

Divine Revelation and the Close of the Prophetic Age: A Summary Study of Cessationism

By Timothy L. Dane¹

Introduction

God still speaks to men in the same way that He did in the days of the apostles, and present day prophets are receiving messages from God in many places and in many ways. This is the kind of belief that many hold within the ranks of twenty-first century Christianity.² The big question is whether or not this is actually true.

For others, although they do not necessarily believe that modern prophetic activity is exactly the same as it was in the apostolic age, they nevertheless believe that God is still giving direct, prophetic revelation in one form or another. The prophetic activity is from God they say, but it does not necessarily always have the accuracy or authority that it had when it came from the Old Testament (OT) prophets or New Testament (NT) apostles.³ This is the view of many, but once again the question is whether or not this is

¹Tim Dane is the president of Front Range Bible Institute in Colorado Springs where he also serves as a professor. He pastored in Los Angeles for 10 years after receiving his M. Div. and Th. M. from The Master's Seminary in Sun Valley, CA and is currently a Ph. D. student at Baptist Bible Seminary in Clarks Summit, PA.

² John MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 42. MacArthur makes mention of one Charismatic pastor in Southern California who told MacArthur that when he shaves in the mornings Jesus "comes into the bathroom and puts his arm around [him] and [they] talk." This Charismatic preacher was somewhat surprised that MacArthur was not quick to believe these accounts.

³ Farnell points, for example, to the novel definition of prophecy that Wayne Grudem has brought to the table in this whole debate. Grudem has introduced the idea that NT prophets did not have the authority of OT prophets but were simply "reporting in their own words what God would bring to mind" and that these prophecies "did not have the authority" of the words of the Lord. That is, the NT prophets were simply reporting things which God had laid on their hearts or brought to their minds (F. David Farnell, "Fallible New Testament Prophecy/Prophets? A Critique of Wayne Grudem's Hypothesis," *TMSJ* 2:2 [Fall 1991]: 161). This definition of prophecy, i.e., a prophecy that is fallible, is a significant departure from the biblical concept that prophecy comes by a direct revelation of God through the Holy Spirit (2 Pet 1:21) and that it is always infallible (cf. e.g., Deut 18:15-22; 1 Sam 3:19-21).

actually true.⁴ Saucy strongly objects to these new and novel definitions of prophecy which include the concept of fallible, NT prophecy. He writes:

Scholarly studies on this subject have traditionally viewed all biblical prophecy as “inspired utterances” that came through direct revelation from God, and I see no reason to change this definition. The attempt to see prophecy as having different levels, ranging from that which is totally God’s Word and therefore inerrant to that which is mixed with varying degrees of human thought including error, is difficult to support biblically.⁵

Along this same line there are a number of Christians who take the position that one simply cannot be sure about this subject. They would say that the Bible is not especially clear on the subject. Hence, one cannot say that such activity does not take place today. Maybe these things do happen and maybe they do not, but the church is not in a position to say that they cannot take place.

There is yet a fourth general viewpoint on this subject. This one would be represented by those Christians who believe that God is *not* still giving direct revelation to men as he did during the eras of the OT prophets or NT apostles. Those who fall into this camp would generally be classified by the label “cessationists.” Cessationists believe

⁴ It is interesting that Grudem simultaneously makes an argument for both fallibility and infallibility when it comes to the NT gift of prophecy. As noted above, he clearly argues for the concept of fallibility, but he elsewhere argues that NT prophets could and did speak with perfect authority and perfect accuracy. For example, when speaking about the prophet Luke (a non-apostle, NT prophet), and the fact that Paul has called Luke’s gospel “Scripture” (cf. 1 Tim 5:18) Grudem notes that this is an instance of “Paul’s putting Luke’s Gospel in the same category as Old Testament Scripture.” See Wayne Grudem, “Scripture’s Self-Attestation and the Problem of Formulating a Doctrine of Scripture,” in *Scripture and Truth*, eds. D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 48-49. As Grudem goes on to say, “We have strong evidence that the early church soon began to receive some New Testament writings as ‘words of God’ equal to the Old Testament” (Ibid., 49). This writer agrees wholeheartedly and would clarify the implications by noting that every exercise of the NT gift of prophecy was infallible and authoritative, qualifying this statement by adding that the genuine gift was at work only during the apostolic age.

