of the structure are being added and Paul is describing apostles and prophets as being *exclusively* first, it follows that these new members cannot be part of the foundation, effectively halting apostleship and prophecy. However, to establish such a notion is to stretch this metaphor even farther than Gaffin and ascribe a function to the foundation that may not necessarily be in the text itself. Instead of relying on an extensive treatment of this metaphor to establish the exclusivity of apostleship and prophecy, one can find elsewhere a more explicit expression of Paul's purpose for this foundation in this same letter.

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid. It should be noted, however, that Grudem himself is attempting to establish a paradigm of prophecy as being something other than infallible and authoritative. He needs to limit the importance of this text to do so.

<sup>29</sup> Carson, *Showing the Spirit*, 96-97. Carson also states that it is as "illegitimate" to stretch this verse to its limit as it would be "to conclude from Titus 1:12 that New Testament prophets were pagan poets from Crete."

<sup>30</sup> C. S. Storms, "A Third Wave Response," in W. A. Grudem (ed.), *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996). 78-81. Storms draws a similar metaphor, stating, "Once a man establishes a company, writes its bylaws, articulates its vision, hires employees, and does all the work essential to laying the foundation for its future work and productivity, he does not necessarily cease to exist or to serve the company in other capacities."

Fourth, Gaffin's definitional role (as articulated in the quotations above) of prophecy strays largely from Paul's definition. Even Robertson, a fellow cessationist with Gaffin, acknowledges that 3:6 is the greater definition of what these "apostles and prophets" do. In this verse, the purpose of both of these offices is to reveal a mystery "that the Gentiles are fellow-heirs, fellow-participants, and fellow-members in the body of Christ."<sup>31</sup> Elaborating upon this point, Paul adds that the great end of this mystery is for it to be made "plain to everyone" (3:9). Certainly, this need has not diminished in the years following Christ's ascension. In the face of Paul's broader understanding of the purpose of apostles and prophets in the letter, Gaffin's definition that apostles and prophets tell people about Jesus ultimately reads like an effort to make prophets sound like pre-Bible entities. It is convenient that Gaffin's definition of the prophetic role in the New Testament is fulfilled by Scripture, but it has very little to do with Paul's understanding, as articulated elsewhere in the letter or in the greater Pauline corpus. Though Paul describes these offices here as being primary broadcasters of the gospel, pressing the metaphor beyond this point flies in the face of Paul's understanding elsewhere and ascribes to apostles and prophets a definition that is based in an agenda read into the text.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>Robertson, *Final Word*, 15-16

<sup>32</sup> So also C. S. Storms, "Third Wave" 78-81. Storms further critiques obtaining a definition of prophet from this verse. He states that even if Paul believe that some prophets in the early church were meant to be once-for-all foundations, Paul clearly has other desires for the office beyond this one role. He writes, "To suggest that Ephesians 2:20 has in view *all possible prophets* in the early church does not measure up to what we read about this gift in the rest of the New Testament." He cites a variety of examples from 1 Corinthians, Romans, and 1 Thessalonians that all differ from the understanding of prophet that Paul allegedly articulates in this passage. Though this thesis is concerned with Paul's understanding, Storms also points out a variety of examples from Acts that would counter such a view of New Testament prophets.

Finally, Gaffin suffers from mixing metaphors. He claims that there is a parallel to 1 Corinthians 3:11 and shrugs off the differences as not affecting the overall meaning of the text. However, this is simply misleading. In the Corinthians passage, Paul does not refer to apostles nor does he mention prophets.<sup>33</sup> Also, he is not actually talking about the construction of the church at all, but instead how the word he brought them about Jesus should be used to build the church. At best, Gaffin appears confused about what Paul is talking about in 1 Corinthians. At worst, he has simply ignored it.

Modern scholarship, again, sees much more to discover in this passage beyond the cessationism debate articulated above. This passage is sandwiched between a depiction of the unification of Jews and Gentiles (vv. 13-18) and a shift in tone as Paul defends his calling to preach the Gospel to Gentiles (3:1-13). In fact, Paul twice declares that Gentiles have been “brought near” to God through Christ (v. 13; cf. v. 17). In this same vein, this passage serves as Paul’s concluding thoughts on the construction of the Church in the wake of Jesus destroying “the barrier, the dividing the wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations” (vv. 14-15). The apostle even begins this concluding depiction of unification in verse 19 with a strong *ara oun* (rendered “consequently” in the NIV) to alert his readers to the summarizing nature of his following words.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> So also Carson, D.A., *Showing the Spirit*, 94-95. The understanding of this concept is essential to an understanding of the importance Paul places on New Testament prophets. As Carson notes, it is only in this verse and 3:5 that Paul groups the offices of apostle and prophet. Apostles, at least the kind to which Paul is referring here as the original twelve plus Paul, are conclusively the inheritors of authority in the wake of Christ’s ascension. Elsewhere in the New Testament, apostles alone assume the place of ultimate authority (1 Cor. 14:37-38; 4:21; 2 Cor. 10:11; 13:1-10; 1 Tim. 1:20). The only exception to such an idea would be here if he were somehow talking about the power inherent in the two positions. That debate has been pointedly addressed in modern scholarship.

<sup>34</sup> So also A.T. Lincoln, *Ephesians* (Word Biblical Commentary 42; Dallas: Word, 1990), 150.

Subsequently, Paul utilizes three illustrations to describe this unification of the church. Having already established the exclusion of Gentiles from Israel previous to Jesus (v. 12), Paul first describes them as citizens (v.19) through the destruction of the dividing wall of hostility (v.14) made possible through the cross (v.16). But Paul does not stop at this description in verse 19. He then adds that Gentiles are now in God's household with the *agioi* (rendered "God's people" in the NIV).<sup>35</sup> In this way, not only does Paul describe the extended citizenship for Gentiles in Israel, but he also shapes the idea of inclusion to reach even beyond a sense of membership in a nation. Gentiles are now part of God's household.<sup>36</sup> Set in the contrast of their exclusion in verse 12, the power of this inclusion cannot be overstated.

In an even grander statement of Gentile inclusion, Paul then states that Gentile believers form the very substance of a structure in which God himself is the most integral part. Though apostles and prophets formed the foundation,<sup>37</sup> Jesus acts as the building's

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<sup>35</sup> Lincoln notes that this entity could be understood as many things, but for the object of this thesis, the discussion is superfluous. For a full discussion on the possibilities of who/what the *agioi* are, see Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 150-151.

<sup>36</sup> F.F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians* (New International Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 303. Although, Paul does not explicitly state the role that Gentiles play in this household, Bruce eloquently states, "If the community is viewed as a house or household, the Gentile believers are full members of the family—not household servants but sons and daughters, with all the rights of inheritance that sons and daughters enjoy."

<sup>37</sup> M. Barth, *Ephesians 1-3* (The Anchor Bible; Garden City: Doubleday, 1974) 314-316. Although Barth notes that contemporary scholarship widely believes Paul is referring to New Testament prophets, the more traditional reading has been that of both Old and New Testament prophets. He articulates three reasons to believe Paul intends New Testament prophets. First, the single article before "apostles and prophets." Second, the placing of "prophets" after "apostles." Third, the other Pauline verses which mention "apostles" and "prophets" in the same breath all clearly indicate that Paul means New Testament prophets exclusively (3:5; 4:11; 1 Cor 12:28-29). Regardless of whether Paul has in view both periods of prophets, there is no indication that he wishes to exclude the New Testament variety, rendering the point moot for this discussion. Whatever Paul says of prophets in this text, he certainly applies to his contemporaries. For a full list of older commentaries that debate the notion of Old and New Testament prophets, see G. D. Fee, *Presence*, 687.

cornerstone (v. 20) and its mortar (in a loose sense) that binds the pieces together (v. 21). Inherent in this illustration of the Church as a structural temple in which God dwells, there exists the assertion that every member is important in a unique way. In the same manner that one brick, regardless of its placement at the bottom or top of a structure, is not of greater importance than another, neither can any believer be of greater importance than another. That apostles and prophets form the foundation for such a structure says a little about Paul's thoughts on how unifying the two offices must be.

Paul invokes the divine passive *epoikodomēthentes* (simply rendered "built" in the NIV but correctly translated as "having been built"), to articulate the construction process. There may be no mistake: the building of the foundation to which Paul refers *has been finished*. And apostles and prophets form this finished foundation.<sup>38</sup> However, now that the cessationist stigma of a completed foundation has been refuted above, this need not mean anything more than that Paul believes God is done using apostles and prophets in this specific, chronological way.

This depiction of the Church calls to mind the body metaphor we find elsewhere in the Pauline epistles (Eph. 4:11-16, Rom. 12:3-8, 1 Cor. 12-14), echoing the unifying idea of the Church being comprised of many parts but acting as a single entity. However, its closest parallel lies in 1 Corinthians 3:10-11. This parallel has nothing to do with Gaffin's usage as articulated above, and with its dismissal, the reader is free to explore

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<sup>38</sup> Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 152-153. See also Barth, *Ephesians 1-3*, 314-316. Barth stretches the passage too far to mean that "apostles and prophets" are not actually the foundation at all, but instead their *proclamation* forms the foundation. This is based upon Paul's description of an ongoing process in 2:17 but does not stay true to the clearly stated text that the temple has indeed *been* built on the "apostles and prophets." However, Barth's observation that the proclamation of the gospel referred to in 2:17 is an ongoing action is an important one. This proclamation is one that will be tied (though not explicitly) to apostles and prophets in 3:6 and indicates that the foundation, though complete, is still *in use*. This is unsurprising, given that Paul (understood to be an apostle and prophet from 1 Corinthians 14) is alive and writing the letter.

the nuance in the changes. The foundation *has been built*, but not by Paul as in the Corinthians passage. Instead, God himself has built this structure of which Paul is a part. As Lincoln notes, in Corinthians, Paul viewed himself as laying Christ as the foundation. Here, “Paul views himself as part of the foundational generation with the other apostles and prophets.”<sup>39</sup> Lincoln states that Paul’s purpose is to “give his Gentile Christian readers a stronger sense of their identity as part of the Church.”<sup>40</sup> Spectacularly, Paul further cements this new Gentile identity by identifying this structure’s purpose to be a “temple” (v. 21) and a “dwelling in which God lives” (v. 22).

What is also of particular interest in this passage is Paul’s notion of the New Testament prophetic office here. As Fee notes, it is *only* in Ephesians that Paul depicts prophets as being a “discrete group of people within the Christian community.” Elsewhere in the Pauline epistles, especially in 1 Corinthians 12 and 14, “prophet” simply refers to someone who prophesies.<sup>41</sup> If one wishes to answer the question, “What is a prophet according to Paul?” it is only in Ephesians that one might receive an answer beyond the obvious “someone who prophesies.” If there is such a thing as the “prophetic office” as a distinct group in the New Testament church, its evidence lies exclusively in Ephesians.

It has been a longstanding debate among scholars whether New Testament prophets were of the same stature as Old Testament prophets, at the very least in terms of their importance, clout, or influence within the early church. This passage would reflect

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<sup>39</sup> Bruce, *The Epistles*, 154.

<sup>40</sup> Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 154. Because these Gentiles *were* formally separate from Israel, it might be that their understanding of themselves as firmly rooted in Israel through Christ’s blood lacked the context that Jewish Christians would have enjoyed. This context “points them to their roots and to the source of the normative teaching that is necessary if they are not to be confused and shaken by erroneous ideas (cf. 4:14).”

<sup>41</sup> Fee, *Presence*, 50.



such a notion on its face, and in fact, would function as some of its greatest support. The office is pointed out by name and paired with an office that Jesus establishes himself to be his representatives (Matt. 10:40) and to walk in truth via the Holy Spirit (cf. John 14:26; 15:26-27; 16:13-15).<sup>42</sup> In addition, in Paul's description here, they certainly form what modern understanding would call a vital structure in the home-building process.

Even Biblically, the "foundation" of a building is conveyed to be of paramount importance because a structure with a poor foundation is liable to collapse. This understanding is best displayed in the parable of the wise and foolish builders in Matthew 7:24-27. In this parable, Jesus concerns himself with the selection of a foundation in the building process. If one builds on sand, the house will collapse when foul weather strikes it. Conversely, if a builder constructs his house on rock, the house will endure the elements. Jesus emphasizes the importance of the foundation; the collapsing of the houses function as an effect of this prior selection process. Without building on the right foundation, a life may fall apart when trials come. If misunderstood, one might ascribe this same understanding to Paul's reference here to mean that apostles and prophets are similarly vital to the endurance of faith.