⁵ Robert L. Saucy, “An Open But Cautious View,” in *Are Miraculous Gifts For Today?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 127. The reader is reminded that passages like Deuteronomy 18:15-20, 1 Samuel 3:19-20, and 2 Peter 1:20-21 teach the idea that genuine prophecy never has error. That prophecy which is being promulgated in Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity today—prophecy which has errors—can only be categorized as “false prophecy,” something which brought the death penalty under the Law of Moses.

that there was a point of time—usually held to be before the end of the first century—that God brought an end to direct, prophetic revelation. Cessationists would usually support this claim by saying that the Bible itself actually teaches that God brought an end to this activity. Regardless of what view one holds on this issue, one thing is clear: this is one of the most controversial topics in all of contemporary Christianity.

In terms of methodology, the beginning place for any theological discussion must be the Bible itself. Jesus said, “My Word is truth” (John 17:17), and as Paul put it God-breathed Scripture is that which is profitable for teaching and equipping (2 Tim 3:16ff.). To answer this question, then, the beginning place for the discussion must be contextually-controlled biblical exegesis. Direct statements of the Bible must hold priority. Secondly, after the preliminary step of exegesis, one must also systematize all that the Bible says on this subject by making theological formulations. One simply cannot rely on direct declarations of the Bible to answer these questions in full, for it is essential that all declarations are brought together for a logical and consistent theological explanation that harmonizes all the relevant passages.⁶ A third source that should be considered in this discussion is that of historical evidence (including the present day). On the one hand, experience cannot be considered the basis for truth claims, but at the same time it is legitimate to see whether one’s theological claims are in harmony with the world in which one lives.

⁶ Theological formulation is that step of truth articulation that begins to employ logic and deductive reasoning. A sound theological articulation, though, is one which is always based on biblical exegesis and biblical theology. Virtually every major doctrine of the Bible includes logic (i.e., a Bible-driven form of logic and deductive reasoning, e.g., see how this is true in the doctrine of the Trinity, the incarnation, and inerrancy). The point is that no one should object that a biblically driven theological reasoning would be part of the basis for a cessationist’s approach.

This paper will present a concise study of the topic of prophetic revelation and whether or not one should hold to any form of cessationism. The methodology to be followed will that which was spoken of above: (1) the findings of direct exegesis, (2) theological reasoning that has the support of biblical exegesis, and (3) observations from history on whether or not one can find support for any particular viewpoint on this subject.

This study will first take a broad look at spiritual gifts to examine the basic nature and purpose of spiritual gifts for a study of cessationism must of necessity first begin with a basic understanding of what gifts are and what God's purposes are in giving them. The second section will focus on a biblical and theological analysis of several key texts and how they provide a biblical basis for reasoning. The third section will consider how historical observations relate to biblical findings and whether or not church history provides support for the claim of cessationism that the close of the apostolic age also brought about a cessation of the revelatory (prophetic) gifts and their companion confirmatory (sign) gifts.

A Broad Overview of Spiritual Gifts

There are four places in the NT where the Bible gives direct, didactic teaching about spiritual gifts.⁷ These four portions of Scripture must be the beginning point in trying to understand whether or not God is still speaking to the world in the same way He did in the apostolic age. A good beginning place in this study is (1) to first look at the

⁷ Four portions of Scripture which provide didactic material on spiritual gifts include Romans 12:3-8, 1 Corinthians 12-14, Ephesians 4:11-16 and 1 Peter 4:10-11. One can also see numerous illustrations in the Book of Acts of how spiritual gifts were at work in the apostolic church. These historical-narrative, descriptive passages are very helpful in seeing the nature and use of gifts.

nature and classification of spiritual gifts and (2) to make an initial, broad statement about the purpose(s) of spiritual gifts.

The Nature and Classification of Spiritual Gifts

The Bible does not provide an explicit explanation for the nature of spiritual gifts. It would appear, however, that they consist of some kind of divine enabling that God gives to each member of the body of Christ, and that this enabling comes to the believer at the moment of personal salvation when Christ places him into a union with Himself in the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:18; cf. Acts 2:4; 10:44-46).