However, the reference to foundation in Ephesians *is quite different* from Jesus's illustration. Whereas Jesus *prescribes* the selection of a quality foundation in the building

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<sup>42</sup> However, there is certainly no reason to believe from this reference that this is how Paul thought of the apostolic office in terms of its importance. The reference to other works merely demonstrates how first-century authors viewed the importance of the office, not to imply that Paul believes that his letters will be canonized or that he believes the apostles are of such significance in the early church. There is some evidence to believe that Paul did believe he (an apostle) and the twelve other appointed apostles did play a role of paramount importance in the church, even above prophets (1 Cor 12:28). However, Bruce rightly notes that Paul often uses the word generally to mean many people beyond Jesus' original twelve and may be doing so here, completely negating the idea of apostolic office alongside a prophetic office. For more on Paul's view of apostles, see Bruce, *The Epistles*, 303-304; Carson, *Showing the Spirit*, 88-91.

process, Paul *describes* the importance of the solid cornerstone and mortar for the endurance of the temple in the form of Jesus Christ. Paul places a heavy emphasis over the following verses on the importance of Jesus as both the cornerstone and the agent that holds the structure together, *not the foundation*.<sup>43</sup> This is in stark contrast to Jesus's depiction of the foundation in Matthew 7.

But if Paul is not using this understanding of foundation, an essential structure of a house, what does he mean? Paul is emphasizing the role of apostles and prophets chronologically.<sup>44</sup> Before the rest of the building can be constructed, a foundation must be built. In the same way, apostles and prophets functioned as torchbearers of the gospel following Jesus's ascension. It should be noted that this does not in any way minimize the importance of prophets in the Church. A foundation is still a vital part of a structure. Paul does make an effort to note their integral nature in the Church's birth (cf. Eph. 4:13). Paving the way for the birth of the Church is by no means a small role. However, Paul does not elevate either of these offices above any other role by labeling them the "foundation."

In conclusion, arguments from this Ephesians passage about the cessation of prophecy are misguided and cloud Paul's actual thoughts of the New Testament prophetic office. Paul deliberately removes himself from the construction of the first-century church to demonstrate that God is building his temple with the lives of Gentiles through the blood of Jesus; prophets and apostles like himself provided the foundation in a chronological sense. Though this foundational pattern of prophecy is finished, it cannot be overlooked that it *unified* a structure with many individuals and gives identity to

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<sup>43</sup> So also Bruce, *The Epistles*, 304; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 162; Fee, *Presence*, 687-688.

<sup>44</sup> So also Bruce, *The Epistles*, 304; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 162; Fee, *Presence*, 688; Gaffin, Jr., "A Cessationist View," 42-43. This is one aspect that Gaffin gets right.

Gentiles, who were formerly apart from God but are now brought into his very household, a subject Paul returns to in other letters regarding prophecy. Finally, there is nothing in this passage to suggest that the “prophetic office” was exalted, or not exalted, above any other gift-receiving office. In Paul’s metaphor, prophets served a chronological role with apostles as the “foundation” of the church, but Jesus is the cornerstone on which the structure rests and from which it grows.

## CHAPTER 4

### EPHESIANS 3:2-6

*2 Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, 3 that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. 4 In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, 5 which was not made known to people in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. 6 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.*

Here, it would be prudent to begin with modern scholarship's view of Paul's main focus, then move into the cessationist debate on the margins. Paul has just described the inclusion of Gentiles into Israel with a flurry of metaphors including citizenship in Israel, inclusion in God's household, and taking part in the construction of a temple in which God both dwells and forms its greatest support in the cornerstone and mortar of Jesus Christ. Apostles and prophets serve as the foundation of this temple constructed by God. Paul has also introduced his readers to a change in purpose from a declaration of unification of Jew and Gentile in the church in chapter 2 to a defense of his calling to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles in chapter 3. As such, Paul's aim in verse 5 is not to elaborate upon how prophets function as foundational elements of the church, but it does give readers some insight into such a paradigm.

In verse 3, Paul informs his readers that a “mystery<sup>45</sup> was made known” to him “by revelation.” As Bruce notes, this mystery, as it is defined by the following verses, “cannot be divorced from the ‘revelation of Jesus Christ’ granted to him on the Damascus road—on the occasion when, as he says, ‘God... was pleased to reveal his Son in me’ (Gal. 1:12, 15-16).”<sup>46</sup> Though Paul surely did not fully comprehend the lifetime of service that lay ahead of him in that moment, he instantly understood through revelation that it was his life’s calling to proclaim Jesus to the Gentiles of the world. Paul also mentions that he has written on this subject briefly, but whether Paul is referring to chapters 1-2 or earlier epistles not collected in the New Testament is unknown.<sup>47</sup> For the purposes of determining what prophecy means to Paul, or what Paul means by revelation in these verses (as this will be important in the discussion below), this point is moot.

In verse 4, Paul informs his readers of his purpose for the letter—to disseminate his insight into this mystery of which he just spoke. As Lincoln notes, what Paul “expects to become clear from reading is his insight, his grasp of the significance of the [mystery] which God has disclosed in Christ.”<sup>48</sup> Paul has been laboring through the first two

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<sup>45</sup> Barth, *Ephesians 1-3*, 123-127, 329-331. The NIV translates *mystērion* to mean “mystery.” Barth argues that this word is far better rendered as “secret” because “in Ephesians and Colossians the singular of the noun *mystērion* denotes an eternal decision of God which must now be proclaimed to the world, rather than a plan or doctrine which must be locked up under the *disciplina arcani*” as in the pagan religions of Paul’s day (cf. Col. 2:6-18; 1 Cor. 10:20; Rev. 2-4). However, for the average reader, “mystery” carries the same connotation that Barth wishes to express (not of pagan cults as he fears), so its use remains valid.

<sup>46</sup> Bruce, *The Epistles*, 311-312.

<sup>47</sup> Barth, *Ephesians 1-3*, 329. Barth adds that a third theory proposes a pseudonymous author writing about the letters that Paul actually wrote. However, this is rejected because no codex or scroll containing a collection of the other epistles to which Paul would be alluding has been found that antedates the writing of Ephesians. See also Bruce, *The Epistles*, 312. For more on the authorship of Ephesians, see Barth, *Ephesians 1-3*, 10-12; Bruce, *The Epistles*, 229-233, 240-246; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, lx-lxxiii. All three see the matter as one of great speculation on all sides. For simplicity, Occam’s razor rules the day. Paul’s name is on the letter. The easiest understanding is that Paul himself wrote it.

<sup>48</sup> Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 92.

chapters already on the subject of the mystery as he speaks on the inclusion of Gentiles into Israel, but the purpose for this discussion is made plain in the verses to come. Before turning attention to them, a parallel to Colossians 1:9 and 2:2 cannot be overlooked. In all three verses, Paul envisions “understanding” as something destined for all believers. The major change in 3:4 is that Paul, or at least his words, assumes the channel for gaining “understanding” into the mystery.

In verse 5, Paul identifies that he is not alone in receiving understanding of this mystery—apostles and prophets do as well. This is not surprising given their foundational role in the Church in 2:20. However, Paul elaborates upon this role here. He seemingly distances himself, holding these offices afar with the distinction of “God’s holy apostles and prophets” instead of “us apostles and prophets” (cf. 4:9).<sup>49</sup> As the understanding was destined for all people, their roles were simply the reception of insight into the mystery to tell the world. As Bruce puts it, “Through these two ministries—the apostles empowered by the spirit of Christ and the prophets inspired by the same Spirit—effect was now being given to the divine purpose which had for so long remained unrevealed.”<sup>50</sup>

However, they were *not* revealed to “other generations,” but Barth notes that the NIV inserts the idea of “people” in these generations. Given that the only entities distinctly noted as not understanding the content of the mystery are “the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms” (v. 11), Barth believes it improbable that Paul is

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<sup>49</sup> Bruce, *The Epistles*, 314. Bruce posits that this could be one of many clues in Ephesians to an authorship outside Paul. However, that Paul ascribes holiness to these two offices and speaks of them objectively is far from conclusive evidence. More likely, elsewhere in Paul’s letters, the “mystery” concerns a broad range of things—all part of God’s redemptive plan (cf. 1 Cor. 15:51; Rom. 11:25 and 16:25). The easiest understanding of Paul’s distant wording here is that Paul simply wishes to focus upon the portion of the mystery that has concerned him in chapters 1-2 as opposed to the entire mystery that concerns all apostles and prophets. Though he is unconvinced, Bruce also notes this as a possibility.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

speaking of Old Testament Israel as the NIV suggests by such a rendering.<sup>51</sup> He is correct in claiming that first-century Jews would not have been surprised by God's plan to prosper Gentiles at the coming of the messiah and the re-establishment of Israel. In fact, it was their expectation and hope displayed in the Old Testament (cf. Gen. 12:3; Psalm 22:7; Isaiah 49:6; Zech. 2:11; Gal. 3:8; Rom. 15:8-12). However, is this what the mystery entails?

When Paul finally does define this "mystery" in verse 6, he writes that it is "through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus" and adds that this mystery is "for everyone" in verse 9. What is surprising for Israel and unknown to previous generations is not the *prospering* of Gentiles but their unabated *inclusion* in Israel. Bruce writes:

That God would bless the Gentiles then was not a new revelation. What then was the new revelation, the mystery hitherto concealed? It was this: that God's blessing of the Gentiles would involve the obliteration of the old line of demarcation which separated them from Jews and the incorporation of Gentile believers together with Jewish believers, without any discrimination, in the new, comprehensive community of God's chosen people.<sup>52</sup>

Again we see that prophecy's main aim in Paul's mind is to unify the Church and to edify listeners by reminding them of their inclusion in Israel through Jesus. Moreover, it should be noted that Paul believes the reception of this information to be *revelatory*. This functional relationship of how prophets receive their message, that it is given to them

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<sup>51</sup> Barth, *Ephesians 1-3*, 332-333.

<sup>52</sup> Bruce, *The Epistles*, 314.

from God, is echoed throughout the New Testament (cf. 2 Pet. 1:20-21; Rev. 1:1; 1 Cor. 14:30).<sup>53</sup>

Cessationism ignores much of this contextualizing of “insight”, “mystery,” and “revelation.” Taking the discussion to a broader scale regarding revelation of mystery, Robertson notes that the word *mystērion* in verse 5 is used twenty-eight times in the New Testament and that each time it refers to something once hidden but now *revealed* by God. Pressing further, Robertson writes, “A ‘mystery’ appears as an element of God’s redemptive truth that now has become known.”<sup>54</sup> To his credit, in this verse, Paul defines the mystery as the inclusion of Gentiles into Israel, a portion of the redemptive work of God. But clearly, Robertson misses the intricacies of what this mystery means to Paul elsewhere, how it is understood (through Paul’s words, here), and who does the understanding. Apostles and prophets do gain insight, yes, but the definition of the mystery that Paul gives here is not even the mystery given to these offices but rather the aspect of the mystery that concerns Paul in this particular letter. Moreover, the understanding of the mystery does not even require prophecy in the formal sense— at least not in the manner Paul dictates in 1 Corinthians 14 with the standing of prophets, two of them speaking to the church in turn and the subsequent weighing of their words. Anyone who reads Paul’s letter may gain his insight.

However, Robertson then uses his understanding to initiate an argument that has been left unaddressed so far. Though the offices of apostle and prophet may have existed for a reason that is still pertinent to today in declaring the gospel, if their role is to reveal

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<sup>53</sup> To cessationism and continuationism’s credit, both Robertson and Carson demonstrate an understanding of this. Robertson, *The Final Word*, 15. See also Carson, D.A., *Showing the Spirit*, 93-94

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 24-25.



this mystery, what does it mean that the New Testament scriptures, the perfection of the revelation of this mystery, are complete? This is the major plank of the cessationist movement, an exaltation of Scripture as the fulfillment of all revelatory gifts. Robertson asserts, “If revelation has been completed with the perfection of the New Testament Scriptures, then prophecy as the principal revelatory gift has now ceased.”<sup>55</sup> In other words, spreading the gospel has been perfected in Scripture because the mystery is *already* revealed. This revelation is *past tense* at the time of the writing of the New Testament, meaning that New Testament prophets functioned alongside apostles in proclaiming this revelation in the years following Christ’s death while the canon was still incomplete. With its perfection, scripture better attested the life, death, and ascension of Jesus and usurped prophecy’s role of proclaiming the revealed mystery. For Robertson, this point is cemented in the sign nature of prophecy (1 Cor. 14:22). He notes, once a sign “has served its purpose to alert the traveller, it is useless.”<sup>56</sup>

However, Robertson ignores three key points in his argument. First, as was discussed above, “apostles and prophets” might be interpreted incorrectly according to Grudem.<sup>57</sup> Robertson may be operating under a false premise in this verse that the definitions found in Ephesians apply concretely to the office of prophet. If Paul is talking

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 20. Robertson finds ground in this understanding from Deuteronomy 18:18-19 when Moses prophesies that an even greater prophet than himself will be raised up in Israel. Robertson claims that this prophet is Jesus, and Scripture, his words and life depicted in perfected form, is all the revelation one needs today.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 43-48. To Robertson, tongues are a form of prophecy predicted in Joel 2:28 because Peter describes them as such in Acts 2:16-21. He then cites prophecies from Moses, Isaiah, and Jeremiah about the future of tongues to articulate the point that their use would be a “sign of the great blessing of God to all the nations of the world” and “a distinctive judgment for Israel” because “God would no longer speak exclusively to them.”