It would appear that some gifts have a more supernatural character than others. For example, on the one hand, there are some gifts (e.g., (1) the revelatory gifts that produce direct prophetic revelation and (2) the miraculous sign gifts which confirm God's prophets and fresh prophetic revelation) which seem to have a more supernatural character than others. For example, there was a clear supernatural aspect involved when a prophet received a direct message from God and there was also a clear supernatural element involved when God's apostles and prophets performed miraculous healings that produced effects that were beyond all known natural laws. Certain gifts had this distinct kind of supernatural character.

On the other hand, there are other kinds of gifts (e.g., (1) gifts that deal primarily with the ongoing propagation of biblical knowledge and (2) gifts that deal with interpersonal service and ministry) that appear to have a more natural character to them. For example, the Bible makes mention of the gift of teaching as being a gift from the Holy Spirit to certain Christians, but it is also clear that there are many people who are

naturally skillful in teaching but they are not even saved. The point to observe is that not all gifts have the same basic character.

Both Paul and Peter make statements which imply different categories of gifts. One example comes in 1 Corinthians 1:4-5 where Paul comments on how richly God had gifted the Corinthian church. In verse 5 Paul makes reference to the fact that they had been enriched “in all *speech* and in all *knowledge*.” Peter also makes a similar kind of distinction in 1 Peter 4:11 where he makes mention of (1) he who *speaks* and (2) he who *serves*, thus suggesting some kind of differences in classification. At this point one could at least suggest that both Peter and Paul are indicating that there are different categories of spiritual gifts.

This distinctiveness in the differing nature of spiritual gifts becomes even more clear when one consults the Greek text. One can see this in 1 Corinthians 12 where Paul provides a partial listing of various kinds of spiritual gifts.⁸ He begins in verse 8 where he first mentions “the word of wisdom” and then follows this by mentioning “the word of knowledge” which, Paul says, is given to “another.” The adjective Paul chose to use in speaking of another is the Greek term ἄλλω (*alloi*), which can carry the connotation of another of the same kind.⁹ In itself, Paul’s use of this term gives the initial suggestion that the word of wisdom and the word of knowledge are two gifts which fall under the

⁸ There is no single place in the NT where all of the gifts are mentioned together.

⁹ One must be careful about pressing this semantic distinction too far, but there is a legitimate reason for recognizing such distinctions in various uses. R. C. H. Lenski would be among those commentators who believe that Paul was in fact indicating a grouping of gifts by his alternating use of adjectives (*I and II Corinthians* [Columbus: Wartburg, 1946], 499). Robertson and Plummer take the position that Paul’s alternation of adjectives was merely for the purpose of trying to “break the intolerable monotony” of using the same term (Archibald Robertson and Alfred Plummer, *The International Critical Commentary: I Corinthians* [Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1953], 265). The present writer believes that it is more appropriate to recognize the distinctiveness of language and how it is in every language synonyms have their own semantic significance.

same basic kind of classification; namely, that they should both be considered gifts that deal with the disclosure of fresh revelation from God.¹⁰ In verse 9, however, when Paul speaks of “the gift of faith” as being given to “another,” this time he uses a different adjective to for the idea “another,” the adjective ἐτέρῳ (*heteroi*). Unlike the former term, this word carries more of the idea another of a different kind.¹¹ Paul’s alternation of synonyms suggests that the gift of faith is somehow in a different kind of class than the gifts “the word of wisdom” and “word of knowledge.” As Hodge put it,

There is a distinction indicated in the Greek which is not expressed in our version. The main divisions in this enumeration seem to be indicated by ἕτερος and the subordinate ones by ἄλλος, though both words are translated by *another*; the former, however, is a stronger expression of difference. Here, therefore, where ἐτέρῳ is used, a new class seems to be introduced.¹²

After the gift of faith, however, Paul begins listing other gifts like “gifts of healings” and “workings of miracles, but when he does this he once again reverts to the use of the term ἄλλῳ (*alloi*), apparently to say that these are of the same basic kind of classification as the gift of faith.

¹⁰ Many contexts in which Paul uses the expression “the word of knowledge” (or simply the term “knowledge”) suggest quite clearly that this gift has a revelatory/prophetic character. One example comes in 1 Corinthians 13:2 where Paul talks about having “all knowledge” so as to know “all mysteries.” In other words, a capacity to receive prophetic knowledge about God’s hidden truths (i.e., His mysteries) comes through an exercise of the gift of prophecy and, in part, the word of knowledge. This close relationship between prophecy and the word of knowledge comes out again in 1 Corinthians 13:8-10, thus confirming the idea that the word of knowledge was a gift that was prophetic/revelatory in character.

¹¹ One should understand that Paul’s intentional alternation of synonyms (especially in a close and immediate context) is for the purpose of making semantic distinctions to make a theological point and not merely for stylistic variation as some commentators suggest. Paul does the same thing in Galatians 1:6-7. In verse 6 Paul marvels that the Galatians had so quickly deserted Christ for a different gospel (ἕτερον, *heteron*) which, Paul says, is really not another gospel at all (ἄλλο, *alloy*). That is, it was a message of a different kind and is not in the same class as the true gospel; hence, it is not another (ἄλλο) message of the same kind as the true gospel.

¹² Charles Hodge, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 246.

One may want to avoid being overly dogmatic on how strictly the gifts can be classified with precision, but one thing seems to be clear from these observations: there appears to be good justification (both exegetically and theologically) for the idea that there are various categories of spiritual gifts, and that they should not all be looked at indiscriminately as being all essentially the same.

One writer has suggested that the 18 gifts of the NT should be classified into four major categories: (1) five revelatory gifts: apostle, prophet, discerning of spirits, word of wisdom, and word of knowledge, (2) five confirmatory gifts: miracles, healings, tongues, interpretation of tongues, and the gift of faith, (3) four speaking gifts: evangelist, pastor, teacher, and exhortation, and (4) four auxiliary gifts: helps or serving, giving, mercy, and administration or leadership.¹³ This writer commends this categorization as being a good reflection of all that the NT shows on these issues. The issue of cessationism revolves around the question of whether or not the revelatory (prophetic) gifts and confirmatory (sign) gifts are still operative today. The cessationist does not believe that all gifts ceased with the apostolic age, but only that the revelatory and confirmatory gifts ceased.

The Purpose(s) of Spiritual Gifts

With reference to spiritual gifts, there are several ways one can view this concept of purpose. There are several places in the Bible where one can see some kind of indication of the purpose for spiritual gifts whether looked at in a general or specific sense.

The first aspect of purpose is that which speaks about edification for the body of Christ. There are several places in 1 Corinthians 12-14 where Paul makes the clear

¹³ Robert L. Thomas, *Understanding Spiritual Gifts* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1999), 173.

statement that gifts are for the edification of others.¹⁴ Hence, in an overarching sense, one should recognize that a major function of gifts is that of building up the corporate body of Christ.¹⁵

A second aspect of purpose might be considered as the concept of stewardship. Peter makes the explicit declaration that the proper use of spiritual gifts is in effect a proper use (i.e., a good stewardship) of the gracious giftedness that God entrusts to each Christian (1 Pet 4:10).

A third aspect of purpose is more particular and deals with the purpose of each gift individually. According to Thomas' categorization noted earlier, one might safely make the following statements about specific purposes: (1) Revelatory gifts have the primary purpose of bringing fresh prophetic revelation. (2) Confirmatory gifts have the primary purpose of confirming God's messengers and their fresh prophetic messages by acting as "sign gifts" (e.g., 1 Cor 14:22 where Paul explicitly says that tongues are to be as a "sign"; cf. Acts 2:12; 4:33; 5:12; 2 Cor 12:12; Heb 2:3-4). (3) Speaking gifts had the main purpose of giving ongoing propagation of the truth that God inscripturated in the Bible itself. (4) Auxiliary gifts have the primary purpose of enabling God's people to skillfully care for the church and its members with its multiplied needs in service and administration.

¹⁴ In 12:7 Paul says that spiritual gifts are "for the common good." In 14:12 Paul tells the Corinthians that in the use of spiritual gifts, they should always "seek to abound for the edification of the church." Likewise, in 14:26 he tells them that all things should be done for "edification." By God's design, spiritual gifts are intended to be used for serving others to bring edification for the body of Christ and not for self-centered uses.