<sup>57</sup> Grudem, *Prophecy in 1 Corinthians*, 54-74. Another issue with Grudem’s treatment of prophecy is similar to Gaffin in that he relies heavily on an understanding of prophecy taken from an exegesis of 1 Cor. 14:29-30. Though his exegesis of that passage may be sound, it is reductionistic to contrive a definitional role for prophecy from any single verse or pairing of verses in the New Testament.

specifically of apostles who are prophets, then the role of revealing this mystery is ascribed to this office alone. Robertson's argument would stand for apostles in such a case, but it would collapse for prophets.

Second, Robertson's position that prophecy is a sign rides on the fact that prophecy and tongues are the same gift. However, for Paul, prophecy and tongues are certainly unique gifts of the spirit. Robertson mistakenly bases his understanding in Acts 2:16-21 to say that Peter believes tongues-speaking to be a kind of prophecy and cross-references this idea with 1 Corinthians 14:22 where Paul labels both gifts as "signs" and 1 Corinthians 14:5 where Paul functionally equates interpreted tongues with prophecy.

However, with regard to the two 1 Corinthians 14 passages, Paul is advancing prophecy over tongues in that chapter. The context of those verses is important. If the two gifts are the same, why does he devote an entire chapter to their differences? Sure, they are both alike in nature and source, but they are different in intelligibility and public usefulness. This is why in 1 Corinthians 14:22, they are both signs, but one is for believers and the other unbelievers, certainly a major difference in the essence of the gift.<sup>58</sup> And in 1 Corinthians 14:5, it is the interpreted part of tongues that functions the same as prophecy because they are both able to be *understood*, not because they are the same gift. It is their reception and capacity for education that is likened there. Summarizing, Carson writes, "So far as the New Testament evidence is concerned, the only one to make a sharp distinction between prophecy and tongues is Paul."<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Carson, *Showing the Spirit*, 107. Carson delves into a lengthy discussion over which of these gifts is actually for each group because it seems that Paul is making a contradiction in verse 23. To avoid confusion or tangential argument, the distinction was omitted here.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 141. Emphasis added.

Finally, and most importantly, even if Robertson is correct in his understanding that tongues is a kind of prophecy and that they are meant to be signs, he is reading one 21<sup>st</sup> century understanding of sign into a 1<sup>st</sup> century context. Why is a sign useless after it has been seen? What if a traveller needs a reminder? Has everyone on earth seen this sign already? Robertson *assumes* much,<sup>60</sup> but a growing number of scholars have come to understand “sign” as something quite different than Robertson’s conclusion. In the New Testament and in the Septuagint, signs are often “an indication of God’s attitude.”<sup>61</sup> To juxtapose the New Testament canon against prophecy because it is a sign is a false dichotomy, certainly not found in these verses. It would do well for the reader to understand them as such in 1 Corinthians 14:22 and elsewhere, instead of reading into the text an understanding that is not present.

In conclusion, three things may be noted about the foundational work of prophets from this reference. First, it involved spreading an understanding of an element of God’s redemptive work. Second, the notion that the formation of Scripture fulfilled and discontinued revelation is found nowhere in modern Biblical scholarship because it ignores Paul’s wide, rich understanding of what *mystērion* is and what its purpose is. Third, though this *mystērion* was first revealed to apostles and prophets foundationally, it was clearly destined for all people to understand. Until all people have gained the insight Paul intends, elements of God’s redemptive work have been left unfinished.

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<sup>60</sup> Robertson, *The Final Word*, 41-42. Robertson goes to great lengths to depict God as one who “does not often surprise his people with something unexpected.” This has no basis in Scripture. In fact, the Bible paints a very different picture. (cf. Job 1; James 4:13-14).

<sup>61</sup> Carson, *Showing the Spirit*, 113-116. For a full list of scholars in agreement, see footnote 16.

## CHAPTER 5

### EPHESIANS 4:11-13

*11 So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, 12 to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up 13 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.*

Cessationism claims fertile ground in this passage through an apparent contradiction on the continuationist side. Gaffin likens this passage unto 1 Corinthians 13:8-12.<sup>62</sup> It is there that continuationists believe Paul most plainly states that the revelatory gifts of prophecy and tongues will continue until the second coming of Christ.<sup>63</sup> However, Gaffin notes that this Ephesians passage also states that, read in the same manner, the listed gifts will continue until faith is fully realized. This would seemingly add to the continuationist argument, except that Paul also includes apostles in the Ephesians list, and the vast majority of continuationists do not believe that God still appoints apostles today—that this office ended with the twelve disciples and Paul. Instead of the continuationist reading, Gaffin points to Paul’s context in the 1 Corinthians passage to claim that the apostle is merely contrasting the partiality of current

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<sup>62</sup> Gaffin, “A Cessationist View,” 55-56. It is noteworthy that in these two passages, Gaffin is convinced that Paul is not discussing when these gifts will cease even though these two passages are arguably the most poignant on the subject. Elsewhere, he is content to extrapolate a cessationist perspective from Paul’s words, but in these two passages, it seems best that “this particular question is left open.”

<sup>63</sup> Carson, *Showing the Spirit*, 66-76; Grudem, *Gift of Prophecy*, 228-243.

revelatory knowledge when compared to faith, hope and love. He writes of both passages:

With this accent on the partial quality of the believer's present knowledge, the particular media of that revealed knowledge are, strictly speaking, incidental... [Paul's] interest is in showing the duration of our present, opaque knowledge—by whatever revelatory means it may come (and that would even include inscripturation)—and whenever they may cease... Almost certainly the “unity/fullness” of [Ephesians] verse 13 has in view the same state of affairs as the perfection in 1 Corinthians 13:10 (echoed perhaps as well in the use of *teleios*, “perfect” or “mature”, in Eph. 4:13), namely the situation brought by Christ's return.<sup>64</sup>

This view allows Gaffin to assert that neither passage should be pressed too far on the issue of cessationism.

Though Gaffin is clearly motivated by keeping his cessationist interpretation alive, modern scholarship largely agrees with his assessment of both 4:11-13 and 1 Corinthians 13:8-12— at least in the sense that the context is important. To Gaffin's credit, Paul is *not* attempting to discuss the issue of cessationism in either passage. However, one cannot resist the comment that neither also does Paul attempt to broach the subject in any of his letters, but that has been further addressed above and will continue below.

After spending three chapters discussing the unity of the Church, a comment upon the diversification of spiritual gifts would seem out of place in Ephesians. Paul even notes a shift in tone in verse 7 as he turns his focus to the individual with the conjunction *de* (rendered “but” in the NIV).<sup>65</sup> However, through this list, Paul declares that unity in

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<sup>64</sup> Gaffin, “A Cessationist View,” 55.

<sup>65</sup> So also Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 225.

Christ is actually achieved *through* the diversity of oratory offices<sup>66</sup> within the body and that individual differentiation is actually at the heart of God's plan for a unified body. Though Paul talks about the individualistic nature of these gifts, they are all given by Christ to build up his body. One final observation of the list on the whole must be made before turning to Paul's usage of it and its effects on Paul's true understanding of prophecy. Paul does not distinguish between gift and office here. As Barth notes, "the substance of Christ's gift in this text is not called '[spiritual] gifts,' but considered as a unit."<sup>67</sup> As a closing note for the Ephesians issue of the "prophetic office," it appears that Paul sees the prophets as nothing more than those who have been given the one "grace" mentioned in verse 7 along with a flurry of other gifts.

As for the reference itself, Paul initially describes the gifts in the gift list (which includes prophecy) as functioning "to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up" (v.12). With this, it would be tempting to read into the text a definitional role of prophecy as always concerning the preparation of God's people for service. This would relegate prophecy's role exclusively to exhortations of community service or loving one another. However, the purpose of the gifts mentioned in verse 11's list does not end in verse 12. Putting a finer point on the purpose of preparing God's people for service, Paul continues his thought in verse 13, "until we all come to meet the unifying faith and knowledge of the Son of God, the Perfect Man, the perfection

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<sup>66</sup> Barth, *Ephesians 4-6*, 434. That is, "all the ministers listed fulfill their service through speaking." Barth calls them "Ministers of the Word." He adds, "their diversity prevents dull uniformity. The unity of the church is true and flourishes when the common origin and function of several ministries are gratefully recognized."

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 436. Barth adds to this idea of one grace, "This gift is the same and has the same measure for 'each one of us' (4:7). By providing for all saints equally, God constitutes the unity of the church. No one member possesses anything that is not given to the whole body of Christ."

of the Messiah, who is the standard of manhood.”<sup>68</sup> Here, Paul states that these gifts, including prophecy, are ultimately given for the unification and maturity of God’s church, which might manifest itself in service but is not relegated exclusively to that attribute.

But what does it look like to become mature and “come to knowledge of the Son of God”? For Gaffin, it points to the Parousia, but this is where he stumbles. Most of modern scholarship sees no parallel in this Ephesians passage to 1 Corinthians 13:8-12. This is for three reasons. First, Gaffin reads into this Ephesians passage the notion of perfection. In Ephesians, Paul lists these offices as the means of the church attaining maturity and knowledge of Christ,<sup>69</sup> not perfection. Second, Paul’s purpose is different for each passage. Gaffin is correct in pointing out that Paul’s focus in the 1 Corinthians passage is the opaque knowledge that comes from spiritual gifts when compared to faith, hope, and love. However, if Paul thinks any of these offices are somehow lacking fullness until the parousia, it is not made obvious from these verses. In fact, it is the Church that lacks fullness, and these offices are given to it in order that it might mature.<sup>70</sup> Third, modern scholarship is simply unconcerned with modern problems with apostolic

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 487. The NIV makes a very poor translation of the passage, lacking much of the original Greek and interpreting much of what is present instead of allowing the English to display the coarse Greek (e.g., the NIV completely omits the Greek’s reference to a “perfect man”). Barth’s is truer to the Greek, difficult as it may be to understand. As Barth notes, this verse is anomalous with regard to the rest of the Pauline corpus and is one of the major arguments for a different authorship. From the context in the following verse concerned with maturity, one can safely assume that despite the rare depictions in the latter half of verse 13, maturity and coming to knowledge of Christ are clearly depicted as the goal of the offices listed in verse 12.

<sup>69</sup> Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 255-257; Bruce, *The Epistles*, 349-350; Barth, *Ephesians 4-6*, 487-489.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 257. Lincoln writes, “Ministers are important for the period of ‘not yet,’ in which the church has to be helped to progress toward the eschatological goals of unity and maturity.”

succession. It is only continuationist argument that is exposed in such cessationist attack.<sup>71</sup>

In conclusion, three things may be observed of Paul's view of prophecy through this final Ephesians reference. First, prophecy was one of many gifts given to the Church by Christ for its maturation and unity of faith, both in its sheer difference that promotes a multi-faceted body and its foundational nature. Second, against Gaffin, this specific reference to prophecy functions as a very poor parallel to negate the outcomes of 1 Corinthians 13:8-12. Finally, the notion of an elevated "prophetic office" actually finds very little traction in Ephesians. For now, prophets are best understood as those who prophesy.

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<sup>71</sup> So also Barth, *Ephesians 4-6*, 437.



## CHAPTER 5

### 1 THESSALONIANS 5:19-22

*19 Do not quench the Spirit. 20 Do not treat prophecies with contempt 21 but test them all; hold on to what is good, 22 reject every kind of evil.*

This passage is often used as a reference point in a larger battle for continuationist argument, namely by Grudem and Carson who hold a lower, fallible view of New Testament prophecy than its Old Testament namesake. As scholars who both emphasize the unparalleled authority of Scripture, their belief in the continuation of prophecy places them in a precarious position. If God's word is still being revealed to believers today, how can the canon truly be closed? Even if Scripture is widely acknowledged to be the most definitive word of God, the measure by which all prophecy must be weighed, if the very words of God are being spoken today, surely their importance outweighs whatever is located in the canon if for no other reason than contemporaneity.