¹⁵ Robert L. Saucy, *The Church in God's Program* (Chicago: Moody, 1972), 176. Saucy correctly highlights the fact that "all manifestations of the Spirit in the worship at Corinth were designed to build up the total community of believers." The operative principle is this: this corporate edification takes place when gifts are utilized for the blessing of others, a process that inevitably involves a degree of individualization to others in the body.

Summary

In light of the fact that there are differences between the various gifts and the fact that God has different functions and purposes for each of the various kinds of gifts, it becomes much easier to understand that one cannot simply lump all gifts together. One must give attention to the differences that exist among all gifts and the reality that certain purposes may have already been totally fulfilled, thus eliminating the ongoing need for certain kinds of spiritual gifts. This is not to say that the church has no further needs for spiritual gifts at all, but only the fact that certain gifts may no longer be necessary and, hence, there may have been a cessation of certain particular gifts. This subject (cessationism) will be the focus of the sections that follow. This discussion of cessationism will weave together the exegetical and theological findings within the one section.

A Biblical and Theological Analysis of Cessationism

For the Christian, the supreme authority on all theological issues should always be what the Bible teaches on the topic. A proper methodology is one which begins with the direct declarations of Scripture before formulating theological statements. This process must first begin with a contextual exegesis of all relevant texts that have bearing on the issue as the basis for systematic statements.¹⁶ On the basis of exegesis, one is then in the position to articulate statements of biblical theology which come directly out of the text. Beyond this, one is then in the position where he can start pulling together all of the

¹⁶ In the effort of building systematic theology, there is absolutely no substitute for letting each text of the Bible stand on its own and be interpreted on its own in its own context before seeking to make articulations of systematic theology.

exegesis and biblical theology from all of the relevant texts for the purpose of formulating a comprehensive systematic theology on the subject.

There are at least three major texts that one needs to consider when looking at the doctrine of cessationism. These are Paul's teaching on gifts in First Corinthians and Ephesians as well as the words of John in Revelation 22 at the close of the canon. There certainly are a number of passages in Acts that directly inform one about the operation of spiritual gifts from a descriptive perspective, but these three texts above are the passages that come from the epistles which help in forming theological statements about cessationism.

Paul's Teaching to the Corinthians

The Bible's most extensive discussion of spiritual comes in 1 Corinthians 12-14. A survey of 1 Corinthians indicates that it was a church that was plagued with numerous problems that required the loving rebuke of their apostolic founder. This letter was Paul's effort to address numerous problems that had come to his attention as well as a number of questions that the Corinthians had posed to him. The letter is one extended, loving rebuke by their founder and apostle.¹⁷

The Unfolding Context. Paul's answer to the Corinthians commences in 12:1 and unfolds with an issue by issue response to the Corinthian chaos. Thomas

¹⁷ The problems include the following: (1) divisions and factions (1:1-4:21), (2) brazen immorality (5:1-13), (3) lawsuits among church members (6:1-11), (4) problems of sexual licentiousness (6:12-20), (5) misunderstandings on sex and marriage (7:1-40), (6) misunderstandings on Christian liberty (8:1-11:1), (7) misunderstandings on public worship (11:2-34), misunderstandings on spiritual gifts (12-14), and (8) misunderstandings on the resurrection (15:1-58). Paul's teaching on spiritual gifts (i.e., chapters 12-14) was not driven by glowing praise, but was a stern rebuke for their arrogance, lack of love, and disregard for Christian propriety.

demonstrates exegetically how Paul unfolds his response to the Corinthian questions as follows: (1) the uniqueness of spiritual gifts (12:1-3), (2) the unified source of spiritual gifts: the triune God (12:4-11), (3) the unified nature of spiritual gifts: a spiritual body (12:12-31a), (4) the unquestioned superiority of spiritual fruit: love (12:31b-13:13), (5) the unified purpose of spiritual gifts: edification (14:1-36), (6) the unified perspective of spiritual gifts: orderly conduct (14:37-40).¹⁸

The Relative Value of Revelatory and Confirmatory Gifts. In the midst of this rebuke and teaching, Paul finds it necessary to correct the Corinthians for their misplaced priorities and why they were wrong for putting such an inordinate emphasis on two particular classes of spiritual gifts, (1) the revelatory (i.e., prophetic) gifts, and (2) the confirmatory (i.e., sign) gifts. The truth of the matter, says Paul, is that when one compares revelatory and confirmatory gifts to other major Christian truths one sees that these two kinds of gifts are one of the least significant aspects of Christian truth. Paul needed to correct the Corinthians by showing what a healthy view of gifts would look like.¹⁹

A healthy view of such gifts would recognize that every individual Christian (each with his own kind of giftedness) is an equal member in the body of Christ (12:12-17). The Corinthians had so exalted certain kinds of gifts that they were, in effect, looking down on others who did not have the more spectacular kinds of giftedness.

A healthy view of such gifts would recognize that God is the One who bestows gifts according to His wisdom and sovereign choice (12:18). Gifts do not come by

¹⁸ Thomas, *Understanding Spiritual Gifts*, 7.

¹⁹ As 1 Corinthians 12-14 shows, the reality of the situation at Corinth was that their biggest fascination was with the gift of tongues.

human worth nor by personal virtue nor by self assertion. They come by the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit. All that anyone possesses has come as a gift (cf. 1 Cor 4:7), so there certainly is no place for pride.

A healthy view of such gifts would recognize that every kind of spiritual gift is necessary and important for the proper functioning of the body of Christ, in the same way that every part of the human body is necessary and important (12:19-22). The Corinthians were wrong for despising others and thinking that the more humble gifts were not as important as a gift like tongues.

A healthy view of such gifts would recognize that the people who have more the prominent kinds of giftedness (e.g., those with the gift of tongues) should go out of their way to be more considerate (i.e., they should bestow more abundant honor) towards those who have less prominent kinds of giftedness (e.g., those who are more gifted with “auxiliary” kinds of gifts such as (1) gift of helps/service, (2) gifts of mercy, or (3) gifts of giving [12:23-26]).

A healthy view of such gifts would recognize that the gifts which bring understandable, prophetic truth to the body of Christ are really much more significant than a gift like tongues which brings no edification apart from interpretation (12:27-30).²⁰ The gifts which produce and disseminate redemptive truth stood at the top of Paul’s list, but tongues—the gift which was so highly prized by the Corinthians—was listed last among the nine gifts Paul mentions in this text. What is the point? The point is that the Corinthians had a severely misplaced priority.

²⁰ Paul intentionally exposes the misplaced emphasis of the Corinthians in the gift list he provides. He does this by first enumerating three gifts which are those whose dominant purpose is that of bringing redemptive truth to the body of Christ: apostles and prophets are those who received direct revelation from God in the apostolic age and teachers are those who continue to disseminate and propagate this truth for the duration of the church age.

A healthy view of such gifts would recognize that there is a “more excellent way” than infatuation with a gift like tongues. What is that more excellent way? It is the way of love (12:31-13:13). Rather than holding tongues in such high esteem, the Corinthians should have been consumed with the idea of loving one another with godly love. Corinthian pride and self-absorption stood as glaring evidence that they were not walking in love, a failure that Paul would bring to their attention. It is within this present portion of 1 Corinthians that Paul shows the Corinthians that their infatuation with tongues was misplaced not only because of the fact that all gifts are important to the proper functioning of the body (ch. 12), but also because of the fact that there is a temporal inferiority to the revelatory and confirmatory gifts in comparison with other gifts and other Christian virtues.

The Temporal Limitations of Revelatory and Confirmatory Gifts. Paul begins chapter 13 by showing the Corinthians that no matter how greatly one may be gifted, if one does not have love for others there will be no value for the one who serves with that giftedness.²¹ The Corinthians lacked love and this was Paul’s rebuke for their lack of love.