In an effort to assuage the issue, Carson and Grudem posit that New Testament prophecy is fallible and lacks the authority that Old Testament, canonized, prophecy possessed. Their full argument will be articulated below in relation to another issue, but one of their points is that New Testament prophecies are repeatedly weighed unlike those of Old Testament prophets. Carson writes:

Once a prophet was tested and approved in the Old Testament, God's people were morally bound to obey him. To disobey such a prophet was to oppose God. If a prophet speaking in the name of God was shown to be in

error, the official sanction was death. But once a prophet is acknowledged as true there is no trace of repeated checks on the *content* of his oracles.<sup>72</sup>

This continuationist argument hinges on the idea that prophets' inspired words were not scrutinized in the Old Testament. Therefore, if the content of prophecy is scrutinized in the New Testament, the prophets of that period did not enjoy the same authority nor infallibility as did their predecessors. They are, essentially, a different type of prophet, though still given information revelationally from God.

So the debate turns upon the word *dokimazete* (rendered “test” in the NIV) in verse 21. Both cessationists and continuationists lay claim here. Carson and Grudem are both content to point out that it is the *prophecy*, the oracle of the prophet, that Paul commands the Thessalonians to “test” and not treat with contempt.<sup>73</sup> However, Gaffin argues that this was Paul’s way of examining the prophet himself, examining the goodness of the prophecy, which is why Paul commands the Thessalonians to test the prophecy instead of the prophet.<sup>74</sup>

Unsurprisingly, modern scholarship is relatively unconcerned with the authority status of New Testament prophets with regard to this passage. However, Fee notes some aspects of the text that might interact unintentionally with this particular aspect of cessationist debate. He writes:

In all likelihood this is an earlier form of what in 1 Corinthians 12:10 and 14:29 calls “discerning,” or “weighing,” the “spirits,” meaning in the first instance the “testing” of prophecies. And this in turn is the early

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<sup>72</sup> Carson, *Showing the Spirit*, 94.

<sup>73</sup> Grudem, *Gift of Prophecy*, 57-62 and Carson, *Showing the Spirit*, 94-96.

<sup>74</sup> R. B. Gaffin, Jr., *Perspectives on Pentecost: New Testament Teaching on the Gifts of the Holy Spirit* (Phillipsburg: P & R Publishing, 1993), 70-71. So also Robertson, *The Final Word*, 101-102.

Christian version of “testing the prophets” found in  
Deuteronomy 18:21-22.<sup>75</sup>

Fee sides with Gaffin that Paul’s instruction to the Thessalonians was in line with the practice of weighing the prophets themselves instead of their prophecies.

However, it must be noted that there is little reason to believe that Paul believes spirits and prophecies are the same entity, aside from the fact that Paul uses the same verb to describe their examination process in 1 Corinthians 12:10 and 14:29. Marshall notes the connection, but is wary to add the same emphasis as Fee. He writes that Paul “regards discrimination as itself an activity directed by the Spirit (cf. 1 Cor. 2:13-16). But he does not explain how it works; he merely requires that the members of the congregation must weigh what the prophets say (1 Cor. 14:29).”<sup>76</sup>

Moreover, Fee’s argument that this is the early Christian version of testing prophets is derived entirely from the assertion that Deuteronomy 18:21-22 weighs prophecies to legitimize prophets. If that is so, then any reference to weighing prophecies is referring to that one. However, Paul gives a different criterion from the Deuteronomy passage for examining prophecy in both this reference and 1 Corinthians 14:3. The Thessalonians are to hold on to what is good and reject what is evil (2 Thess. 5:22), and the Corinthians are told that the prophecy must be for their “strengthening, encouraging and comfort” (1 Cor. 14:3). This is a far cry from Deuteronomy, where the prophecy simply must be true and spoken in the name of God. To assume the premise that this is the early version of the Old

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<sup>75</sup> G. D. Fee, *The First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians* (New International Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 221.

<sup>76</sup> I. H. Marshall, *1 and 2 Thessalonians* (The New Century Bible Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 159.

Testament custom is to argue that the apostles, including Paul, were *just* Jewish enough to find the Old Testament meaningful but not Jewish enough to know and articulate what it actually says about evaluating prophets. There is no Scriptural, or even contemporary cultural, evidence to believe that this was the case.<sup>77</sup> If the text is left at face value, Carson's point remains, at least in his argument that the scrutiny between the two offices is different.

Overall, however, modern scholarship takes away two broader notions from this reference. First, it is the entire Thessalonian church that is responsible for weighing prophetic utterances.<sup>78</sup> The exhortations at the end of the letter are certainly not addressed to a particular group. Second, as Fee notes from vv. 21-22, "somehow, presumably by the content, [the Thessalonians] should be able to discern the good from the evil."<sup>79</sup> Other criteria are given elsewhere for discerning legitimacy of spoken word (cf. 2 Thess. 2:15; 1 Cor 14:3), implying that this particular reference is not meant to be exhaustive of the ways prophecy may be tested.

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<sup>77</sup> So also L. Morris, *The Epistles of Paul to the Thessalonians* (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries; Grand Rapids; Eerdmans, 1984), 108 and Marshall, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 158-159.

<sup>78</sup> Marshall, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 158-159.

<sup>79</sup> Fee, *Letters to the Thessalonians*, 222.

## CHAPTER 7

### 1 CORINTHIANS 12:7-11

*7 Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. 8 To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, 9 to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, 10 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. 11 All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines.*

Continuationists are, by and large, far more on the offensive regarding 1 Corinthians. When taken out of its context, the fact that Paul endorses the use of tongues and prophecy throughout chapters 12-14 seems to be the most fatal blow to the promotion of cessationism. Continuationists often pose the question, why would Paul have encouraged the use of the two gifts if he saw them as unnecessary or ending with the apostolic age? Again, we see that cessationists are happy to point to the context of the chapters; Paul's reason for writing is that the Corinthians need instruction on how to handle spiritual gifts. His endorsement of the gifts is merely incidental to the context of the letter. As previously noted, Gaffin uses this context argument and Ephesians 4:11 to completely divorce the issue of cessationism from 1 Corinthians. However, if Gaffin's parallel is proved to be lacking (as the discussion above suggests), then the issue remains on the table. And continuationists are content to use this gift listing to point out that prophecy is considered by Paul to be just one of many gifts of the spirit and that its

placement alongside other gifts not believed to be exclusively first-century (i.e., faith<sup>80</sup> and healing but more noticeably the *absence* of apostleship) validates its continuation.<sup>81</sup> But is this even fair to the passage or all there is to glean from Paul's understanding of prophecy in 1 Corinthians 12:7-11?

Before answering this question, it would be wise to first summarize the context of the letter given that it will be the subject of several chapters to come. 1 Corinthians is actually the second known letter that Paul sent to the Corinthians (cf. 1 Cor. 5:9-11) and is written as a response to a letter the Corinthians sent to Paul (cf. 1 Cor. 7:1, 25; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1, 12) and an oral report to Paul by Chloe's people (cf. 1 Cor. 1:11-12). Thus, many of the subjects in the letter begins with *peri de* (rendered "now about" in the NIV), as Paul turns his focus to a new issue from the letter the Corinthians wrote him. This reference also flows out of such a response: 12:1 starts with, "Now about the gifts of the Spirit." Paul, in chapters 12-14, is addressing Corinthian issues regarding spiritual gifts mentioned in their letter and/or the report of Chloe's people.<sup>82</sup>

Structurally, chapter 12 serves as an introductory broach of the subject of spiritual gifts, showing all spiritual gifts to have come from Jesus (vv.1-3), the diversity of gifts reflecting the nature of God (vv. 4-11), the unity of this diversity exemplified through a

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<sup>80</sup> Carson, *Showing the Spirit*, 38. Carson notes that this is not "saving faith" but rather "the kind of faith to perform some extraordinary work." However, there is little reason to believe that God does not grant this kind of faith today. Carson even cites an example in George Müller of Bristol, a man who helped care for, and educate, over 10,000 orphans in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.

<sup>81</sup> C.S. Storms, "A Third Wave Response," 78; Oss, "A Pentecostal/Charismatic View," 275-276. However, to Carson's credit, he notes much more about the gift list beyond its possibility of cessation, including a comparison to other gift lists in the New Testament, an attempted definition for all the gifts, and a sincere attempt to contextualize the list and comment upon its meaning. See Carson, *Showing the Spirit*, 31-42.

<sup>82</sup> So also C.H. Talbert, *Reading Corinthians: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (Macon: Smyth and Helwys, 2002) 8-11; G. D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (New International Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 4-15. Fee believes the greatest issue to be the Corinthians questioning his apostolic authority because he differs with them on the importance of being "spiritual."

body metaphor (vv. 12-14), the two implications of this body metaphor (vv. 15-26) and a reiteration of the diversity of spiritual gifts (vv. 27-31). Given this emphasis on the variation of gifts as well as the distinct necessity of this diversity for the functional unity of the body, it comes as no surprise that many scholars<sup>83</sup> believe that Paul is thus arguing in chapter 12 against a faction of the Corinthian church that is overemphasizing one, or some, of the gifts above others (later identified as tongues and prophecy, with the greater emphasis on tongues, given 13:1-2, 8-10; 14:5). Whereas chapter 12 is a reproach of this misplaced emphasis, chapter 13 serves as an exhortation to the Corinthian church on what they *should* emphasize—“the most excellent way.” Chapter 14, then, is characterized by some practical implications for tongues and prophecy— an emphasis on the intelligibility

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<sup>83</sup> Thus, this answers the question, “To what is Paul responding in the Corinthian letter?” Fee notes that, “historically,” the traditional interpretation has been that there were warring factions in the divided Corinthian church and Paul writes to settle the dispute between the two groups. However, he also notes that when such factions are absolutely evident, their differences are always socioeconomic (11:17-34; cf. 1:26; 7:20-24; 12:13), not theological. Nothing in 1 Corinthians 7-16, where Paul is answering theological issues in their letter, leads the reader to believe otherwise on its face. Fee argues that Paul has met opposition with the church *as a whole* that is led/initiated by a few (cf. 1:12; 4:3, 6, 18-20; 9:3; 10:29-30; 14:37; 15:12), culminating in his “painful visit” recorded in 2 Corinthians 2:1-4 and depicted in 1 Corinthians by Paul’s repeated defenses of his apostolic authority in the letter (4:1-21; cf. 5-6; 9:3 when the Corinthians “sit in judgment” of him for eating marketplace food in some settings but not others depicted in 9:19-23), as well as defenses of his giftedness in the spirit (14:37; cf. 3:18; 8:1). A fuller argument is made in G. D. Fee, *Corinthians*, 7-16. However, Fee’s treatment glosses over some of the contrary evidence such as Paul’s repeated “yes—but” statements throughout the letter (e.g., 7:1; 8:7). In these, it seems most obvious that there is some sort of appeal occurring from the Corinthians to Paul. Talbert’s view seems most encompassing. Talbert, *Reading Corinthians*, 9-11, sees the opponents of Paul as numerous and varying. At times, it may be the whole church as with Paul’s clarifying of the Corinthians’ overrealized eschatology in chapter 4, or factions in other points of the letter, such as overemphasis of spiritual gifts in chapters 12-14. This point agrees on the whole with Fee’s conclusion with the slight change that it is Paul against the divided Corinthians, occasionally siding with one faction over another on various issues. This is the issue in chapters 12-14.

of prophecy (14:1-12), the application of these gifts (14:13-25) and the ordering of these gifts in Corinthian meetings (14:26-40).<sup>84</sup>

There are three things to note from modern scholarship about prophecy in this reference, all of which are echoed to some extent in continuationist argument. First, prophecy, among many other spiritual gifts listed, is given for “the common good” (v. 11) a motif that will be reiterated in chapter 14.<sup>85</sup> Second, it is the Spirit who determines what gift the believer receives (v.11), though this should not be pressed too far. This does not contradict Paul’s later exhortations to pursue these gifts (12:31; 14:1), but simply chides the Corinthians for their heightened view of themselves for possessing such gifts (4:6, 18-20; 5:2; 8:1).<sup>86</sup> Orr and Walther write, “whatever gifts the Corinthians possess come only from divine favor (4:7). It is important to keep Paul’s focus in view. The history of the church shows that it is easy to fix attention upon spiritual gifts rather than upon the Spirit, who apportions them.”<sup>87</sup> It is as incorrect, from this verse, for the cessationist to denounce the search for spiritual gifts as the continuationist to declare that

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<sup>84</sup> Fee, *Corinthians*, 23. So, to cessationism’s credit, some of their scholarship on this issue is reflected in modern scholarship, at least on their emphasis that Paul is writing to address specific issues in the Corinthian church. However, its stress of this particular issue is in response to continuationist thought, and therefore often limits scholars’ ability to study the issue effectively. For example, Gaffin, “A Cessationist View,” 37-41. This evidences itself in Gaffin’s claims refuted above on neglecting the implications of 1 Corinthians 13:8-12 through an appeal to Ephesians 4:11. Also, Gaffin treats spiritual gifts as being directly connected to the unique spread of the gospel in the age of apostles. He points to Acts as his basis for understanding, but he does so by ignoring 1 Corinthians altogether, especially the list of gifts at hand. Storms is in agreement. Storms, “A Third Wave Response,” 80.

<sup>85</sup> Talbert, *Reading Corinthians*, 106; Carson, *Showing the Spirit*, 34-35; W. F. Orr, and J. A. Walther, *1 Corinthians* (The Anchor Bible; Garden City: Doubleday, 1974), 281

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 283; Carson, *Showing the Spirit*, 41-42.

<sup>87</sup> Orr and Walther, *1 Corinthians*, 283. So also Carson, *Showing the Spirit*, 41. Carson cautions readers not to over-emphasize God’s sovereign determination in giving gifts (12:7) nor human pursuit of the best gifts (12:31; 14:1). He writes, “Both conclusions are premature. They fail to recognize the ways in which God’s sovereignty and human responsibility function side by side in the Scriptures.”



any ungifted believer has simply not sought hard enough after their desired gift. The *gift* of prophecy is just what it claims to be by definition, a gift.

Third, this list that Paul employs exemplifies the diversity of spiritual gifts, and is the groundwork for Paul's upcoming metaphor of the Church as a body.<sup>88</sup> Paul addresses the issue in two parts, though the first part is the most pressing for the purposes of this thesis.<sup>89</sup> The first part (vv. 15-20) emphasizes that this diversity actually promotes the fullest functioning of the body. In an effort to build his case for continuation,<sup>90</sup> this is where Carson missteps. He claims, mainly from vv. 15-16, although it is unclear as he plays loosely with the text, that Paul tells people without miraculous spiritual gifts "that precisely because of the diversity of gifts God has distributed in the church, the member that seems inferior cannot reasonably say it does not belong, or threaten to leave."<sup>91</sup> He further states that Paul depicts each body member as "self-pitying" to reflect this

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<sup>88</sup> Fee, *Corinthians*, 590. Also Carson, *Showing the Spirit*, 34. However, Carson correctly stresses that one of the implications of verse 7 is that every believer gets a gift. This list's diversity, though not encompassing of all the gifts surely present at Corinth, is also flowing from Paul's ambition to demonstrate the breadth of giftedness to all believers. Fee claims that this is not Paul's concern, but how could Paul simultaneously say that the Church is united through unique spiritual gifts just as the body is united through its unique parts while also implying that some Christians lack spiritual gifts? Are there some believers that are not part of the church body? This is surely not what Paul means.

<sup>89</sup> Carson, *Showing the Spirit*, 47-49, believes that Paul is addressing warring factions, one faction with seemingly lesser gifts feeling unimportant (vv. 14-19) and one with seemingly greater gifts judging those who possess seemingly lesser gifts (vv. 20-26). To those with lesser gifts, Paul emphasizes that diversity is essential to the body. To those with seemingly greater gifts, Paul emphasizes the integral nature of the seemingly lesser gifts.

<sup>90</sup> When Carson treats this passage, he is building to an argument that New Testament prophets are of a lower status than Old Testament prophets. He hopes to combat a cessationist issue derived from Deuteronomy 18:15 that Jesus fulfills the prophetic office, hence ceasing prophecy's necessity with the creation of Scripture. He needs prophecy, as well as tongues, to be on equal playing ground with other spiritual gifts as to make his case that New Testament prophets are their own breed. Regardless of how valid his conclusion may or may not be on that matter, this passage will not do as evidence.

<sup>91</sup> Carson, *Showing the Spirit*, 47-48

inferiority and superiority complex occurring in Corinth between “charismatics” and “non-charismatics” in Corinth.<sup>92</sup>

However, is this fair to Paul’s intentions? Does any part of this passage actually express the idea of equality of gifts? No, Carson reads into vv. 15-16 the idea of superiority and inferiority, clouding his entire treatment of the passage. What is actually plain from these verses is that some of the body parts desire to be other body parts, or subtracting the metaphor, some believers in Corinth desire to have other spiritual gifts that they do not possess. Paul does not tell us why. However, Paul’s *point* becomes clear from the rhetorical questions in verse 17, and he recapitulates the idea in verse 19. If the body consisted of a single organ, it would lose out on some of its *capability*. There is no need to read into this text factions of people who possess miraculous spiritual gifts and those who do not feeling bad about themselves. Verses 15-16 simply ready Paul for his main point; they are rhetorical in nature. Instead, Paul is building to a point of emphasizing unity through diversity in gifts so that the body may be fully functional. Fee summarizes the point nicely saying, “This interchange of the sense organs makes it clear that Paul’s point is not the ‘inferiority’ of one to the other. The point is the need for all members; otherwise some function of the body would be missing.”<sup>93</sup> Orr and Walther, in agreement, stress that Paul adds vv. 18-20 to cement the issue. They write, “since no one is able to do the work of another, all are necessary *no matter how they may differ*. This arrangement is by divine appointment.”<sup>94</sup> Some gifts may very well be superior to others, but they are all still important in their own right. Without them all, the body lacks part of

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid. 48-49.

<sup>93</sup> Fee, *Corinthians*, 610-611.

<sup>94</sup> Orr and Walther, *1 Corinthians*, 286. Emphasis added to show their echoed lack of concern with why some gifts were desired over others.

its full capability. Ultimately, all of this analysis might overlook the simplest point of Paul's metaphor and therefore bears brief mentioning: every believer is unique. Though one might expect the settling of differences to involve finding common ground, it is precisely *in* their diversity that the body of Christ, the Church, may find unity and full function.

In conclusion, there are three things to gain from this passage with regard to Paul's thoughts on prophecy. First, like all spiritual gifts, it exists for the common good. Second, the Spirit apportions spiritual gifts as he pleases, rendering its receptor as incapable of taking pride in its reception. This also cements the importance of each member's gift as a God-intended portion of the church body. Third, prophecy is no more vital to the *full* functioning of the church than any other gift, though its relative importance to the other gifts has not been of import to Paul to this point.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> With regard to cessationism's argument that these observations are all contextual to the Corinthian church, Talbert, *Reading Corinthians*, 104-106, suggests the widespread use of the gifts mentioned in vv. 8-10 continuing outside the context of the Corinthian church through the Patristic era. Even cessationism's appeal to history beyond Scripture buckles under the weight of its own premise.

## CHAPTER 8

### 1 CORINTHIANS 12:28-30

*28 And god has placed in the church first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, of helping, of guidance, and of different kinds of tongues. 29 Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? 30 Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? 31 Now eagerly desire the greater gifts.*

A general consensus seems to have been reached on both sides of the cessationism debate with regard to this reference. Continuationists, especially those that see New Testament prophecy as being fallible, see Paul's enumeration of offices in this reference to be based upon their value or usefulness.<sup>96</sup> Gaffin is happy to concede the point. Steeped in his concern for the supremacy of the completed canon, he then turns the tables on continuationists and writes:

...their view is left with the following conclusion: In the church prophecy, always subject to evaluation as fallible and therefore never binding on anyone, is more useful and edifying than teaching based on God's clear, authoritative, and inerrant word. Prophecy takes precedence over such teaching!

Carson, having read Gaffin's critique, treats the passage in relation to all the lists available in the New Testament, and due to their varying order, ascribes no real meaning to Paul's enumeration. He writes, "It cannot be assumed that the entries are in order of importance when prophecy is sixth in the first list (12:8-10), second in the second list

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<sup>96</sup> W. A. Grudem, *Gift of Prophecy*, 53; Fee, *Presence*, 190

(12:28), and first in the third (Romans 12:6-7).”<sup>97</sup> Moreover, he later argues, specifically for this reference, that Paul’s theme of edification as a ranking system for spiritual gifts does not surface until chapter 14 and it cannot be a ranking in terms of importance because “Paul is about to classify greatness in terms of love and edification, not personal pomp or importance.”<sup>98</sup> So, why does Paul list prophecy where he does in this reference? Because this section of the thesis is the final list reference and is pertinent to the discussion (echoed in scholarship not concerned with cessationism), an opportunity has arisen to examine the full range of lists Paul employs that have been examined individually above:

Romans 12:6-7	1 Corinthians 12:8-10	1 Corinthians 12:28	Ephesians 4:11
prophesying serving teaching encouraging contributing to the needs of others leadership showing mercy	message of wisdom message of knowledge faith healing miraculous powers prophecy distinguishing between spirits tongues interpretation of tongues	apostles prophets teachers miracles healing helping guidance different kinds of tongues	apostles prophets evangelists pastors teachers

<sup>97</sup> Carson, D.A., *Showing the Spirit*, 36.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 88-100. However, he seemingly contradicts himself in the earlier argument by adopting the position that the ranking is likely in chronological order. He does so to fit a continuationist agenda of proving that tongues have not ceased. He assumes that apostleship has ceased and then writes, “Perhaps that is why it is not apostleship but prophecy that is discussed so centrally in chapter 13. If Paul had wanted to say that tongues cease toward the end of the apostolic age or thereabouts, instead of at the parousia, he had a ready-made precedent in the gift of apostleship, already listed as the *first* appointment in the church. Instead, he links tongues and the gift of knowledge with prophecy, the *second* appointment in the church, and thereby opens the door to the eschatological argument central to this chapter.” For someone who has determined no real meaning in the order of the lists, this is an awfully loaded statement.

Modern scholarship is divided on the issue, though an agenda-free reading of the text leans toward Carson.<sup>99</sup> Orr and Walther agree that Paul's view of the importance of prophecy is not evident from his placement of the gift in his various lists. They note that apostles and prophets likely do hold a "preeminent place" in the New Testament Church given their status in Ephesians 2:20 and 3:5,<sup>100</sup> but that this notion is lacking in the lists themselves. They write of Paul's gift lists, "This relative fluidity added to the lack of such lists in other New Testament books (particularly the Pastorals) suggests that these gifts were widespread and recognized but not precisely locked in a pecking order."<sup>101</sup>

Fee, who was just quoted above arguing that Paul's body metaphor in 12:15-19 does not concern importance, argues just the opposite with this list in 12:28. He claims that Paul "certainly intends the first three to be ranked"<sup>102</sup> even though he writes two pages earlier that Paul's overall "concern is neither with *instruction* about gifts and ministries nor with *ranking* them."<sup>103</sup> This confusing interplay is summed up in his reasoning for why Paul is just ranking the first three offices. He writes, "It is not so much that one is more important than the other, nor that this is necessarily their order of authority, but that one has precedence over the other in the founding and building up of the local assembly." Paul has not mentioned this notion in the letter, and therefore, Fee

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<sup>99</sup> Even if Gaffin is correct in his assumption that Paul is ranking the gifts/offices, his notion of "teaching" is flawed with assertion and eisegesis. It is highly improbable that Paul had in mind expounding upon Scripture as "teaching," considering some of the New Testament hadn't even been written yet, let alone compiled. This creates a false dichotomy that is completely foreign to Paul's theology. If Paul had even known of such a thing as the New Testament, it is unclear how Paul would have regarded its exposition. It may very well have fallen under apostolic function. What teaching *actually* means in the New Testament is difficult to determine because the evidence is so small. For a discussion on Paul's view of teaching see Fee, *Corinthians*, 621.

<sup>100</sup> This notion has been refuted above.

<sup>101</sup> Orr and Walther, *1 Corinthians*, 288.

<sup>102</sup> Fee, *Corinthians*, 619.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 617.

unsurprisingly uses no Scripture to support his premise. If this is suddenly Paul's concern, it is completely incoherent with the flow of the letter.

This is why, the other lists notwithstanding, Talbert's interpretation seems most convincing, appealing to the context of the list in 12:28 as advocacy against ascribing importance to any of the offices. He writes, "If Paul were ranking gifts here, he would be involved in the very problem he is seeking to combat in the Corinthians' behavior. He would be saying that he, because of his apostleship, outranked them because they were not apostles."<sup>104</sup> Obviously, Paul does believe this to be true (cf. 14:37), but Talbert is correct in observing that this sudden grandstanding would be completely incoherent with the flow of the letter. With this enumerated reference put aside now, there is little reason to see a pattern of superiority or inferiority in Paul's view of prophecy when compared to the variety of other Spiritual gifts.

Beyond the implications of prophecy's place in the order of the list, there is one other conclusion that may be drawn from this text that is often missed in cessationism debates. Prophecy, along with the many other gifts listed, is a gift given to some believers but not all. This seems logical, but it was lost on the Corinthian church as they sought the more miraculous gifts. As Fee notes, this list and the subsequent rhetorical questions are basically extensions of the rhetorical questions in vv. 17 and 19. Paul's final intention before discussing "the more excellent way" is not to rank prophecy in terms of its

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<sup>104</sup> Talbert, *Reading Corinthians*, 108. Moreover, any reading that asserts that Paul has suddenly turned his attention to importance would construe Paul's argument to be, "Just as all the parts in the human body are essential to its full function, all spiritual gifts are integral to a fully functional church. However, these offices and gifts are the most important and should be pursued, but not everyone can have them obviously. Love is the most important, though, and every believer should have that." If Paul does believe in a hierarchical structure of gifts, this would be a very strange place to enumerate it.

importance, though this is often the topic explored from this reference in cessationism debates. Instead, even in this gift list, “diversity within unity is Paul’s concern.”<sup>105</sup>

In sum, three things may be concluded on Paul’s view of prophecy. First, prophecy was one of many gifts in the New Testament Church that aided in its full functioning. Second, prophecy, though enumerated in this reference, does not possess any greater importance than any other gift. And thus, its varied placement in the other gift lists in the Pauline corpus does not necessitate the idea that Paul elevates the gift in terms of its importance. Finally, Paul’s actual intention for this list is to again remind the Corinthians that it is God who gives a variety of gifts to the church so that it may fully function in unity, as articulated by the rhetorical questions that follow the list.