²¹ This is not to say that an unloving person will not bring some benefit to others through the exercise of a gift. Others may receive some benefit from such service, but the unloving person will receive no reward for the unloving exercise of his gift. Paul demonstrates this truth in 1 Corinthians 13:1-3 by first talking about an actual gift (e.g., the fact that Paul actually did possess the gift of tongues and the fact that Paul did possess the gift of prophecy), then by talking hyperbolically about a hypothetical extreme (e.g., Paul says “even if I spoke with the *tongues of angels*,” a hyperbolic, non-real supposition). Furthermore, Paul did in fact possess the gift of prophecy, but even if a hypothetical situation existed in which he had all prophetic knowledge (the gift of the word of knowledge) so as to know all redemptive mysteries (a hyperbolic, non-real supposition) or even if he had the gift of faith so as to be able to move mountains (a hyperbolic, non-real supposition), if he did not have love he would have no profit. Paul has shown that giftedness is not a measure of spirituality and the unloving use of giftedness is not a basis for Christian rewards.

What does love look like? Paul proceeds to show them in verses 4-7. Love shows itself in humble service, the kind of thing lacking with the Corinthians. Love never seeks to exalt itself in arrogance. Unfortunately, this was a common problem with the Corinthians. In short, the Corinthians needed an attitude adjustment in regards to their views of others and the significance of spiritual gifts, especially in regards to the more prominent, spectacular gifts.

Paul provided correction by showing the Corinthians that there would come (some time within the church age) a point of cessation for these revelatory and confirmatory gifts that were so highly prized by the Corinthians. Revelatory gifts, like the gift of prophecy and the word of knowledge (which serve as representative of all revelatory gifts) will one day come to a decisive point of cessation,²² but love will never come to a point of cessation; hence, “love never fails” (13:8). Confirmatory gifts, like the gift of tongues (which serves as representative of all confirmatory gifts) will some day cease,²³ but “love never fails.” Clearly the Corinthians had a misplaced focus for they were fascinated with tongues, a gift of temporal inferiority.²⁴

²² When talking about the cessation of the revelatory gifts (i.e., prophecy and the word of knowledge) Paul uses a future passive form of the verb καταργέω (*katargeo*). Lexicographers demonstrate that the basic idea is that of causing something to become unproductive, to lose its power or effectiveness, to become powerless, to come to an end, to be wiped out, to be set aside or to be abolished (William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, "Based on Walter Bauer's Griechisch-Deutsches Wörterbuch Zu Den Schriften Des Neuen Testaments Und Der Frhchristlichen [Sic] Literatur, Sixth Edition, Ed. Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland, With Viktor Reichmann and on Previous English Editions by W.F. Arndt, F.W. Gingrich, and F.W. Danker.", 3rd ed. [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000], 525).

²³ Paul uses of the middle voice of παύω (*pauo*), “to cease,” rather than the future passive of καταργέω may suggest that the confirmatory gifts gradually came to a point of cessation during apostolic age instead of at a decisive point of cessation at the end of apostolic age (as one might legitimately infer from the future passive). It will be difficult to strongly document this, but the shift in verbs and voice suggest that this may be the proper understanding of what took place.

²⁴ One should consider the masterful argument of the apostle to show the relative unimportance of the revelatory gifts and confirmatory gifts: (1) love goes on eternally in the past and eternally in the future,

At this point, one thing is clear: Paul has brought attention to two classes of gifts and has declared that these two kinds of gifts will have a point of cessation for the body of Christ. Paul does not say that *all* gifts would come to such a point of cessation, for there certainly is an ongoing need for giftedness in the body of Christ.²⁵ He does, though, say that there would be a point of cessation for these two kinds of gifts.²⁶

This is not to say that the revelatory gifts and the confirmatory gifts were not important, not in the least. The fact is that these gifts were the means by which God brought the New Testament into existence. God’s prophetic messengers spoke this fresh prophetic truth as they were directly moved by the Holy Spirit, and as God Himself authenticated these messengers (and hence the message) by the miraculous testimony that came from the confirmatory gifts (cf. e.g., Acts 2:43; 4:33; 5:12; 2 Cor 12:12; Heb 2:3-4). The fact is, though, that as valuable as the prophetic gifts were, they still were only bringing little bits and pieces of prophetic truth. They never produced exhaustive prophetic knowledge; hence, Paul declares in verse 9, “we know in part and we prophecy

(2) faith began with the creation of Adam and remains until the New Creation when all will be in glory, (3) hope became necessary from the entrance of sin in Genesis 3 and remains necessary until the New Creation when all will be in glory, (4) spiritual gifts in general began at the day of Pentecost and continue with the church until the end of the church age with the rapture, and (5) revelatory gifts and confirmatory gifts also began at Pentecost, but will come to a point of cessation that will be before the end of the church age. Hence, the Corinthians, with their infatuation with a gift like tongues, had their focus placed on that which was least permanent. They should have made their focus on love which is the most permanent.