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<sup>105</sup> Fee, *Corinthians*, 617.



## CHAPTER 9

### 1 CORINTHIANS 13:8-13

*8 Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. 9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part, 10 but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears. 11 When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. 12 For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. 13 And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.*

This passage was briefly discussed in relation to Ephesians 4:11-13 because of its apparent eschatological purview. To delve a bit deeper into the cessationist argument, the two-period eschatology of Christianity, adopted by many in reformed circles, must first be examined. First, because of Christ's death, resurrection and ascension, Christians live in a period where God's kingdom has initially come to earth. This period is referred to as "the already," characterized by each believer having access to God through Christ. To borrow Paul's own words in Ephesians 2:20, the foundation of the Church has already been built and the cornerstone laid. Second, God's kingdom is still under construction; Christians still await the Second Coming (often referred to as the parousia because of its use in the Greek New Testament to denote such an event) of Jesus. This period is often referred to as "the not yet." To give just one example from Paul's words, one day believers will be "caught up" in the clouds with Christ to be with him forever (1 Thess. 4:16-17).

Gaffin's point is lost in this dogma as well as a misunderstanding of his contemporaries in one of his more contrived attempts. He accuses Carson<sup>106</sup> and Fee of claiming that prophecy belongs to "the 'already' as eschatology but not to the 'not yet.'"<sup>107</sup> He then indicts the two for ignoring this passage where a basic point "is the temporary, that is, less than eschatological significance of prophetic gifts like prophecy and tongues."<sup>108</sup> To Gaffin, revelatory gifts such as prophecy cannot be construed as being part of the extension of God's kingdom into the here and now if they cannot continue into the next. He continues then, "Can the realities of realized *eschatology* really be said to 'cease' and 'pass away' (v. 8)?"<sup>109</sup>

Modern scholarship has a radically different approach to the passage than Gaffin, making it difficult to even comment upon modern scholarship's ruling on his claims. Gaffin, though he asks his final question rhetorically, demonstrates that he has read *so much into the text* that he assumes no one could believe that Paul would be making a point that he is, in fact, making. Embarrassingly, the answer to his supposedly rhetorical question is actually "yes," at least on the terms in which he puts it. Prophecy is part of God's active presence on earth in Paul's day communicating the mystery of the gospel revelationally (Eph. 3:5). If that means that prophecy belongs in the "already," then so be

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<sup>106</sup> However, it must be noted that nowhere on the page Gaffin cites does Carson mention eschatology nor does he even broach the subject. Sensing this stretch, Gaffin writes that Carson argues this position "more cautiously" than his continuationist contemporaries. The reader will have to determine if Gaffin's assertion is true from Carson's actual discussion of the passage articulated below. See Gaffin, "A Cessationist View," 56.

<sup>107</sup> Gaffin, "A Cessationist View," 56. Fee, *Empowering Presence*, 893. Fee clearly states that Paul's purpose in labeling revelatory gifts as childlike (v.11) and imperfect (v.10) is to "put them into proper (= 'already, but not yet') eschatological perspective." This is part of a larger argument in talking about tongues ending. At best, Gaffin greatly misunderstood Fee's point. At worst, Gaffin did not bother to read what Fee actually wrote and clearly misquotes him.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.* 57.

it. Modern scholarship has no intentions of formulating such a paradigm for prophecy, nor commenting upon Gaffin's existing one, because Paul is not doing so in these verses. What is clear to Walther and Orr is that Paul is making the point that "the prophet has only a fleeting glimpse of God" because prophecy, among other spiritual gifts' form is only "partial," so it must pass away, unlike love.<sup>110</sup> Gaffin's paradigm of labeling this spiritual activity as being in the "already" or "not yet" is irrelevant to Paul's intention. In sum, it seems that whatever Gaffin believes to be impossible is exactly what Paul is advocating.

Against Gaffin's mudslinging, Carson seems to have an entirely different focus beyond labeling prophecy as belonging to a particular form of eschatology, though he is still motivated by a continuationist agenda. His argument centers on verse 10. Paul writes that when *teleion* (rendered "completeness" in the NIV, but rendered "perfection" by Carson) comes, what is "in part"<sup>111</sup> will pass away. It is clear, then, that whatever Paul means by "completion" provides the answer as to when the cessation of prophecy will take place. Carson observes three camps on the meaning of "completeness": the canon, individual maturity and "related to the parousia."<sup>112</sup>

He then advocates that Paul is explicitly speaking of the parousia for seven reasons. First, Paul is not aware that there will even be a canon as he writes 1 Corinthians. Second, Carson believes verse 12b to be of particular significance. He

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<sup>110</sup> So also Orr and Walther, *1 Corinthians*, 297. However, for obvious reasons, the two scholars do not discuss where spiritual gifts fit into Gaffin's eschatological paradigm.

<sup>111</sup> Given Paul's depiction of prophecies as being "in part" in verse 9, this reference must include prophecy.

<sup>112</sup> Carson, *Showing the Spirit*, 69, hesitates to call Paul's idea of "perfection" the actual Second Coming of Christ. He writes, "I say 'related to the parousia' rather than 'parousia' itself because some have objected that the word *parousia* is feminine, whereas the word for 'perfection' is masculine. The objection is without merit, for 'perfection' is not the parousia itself but the state of affairs brought about by the arrival of the parousia."

writes, “perfection entails a state of affairs where my knowledge is in some ways comparable with God’s present knowledge of me.” Revelatory gifts will be rendered obsolete in such a state, where “wonderful knowledge of God becomes ours.”<sup>113</sup> Third, verse 12a is just as significant. He notes, “we shall see face to face” is a formula in the Septuagint for a theophany and “therefore, almost a certain reference to the new state brought by the parousia.” Fourth, any pre-parousia trivializes verse 12. So, for example, the idea of personal growth does not seem likely from verse 12 nor does a claim that Paul has in mind the unification of Jew and Gentile. Fifth, verse 11’s sharp distinction cannot be argued to mirror a precanonical and postcanonical church. Sixth, the word for “perfection” may not be used elsewhere in the New Testament to refer to the state of affairs related to the parousia, but it is also true that “perfection” is rarely used outside of an adjective. Only here would it be a neuter, articular substantive to reflect its contrast with the “partial.” Seventh, New Testament prophets do not have “the same revelatory and authoritative significance as inscripturated prophecy.”<sup>114</sup>

Modern scholarship varies slightly from Carson because of their different aims, but their approaches, if anything, actually endorse his findings because all do at least acknowledge that Paul gives some indication of a specific time when prophecy will cease. Tellingly, Talbert simply assumes that Paul believes the gifts to perish at the parousia in verse 10.<sup>115</sup> Walther and Orr offhandedly posit also that Paul is referring to the parousia given the coming discussion in chapter 15 but, like Carson, acknowledge

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid. 70. He reminds the reader, “Paul’s point is not that the charismatic gifts disappear because of their intrinsic weakness or failure.” They cease because they are rendered useless by “what is to come.”

<sup>114</sup> Ibid. 72. This last point will be addressed below.

<sup>115</sup> Talbert, *Reading Corinthians*, 109.

two other possible dates in the form of death<sup>116</sup> or some “future stage” of human life.<sup>117</sup>

What is abundantly clear when the issue of cessationism is removed from the text is that Paul, in the entire chapter, is not attempting to determine when spiritual gifts will cease, even when he actually refers to their approaching period of cessation.

Instead, his focus is on their lesser status when compared to faith, hope and love—especially love.<sup>118</sup> This is what he hopes the Corinthians will learn from his comparing of spiritual gifts to love, starting with his first comparison that love never fails unlike ceasing prophecy (v. 8) and ending with his conclusion that love is the greatest of what remains (v. 13) over against prophecy, which can only know things in part (v. 12). As Orr and Walther put it, “All of these [gifts] will cease to function. The milieu in which they operate will one day come to an end and will be superseded by a situation in which they are inappropriate or unnecessary. Love however, is perpetual and will never be set

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<sup>116</sup> Carson, *Showing the Spirit*, 69. Carson also notes death as a possibility but lumps it into the eschatological significance of the parousia. He writes that Paul could mean death “if that should intervene and if the matter of “perfection” is looked at from a purely individual point of view rather than absolutely.” If Paul sees death as the end of such a gift, then he also sees the meeting of Christ as well (cf. 1 Thess. 4:16-17).

<sup>117</sup> Orr and Walther, *1 Corinthians*, 297. They ultimately conclude that it is not really important because it is not Paul’s focus. This does not, however, discount Carson’s attempt at fleshing out Paul’s notion, though it may be incidental to his overall purpose for the reference.

<sup>118</sup> Fee, *Corinthians*, 625-628, disagrees. He writes that the idea of comparison must be read into the text. Instead, Fee points to 12:31b as Paul’s thesis in an effort to combat the idea that Paul somehow thinks that love is a spiritual gift like prophecy or tongues. He argues that Paul is showing the Corinthians a “way” to view their spiritual gifts, not a gift they should desire more than prophecy or tongues. He also argues that this chapter is a “digression” from the subject of spiritual gifts for this reason, though still relevant to the letter. These are important aspects to consider. However, a middle ground is preferable for three reasons. First, Paul is certainly comparing love to the spiritual gifts, at in the introduction and conclusion of the chapter. There is simply no way around the *de* (rendered “but” in the NIV) in vv. 1-3 and 8-12 as being anything other than a comparison exegetically. How can one even use such a conjunction and not intend the second part of the sentence to not be contrasted with the first? Fee’s premise simply does not follow exegetically in vv. 1-3 and 8-12. Second, Fee has created a false dichotomy in establishing that Paul must believe love is a gift if he is comparing it to other gifts. Paul is indeed showing the Corinthians the way to pursue their gifts through love, but he is doing it by comparison at times and more descriptively at others (vv. 4-7). Paul hopes to show that gifts, in and of themselves, are insufficient, but love is not. This accommodates for both the comparisons in vv. 1-3 and 8-12 as well as the description or exaltation of love in vv. 4-7.

aside.”<sup>119</sup> The question of when they will cease is, more or less, unimportant to Paul—just that they cease as compared to the most excellent way of love.

In conclusion, doctrine and dogma rule the day in cessationism, blinding Gaffin to Paul’s true focus of the text. Likewise, in an effort to combat cessationists, Carson reads Paul’s ceasing of prophecy to be at the parousia, and his notion is echoed in modern scholarship with agenda-free reading of the text. However, Paul’s focus in chapter 13 is much greater than a point he makes about spiritual gifts when compared to the “most excellent way.” Without love, prophecy is empty, a subject that will be approached more practically in chapter 14. There, Paul will take up the mantle that prophecy is for the good of the Church, a theme already visited in chapter 12.

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<sup>119</sup> Orr and Walther, *1 Corinthians*, 296-297.

## CHAPTER 10

### 1 CORINTHIANS 14:29-40

*29 Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said. 30 And if a revelation comes to someone who is sitting down, the first speaker should stop. 31 For you can all prophesy in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged. 32 The spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets. 33 For God is not a God of disorder but of peace—as in all the congregations of the Lord’s people.*

*34 Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the law says. 35 If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.*

*36 Or did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only people it has reached? 37 If anyone thinks they are a prophet or otherwise gifted by the Spirit, let them acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord’s command. 38 But if anyone ignores this, they will themselves be ignored.*

*39 Therefore, my brothers and sisters, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. 40 But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way.*

There are five references to “prophecy”, “prophet” or “prophesy” in this passage alone. For reasons of clarity, looking at the verses with references to the gift of prophecy individually will not do, as it would require repetition or an unfair treatment of the argument. Most of the arguments that have been delayed to this point use several of the verses scattered not only throughout this chapter but others as well to make their point. These cannot simply be ignored. So, for reasons of simplicity, this passage will be treated in terms of the two cessationism debates that base most, or at least a great portion, of their understanding from this chapter, either in defense or offense. For each, after the debate has been articulated, Paul’s actual focus for the verses used will be expounded upon in modern scholarship in the same fashion as the previous chapters.

*Jesus as the epitome of the prophetic office/Old Testament v. New Testament Prophets*

Robertson argues, from his understanding of prophecy in Ephesians and Deuteronomy 18:15, that Jesus is the grand capitulation of the prophetic office.<sup>120</sup> By claiming that the purpose of revelation was fulfilled in the life, death, and ascension of Christ, there can be no better way than Scripture to further reveal the mystery articulated in the Ephesians discussion above because it depicts all that must be known about Jesus. For Robertson, New Testament prophets simply functioned as the in-between, foundational proclaimers of the last revealed truth in Jesus and have served their purpose now that Scripture proclaims Jesus's life and teachings fully.

Ultimately, this argument hangs on several exegetical strings, one of which has been refuted above with "foundation" insinuating a once-for-all prophetic office proclaiming a revealed mystery that Paul somehow believes Scripture will proclaim most fully. A second string is that the office of New Testament prophets, though universally understood to receive information revelationally like Old Testament prophets,<sup>121</sup> *functions* in the same vein as the Old Testament prophets and Jesus as proclaimers of God's will. In such a case, prophets would have the same authority and infallibility as these two offices. If they do, then Robertson *may be* justified to claim that prophecy's purpose has been served. If they do not, then Jesus can be the capitulation of the office of Old Testament prophets while New Testament prophets continue to function.

As was discussed in the 1 Thessalonians 5:19-21 section, continuationists have taken up such a challenge. Grudem was the first to posit that New Testament prophets did not operate in the same manner as Old Testament prophets, lacking both their authority

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<sup>120</sup> Robertson, *The Final Word*, 10-11, 53.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.



and infallibility, for six reasons. Carson, having agreed with Grudem, summarizes, clarifies and builds on these six points.

First, Grudem and Carson argue that Old Testament prophecies were infallible, whereas New Testament prophecies were rarely “in the form of a direct quotation from God.”<sup>122</sup> Unlike their Old Testament namesakes, New Testament prophets rarely claim to quote the very words of God. They are fallible. To Carson’s credit, he acknowledges that the other positions do not believe this is necessary for prophecy to occur, even in the Old Testament. However, Grudem presses on with the distinct fallibility of prophetic word in the New Testament as opposed to the Old Testament. He demonstrates from Acts 21:10-11 that Agabus, a New Testament prophet, was wrong on two of the details of his prophecy that Paul would be delivered into the hands of the Gentiles by the Jews.<sup>123</sup> And these two details, Grudem writes, were the “only two details Agabus mentions—they are, in terms of content, the heart of his prophecy.”<sup>124</sup> Grudem then gives five examples of the importance of accuracy with regard to Old Testament prophecy and writes, “Now it is especially in the case of prophetic pronouncement that accuracy in detail was an essential mark of authenticity.”<sup>125</sup>

Second, the tandem argues that the twelve apostles plus Paul were the legitimate heirs to the Old Testament prophets. As was articulated in the 1 Thessalonians 5:19-21

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<sup>122</sup> Carson, *Showing the Spirit*, 94; Grudem, *Prophecy in 1 Corinthians*, 54-74.

<sup>123</sup> Grudem, *Gift of Prophecy*, 78-79. First, in Acts 21:27-35 and 22:29, Luke describes twice that it was the Romans who captured Paul, not the Jews. Moreover, Paul was not delivered into the hands of the Gentiles voluntarily. He was “*rescued*” from the Jews in Acts 21:31.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.* 79. He continues, “In fact, these details are what make it unusual as a prediction. Probably anyone who knew how the Jews throughout the Empire had treated Paul in various cities could have ‘predicted’ with no revelation from the Holy Spirit at all that Paul would meet violent opposition from Jews in Jerusalem. What was unique about Agabus’s prophecy was this prediction of “binding” and delivering into the hands of the Gentiles. And on these two key elements, he is just a bit wrong.”

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*

discussion, Carson and Grudem posit that it was the content of oracles that was weighed for New Testament prophets, unlike Old Testament prophets, and there is no indication from Scripture that a false prophecy would result in death as was the case for Old Testament prophets (cf. Deut. 18:20).<sup>126</sup> There seems to be no punitive repercussions for false prophecy in the New Testament, simply that it ought to be ignored, or in the case of the Thessalonians, “rejected.”

Third, Carson and Grudem point out that prophecy was never heralded as the solution to apostolic succession of authority in the New Testament.<sup>127</sup> 2 Timothy serves as an example as Paul charges Timothy to “guard the deposit” that was given to him (2 Timothy 1:14). If prophets were even second in command in the New Testament, speaking *mostly* infallible revelatory words, one would assume Paul and others would have hailed prophets as their successors as the apostolic age closed instead of exhorting the next generation to cling to their teachings.

Fourth, Carson adds that the evidence against New Testament prophets having the same clout as Old Testament prophets is bountiful. Most notably, Paul has to advance the cause of prophecy over tongues in 1 Corinthians 14 and has to command the Thessalonians not to “treat prophecies with contempt” (1 Thess. 5:20).<sup>128</sup> For Carson, if

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<sup>126</sup> Carson, *Showing the Spirit*, 94-95; Grudem, *Gift of Prophecy*, 54-68, 85. Both scholars point out in verse 29 that Paul uses the verb *diakrinō* (rendered “weigh” in the NIV) to connote an act of weighing multiple facets of an issue instead of *krinō* (also rendered “weigh”) to connote the judgment between two things. This undermines Robertson’s notion that the NIV rendering, “weigh what is said,” wrongly assumes that Paul is talking about what is said. Robertson argues that *diakrinō* is referring to which prophet should speak next, not the weighing of prophets as Gaffin suggests or their oracles as Grudem and Carson suggest. Robertson, *The Final Word*, 99-100. Tellingly, modern scholarship sides with Gaffin (his position is noted above in the 1 Thess. discussion) or Grudem and Carson. Orr and Walther, *1 Corinthians*, 304; Fee, *Corinthians*, 693-695; Talbert, *Reading Corinthians*, 114.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid. 96; Grudem, *Gift of Prophecy*, 86-87

<sup>128</sup> Ibid. 96-97. Grudem, *Gift of Prophecy*, 69.

prophets occupied such an exalted office in the New Testament Church, it would be highly incongruent for the Corinthians to be seeking the gift of tongues instead. Also, though the specific reason for the Thessalonian exhortation is unknown, the Thessalonians obviously did not hold prophets in high esteem or Paul would not have felt the need to say it.

Fifth, there are several instances in the New Testament where prophets are certainly depicted as having lower authority than apostles.<sup>129</sup> Moreover, Paul clearly places prophecy under his own authority *as an apostle who actually speaks the words of God* in 1 Corinthians 14:37-38.<sup>130</sup> This, for Carson and Grudem, is surely a sign that prophecy does not have the same level of authority in the New Testament as in the Old.

Finally, the gift of prophecy stands “considerably tamed” given Paul’s constraints in this chapter (cf. 14:29, 30, 36) and in chapter 11.<sup>131</sup> If prophets were really leaders of the New Testament Church, why would Paul put so many restrictions on them? Surely, their predecessors in the Old Testament told Israel what God had revealed to them without hindrance.

Grudem and Carson deviate from Paul’s actual focus in the texts they cite in three ways, as noted by modern scholarship. First, with regard to Grudem’s first point, even Carson acknowledges a problem.<sup>132</sup> Old Testament prophets cannot be pigeonholed into a singular definition, much like New Testament prophets. Carson actually acknowledges this one. He writes that even in the Old Testament, at least two different types of prophets existed—one Mosaic, speaking the infallible words of God, and the other “charismatic

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid.; Grudem, *Gift of Prophecy*, 75-77, cites Acts 21:4-5 as an example.

<sup>130</sup> Grudem, *Gift of Prophecy*, 67-68.

<sup>131</sup> Carson, *Showing the Spirit*, 97-98.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 98.

and enigmatic” (cf. Num. 12:6-8). However, because Joel’s prophecy concerns the latter, Carson claims that Grudem’s general point stands. New Testament prophets are different than the canonical Old Testament prophets who commanded authority and infallibility.

Second, Carson and Grudem’s fourth point that Paul is advancing the cause of prophecy over tongues misses Paul’s focus in the passage entirely. Paul is not advancing prophecy over tongues. He is advancing edification of the church body over the edification of oneself. It just so happens that these two gifts were the ways that the Corinthians were demonstrating this behavior. As Orr and Walther put it, ““The issue of the whole matter is to recognize that the expression of the spiritual gifts must have in view the strengthening of the divine society.”<sup>133</sup>

Third, also on Grudem’s fourth point, Paul’s exhortation to the Thessalonians to not treat prophecy with contempt does not mean that prophets are of a lesser nature than Old Testament prophets in Thessalonica (1 Thessalonians 5:19-22). The context is unknown.<sup>134</sup> It could just as likely be that the Thessalonians simply didn’t like what their prophets were saying (e.g. telling them to repent of certain sins), even if their prophets were saying infallible words from God. This could have caused some resentment among the congregation against prophecy.

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<sup>133</sup> So also Orr and Walther, *1 Corinthians*, 307. Their argument hinges on verse 6. They write, “The emphasis on prophecy is elucidated by inclusion of revelation, knowledge, and teaching. Such communication is a principal purpose of the public meeting of the church.” Any of these media of communication may be abused when used for personal edification over communal edification in the church setting.

<sup>134</sup> Morris, *Paul to the Thessalonians*, 108, describes a situation in which some of the Thessalonians’ over-enthusiasm for the parousia was rebuked “rather tactlessly.” He writes, “there is nothing improbable in the idea that, in the process, they had come to look slightly on prophecy.” So also Marshall, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 158.

Fourth, with regard to the sixth point, to even label Paul's ordinances for prophecy as "constricting" or infer that the office is "considerably tamed" is certainly an agenda-driven reading of the text. Modern scholarship recognizes none of these interpretations. Paul actually states very clearly that his true purpose is not to curtail prophecy. Instead, he hopes to bring order to the exercise "so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged" (14:31) because "God is not a God of disorder but of peace" (14:33). Orr and Walther write that Paul "thinks of all legitimate participation in corporate worship as Spirit-gifted. Special instruction, however, is needed to guide the congregation."<sup>135</sup> To view Paul's instructions as "restrictions" undermines the entire purpose of law as the ultimate way to pursue what is "good" (cf. Rom. 2:13; 13:2-4).

Ultimately, the grand notion of clout that Carson and Grudem suggest Old Testament prophets possessed is misguided. Many times, the warnings of Old Testament prophets were not heeded (e.g., 1 Sam. 15; 2 Kings 17:13-17). Power was not central to the make-up of Old Testament prophets in the sense that no one would disobey them or challenge their prophecies, so this criterion of absolute authority cannot be used to distinguish Old and New Testament prophets. Therefore, it is not Paul's *disobeying* of the wishes of the prophets from Tyre (Acts 21:3-5) or Agabus' slight differences in detail (Acts 21:10-11) from the event's actual occurrence that prove New Testament prophets lacked the authority of Old Testament prophets.

Instead, if focus of the text is allowed to speak for itself, as is the case in modern scholarship, something much more revealing occurs. Luke's *reaction* to Paul's disobeying is far more telling than Paul ignoring the desire of the prophets in Agabus's prophecy. When Paul is unable to be dissuaded from continuing on to Jerusalem, Luke

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<sup>135</sup> Orr and Walther, *1 Corinthians*, 310.

calls Paul's apparent disobedience "the Lord's will" (Acts 21:14). Elsewhere, in Romans 15:30-32 and in a speech Paul gives to the Ephesians at Miletus Acts 20:18-38, Paul invokes the authority of the Holy Spirit as his driving force to get to Jerusalem.<sup>136</sup> In other words, Paul, an apostle, had a mission that he considered, and Luke admitted, held greater authority than the content of prophecies or the desires of prophets.

This simply modifies Carson and Grudem's claim that New Testament prophets were categorically different from Old Testament prophets. Their notion of authority as binding aside, it is their second and fifth points that apostles carried the banner as the heirs of the Old Testament prophetic office that finds the greatest weight in modern scholarship. If authority is viewed in this light, Carson and Grudem's point that apostles were the authority figures of the New Testament, not prophets, is echoed by Barth. He argues against Robertson's usage of Ephesians, though he does not even acknowledge Robertson's argument, and simultaneously echoes Carson and Grudem's strongest premise. He writes:

In the subapostolic age "the twelve (apostles)" rather than both apostles and prophets would have been called the greatest authorities after Christ. Prophets were no longer highly esteemed—except among some groups that became heretical. Just as Deut 18:15, 18 promised that Israel would again be given a prophet, so the author of Ephesians cannot imagine the church living on solid ground without the service of "prophets."<sup>137</sup>

The easiest reading of the New Testament demonstrates that apostles were the ones appointed by Jesus to be the authority figures after his ascension (cf. Luke

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 91. Surely, Acts 21:4 has the explicit connotation that Luke and the people in Caesarea simply "gave up" on persuading Paul not to go to Jerusalem. But, it also has the connotation that what Paul, an apostle, decided to do would be the ultimate authority and part of God's will, even when others, including prophets, did not understand his actions.

<sup>137</sup> Barth, *Ephesians 1-3*, 316-317.

6:13-16; Acts 1:8; Matthew 10:2-4, 19-20, 40). They are the figures endowed with the Spirit's authority to represent Jesus. There is no evidence that this same weight was given to New Testament prophets.

### *The Role of Women*

Continuationists find themselves in a new predicament. The reformed tradition, the stage on which this debate is often set, given its elevated view of Scripture, has long disallowed women from assuming leadership roles in the Church. This understanding is based upon passages such as 1 Timothy 2:11-15, where Paul indicates that due to the creation narrative, women ought to be subjugated to men in the Church. For Carson and Grudem, the ordinances in 1 Corinthians 11 pose a particular threat to such a tradition or at least a contradiction to the 1 Timothy 2:11-15 paradigm. If the commands about head coverings can be put aside for the moment, Paul clearly assumes that women ought to be prophesying as a regular part of the Corinthian worship meeting, not silent as the 1 Timothy passage suggests. Carson and Grudem have already undertaken a considerable effort to reduce the authority of that role in the New Testament, as articulated above. For them, it stands as an office that has very limited authority but functions as a revelatory, yet fallible, spiritual gift. However, the fact remains that women are still entrusted with a role that allows them to speak the revealed words of God. The focus of curtailing this new wrinkle turns to 1 Corinthians 14:29-36. Carson concludes that though women are allowed to prophesy, they should not be part of the church discussion that weighs what is prophesied (v.29),<sup>138</sup> further stripping the authority women possessed in the early Church. This is why Paul says that women ought to be silent in verse 34; he is referring to the

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<sup>138</sup> Carson, *Showing the Spirit*, 129. Carson determines that "the others" in verse 29 means the rest of the church through its parallels in the New Testament (e.g., 1 Thess. 5:21; 1 John 4:1-6) and the construction of the Greek as *hoi loipoi* instead of *hoi alloi*.

weighing of prophecy (v. 31), bolstered by Paul’s appeal to what “the law says” about women in terms of authority.<sup>139</sup> Carson’s interpretation reaffirms women in their traditionally held status in the Church; they may prophesy, but they are not to be in authority, especially because wives’ “submission could not be preserved if the wives participated: the first husband who uttered a prophecy would precipitate the problem.”<sup>140</sup> However, Carson, well aware of the apparent tension this theory creates between women having the ability to prophesy but not determine the veracity of prophecy, assuages the issue:

The objection carries little weight *provided* the view of prophecy I am outlining is understood to be the one with which Paul operated. It constitutes a problem *only* if prophecy has the same authority status that the great writing prophets of the Old Testament enjoyed.<sup>141</sup>

In other words, there is no tension as long as the weighing of prophecy *is actually* more important than the act of prophesying itself, and this would be the case if prophecy did lack authority and was as fallible as Carson believes it to be— of a sort so untrustworthy that it cannot be relied upon.

This sheds a certain light on Carson’s desired development of non-authoritative prophecy in the New Testament. It seems obvious now why he is unconcerned with prophecy’s occasional fallibility and lack of undeniable authority paralleled in the Old

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid., Carson points to Genesis 2:20-24 to understand Paul’s appeal. He argues “it is to that Scripture that Paul explicitly turns on two other occasions when he discusses female roles (1 Cor. 11:8,9; 1 Tim. 2:13). The passage from Genesis 2 does not enjoin silence but it suggests that because man was made first and woman was made for man, “a pattern has been laid down regarding the roles the two play.” Also, Carson notes, in the *only* other times in the New Testament where Paul actually employs the phrase “the law says” (Rom. 3:19; 1 Cor. 9:8), he is referring to the Old Testament law, effectively bolstering his argument that Paul is indeed referring to Genesis.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 130.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.



Testament. It dilutes his intended point that New Testament prophecy lacked any *real* authority. He needs the Old Testament prophetic office not just to be supplanted by apostles but also to be practically diminished by them. This could clear the way for Paul barring women from weighing prophecies, a serious venture, while allowing them to prophesy.

But this is simply not the case as articulated above, though the actual meaning of Paul's words in these verses is widely contested in modern scholarship. Orr and Walther conclude that the "others" in verse 29 are those with the spiritual gift of discerning between true and false prophecy, not the church at large. This group would include women if they possessed such a gift. Then, they argue that Paul's later point that women need to be silent in the church (v. 34) is based upon chatty women in the Corinthian congregation who are apparently interrupting the service with questions that they ought to ask their husbands at home (v. 35).<sup>142</sup>

However, inventing a new spiritual gift to decide who "the others" are in verse 29 is hardly a viable solution, especially given Paul's extended treatment of gift lists in Chapter 12 that set up the curtailing of tongues in chapter 14 because it does not edify the church. Would Paul not have explicitly mentioned this kind of discernment of prophecy at least once in the whole discussion? Paul clearly values the gift of prophecy's ability to edify its listeners (vv. 18-19) and urges the pursuit of prophecy over tongues (vv. 6-12). Surely, it would have served his purpose well to at least enumerate the gift that keeps prophecy in check and, arguably, helps in its edification process through its verification.

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<sup>142</sup> Orr and Walther, *I Corinthians*, 304, 311-315. So also Fee, *Corinthians*, 693-694, though he retreats from this position to conclude that the simplest argument is "that prophecies did not have independent authority in the church, but must always be the province of the corporate body, who in the Spirit were to determine the sense or perhaps viability of what had been said."

The chatty women argument is similarly troubling. Surely, not all the women in the Corinthian church were chatty, so why are all of them being silenced? Equally problematic is the notion that none of the men were noisy. Another inherent flaw in this interpretation is that it assumes that *just the women* in the church were uneducated about whatever issues into which Paul believes they were inquiring (v. 35). Even worse, apparently, *all* of their husbands knew the answers. It is highly unlikely that this is the case or that Paul would make such sweeping, rigid commands based on gender.

Talbert avoids taking any clear sides. He posits that verse 29 is referring to Paul's broader intention of order but that Paul is referring to weighing what is said. He does not posit a guess as to who does this weighing or how. He does suggest that it is *not* a group of prophets because vv. 30-32 are all Paul's clear mandate that prophets should not lose control of themselves, which would prevent order in the service.<sup>143</sup>

Fee simply dismisses vv. 34-35 altogether for two reasons. First, "one can make much better sense of the structure of Paul's argument without these intruding sentences."<sup>144</sup> Second, he notes that these two verses have appeared after verse 40 in some manuscripts and suggests that this means a scribe implanted them before any of the existing transcripts were copied.<sup>145</sup> To Fee's first point, is it that one can make much better sense of Paul's argument without these two sentences or that it makes much better sense of Fee's argument if these two sentences are not allowed to "intrude?" Just because an issue is inconvenient or controversial does not mean it ought to be dismissed, especially if coherence can be established (and it will be below). To Fee's second point, he makes a terrible contradiction. On the one hand, he argues that the two verses do not

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<sup>143</sup> Talbert, *Reading Corinthians*, 114.

<sup>144</sup> Fee, *Corinthians*, 701.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.* 699-700.

make sense in Paul's structure, but then he argues that a scribe would never have moved these sentences after verse 40 because "all who comment on it find the arrangement very logical." In essence, Fee himself believes that Paul's argument is incoherent where the verses currently stand, but then he appeals to authority to dismiss claims that placing vv. 34-35 after verse 40 could help the cohesion of the argument. Which is the case?

The answer is neither so long as a possible solution to Paul's apparent incoherency may be given. Ultimately, Carson's final solution still seems most plausible, though for slightly different reasons than his continuationist agenda put forward above. His only issue is the contradiction explored above that prophecy could, in fact, be authoritative— meaning that Paul must contradict himself if he believes women could be able to prophesy with genuine authority from God but not weigh the veracity of others' prophecies. However, this creates a false dichotomy that if Paul gives women authority, he must give them total authority, even over men. Could it not be that Paul believes women can play a role in disseminating legitimate, authoritative words of God to the Church but not play a role in the weighing of those words as a check to their ability to be in authority over men? Imagine the following scenario: a woman in the Corinthian church stands up to prophesy and tells her husband something he must now obey. If she is not part of the discussion that weighs her prophecy, nor are any of the other women, could the men not determine it to be negligible?<sup>146</sup> Likewise, Carson's nightmare of a woman

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<sup>146</sup> Opposition to such an interpretation will no doubt point out the unfairness of such a scenario. This interpretation means that women could prophesy something edifying to a man and it be deemed negligible by the weighing process solely on the grounds that women should not be in authority over men. This would seem to contradict Paul's emphasis on edification and love over everything in chapters 12-14. However, this also forces a false dichotomy on Paul's commands that simply does not exist, hypothesizing some sort of "good ol' boys club" dominating the Church. How can a community pursuing the "most excellent way" (13:1), and so keen on edification, be so hostile to a prophecy that is actually given in love for the edification of the

denouncing her husband's prophecy is also not possible in this scenario. As unfortunate or fortunate as a modern reader may view this conclusion, it lines up with how Paul believes men and women operate in his other letters (See 1 Cor. 11:8,9; 1 Tim. 2:13). There is no reason to believe this passage to be some sort of exception.

Before too much is read into this interpretation, this still lends itself to the notion that women may play an integral role in the distribution of the word of God to the Church. They are not to be hindered in this respect. It is only in their authority over men that Paul is concerned. Ultimately, this likely does severe damage to Carson's hope that women may still be barred from teaching and the like in the modern church, but that is just as irrelevant to what Paul says as feminist desire for full authority is.

It is also understandable, given the current social climate, that this interpretation of Paul is unsatisfactory. However, ancient texts are not to be read in terms of desired outcomes. This is the monster that creates the issue of cessationism, and relegates prophecy to something beneath its apparent status. This approach allows scholars to save Paul from himself and his apparent sexism, including dismissing the texts altogether, but they miss Paul's meaning in the process, however just or unjust his conclusions might be. Sometimes, Scripture may not say what the status quo demands of it. This posturing and proof texting lies beyond the interest of this thesis—to find Paul's true thoughts on prophecy beyond the issue of cessationism.

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listener? This hypothetical does not exist if Paul's desires are reflected in the conduct of the Church. Moreover, it could be that Paul knows that he has emphasized edification as the guiding principle of how to conduct a church service and now limits that emphasis, however unjust the modern reader might find that curtailing to be.

## CHAPTER 11

### CONCLUSION

The issue of cessationism has been shown to lead to poor exegesis of the Pauline epistles, both from cessationists and continuationists alike. Cessationists are guilty of reading into Paul's words an understanding that simply is not there. Continuationists, by the very nature of defending an understanding that is not truly present in the first place, miss Paul's actual robust understanding of prophecy's function in the first century. Both sides are at fault for skewing the text into a direction that limits Paul's understanding and promotes an agenda.

In Romans, cessationism led to an understanding that Paul does not believe in ecstatic utterances of prophecy and a conclusion that Paul advocates prophecy beyond the apostolic era. Both are issues that had nothing to do with Paul's intentions in the passage of describing the unity that diversity of gifting brings. In Ephesians, cessationism led to Gaffin's various theories about once-for-all natures of foundations, Robertson's argument about travellers who see signs and require them no more and a witch hunt of continuationist over apostolic succession. Paul's focus of the text was to describe God's inclusion of Gentiles into Israel through the use of apostles and prophets who understood this mystery revelationally. In 1 Corinthians, cessationism led to Gaffin's dogmatic understanding of where prophecy lies with regard to realized eschatology, an attempt by Carson to determine when Paul thinks prophecy will end, Robertson's argument that Jesus

was the grand capitulation of the prophetic office and the subsequent cessation of prophecy, Carson and Grudem's argument for the status of New Testament prophets as being lesser than Old Testament prophets, and an agenda-driven exposition on women's role in the church. Paul's actual intentions for 1 Corinthians 12-14 were to demonstrate that all spiritual gifts should be edifying, that all spiritual gifts are nothing compared to the permanence and power of love, and to advance edification over a fascination with the miraculous.

It is most unfortunate that cessationists are so steeped in their mantra of *sola scriptura* that they will defend Scripture's solitary use today even against the obvious demands of the text it so highly values. In what can only be described as sheer irony, these are the same folks who are so often positing to the charismatic majority world, "Is Scripture sufficient?" Obviously, there have been charismatic abuses of spiritual gifts in recent Christian history, but this argument of cessation is coming from dogma that is no longer relevant to today's conversation. When it comes to prophecy in the Pauline epistles, the mystery has been revealed.

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