²⁵ Hence, the speaking gifts (evangelist, pastor, teacher, exhortation) and auxiliary gifts (mercy, giving, leadership/administration, helps/service) will remain active until the removal of the body of Christ at the time of the rapture.

²⁶ MacArthur points to evidence that the miraculous, sign gifts (like tongues and healings) had begun to diminish and even cease during the apostolic age for they were named in the earlier epistle of 1 Corinthians, but were not even mentioned in the later epistles of Romans and Ephesians and there is no evidence in any of the later books of the NT for any ongoing miraculous activity (*Charismatic Chaos*, 282). Mayhue points to the fact that it appears that “Paul’s frequency of healing declined with the passing of time” for there are a number of examples where he did not bring healing as seen in places like Galatians 4:13–15 where it mentions that Paul was ill, Philippians 2:25–30 where Epaphroditus was ill, 1 Timothy 5:23 where Timothy was ill, and 2 Timothy 4:20 where Trophimus was ill (Richard Mayhue, “Cessationism, “The Gifts Of Healings,” And Divine Healing,” *TMSJ* 14:2 [Fall 2003]: 284).

in part.” This does not at all mean that God’s prophetic activity was partially pure and partially erroneous.²⁷ It simply means that even the great revelatory gifts had their limitations for they only produced a partial prophetic understanding.²⁸ However, says Paul, the time would come when these “partial” gifts would themselves be “done away” (v. 10).²⁹ Paul says that this cessation would take place “when the perfect comes” (NASB). A major question, then, is what did Paul intend when he made this reference to “the perfect?”

Writers have set forth several major viewpoints to try and explain what Paul intended with this expression. One viewpoint is that this is a reference to the eternal state. John MacArthur would be representative of this view when he writes,

The perfect must be the eternal state, when we in glory see God face to face (Rev. 22:4) and have full knowledge in the eternal new heavens and new earth. Just as a child grows to full understanding, believers will come to perfect knowledge and no such gifts will be necessary.³⁰

²⁷ Grudem has a curious way of dealing with these issues, for on the one hand he makes the argument (as noted earlier in this paper) that NT prophets, i.e., those with the NT gift of prophecy, are capable of error (a viewpoint this writer strenuously rejects). On the other hand, he will make the statement that “The distinguishing characteristic of a true prophet is that he does not speak his own words or ‘words of his own heart,’ but words God has sent (*salach*) him to deliver (Deut. 18:18-20; Jer. 14:14; 23:16-40; 29:31-32; Ezek. 13:1-19; cf. Num. 16:28).” Grudem, “Scripture’s Self-Attestation and the Problem of Formulating a Doctrine of Scripture,” in *Scripture and Truth*, 22. Grudem rightly makes this claim of absolute authority and infallibility because in prophecy God is speaking His own words through His chosen prophet (which, in the context of this immediate quote, Grudem is restricting to the OT prophecy). The major question that arises is why Grudem would want to argue that such authority and infallibility are not also true with NT prophecy. This writer sees no justification for this kind of bifurcation and questions the reason why one would want to make such a claim. There certainly are many within the Pentecostal, Charismatic, and Third Wave camps who applaud this kind of explanation for it has become a theological justification for the multiplied examples of false prophecy that have arisen since the 20th century birth of the modern Pentecostal/Charismatic/Third Wave movements. A theological position that allows for fallible prophecy in the NT leaves the present day “prophet” essentially immune from prosecution when making false prophecies.

²⁸ Leon Morris, *1 Corinthians* (London: Tyndale, 1960), 187. As Morris puts it “God does not reveal everything, so that the prophet, no less than the sage, gives but a partial glimpse of truth.”

²⁹ Paul once again, as in verse 8, uses the future passive form of *καταργέω* (*katargeo*) to teach that there will be a cessation for such gifts.

³⁰ John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Study Bible*, electronic ed. (Nashville: Word Pub., 1997, c1997), 1 Cor 13:8.

A fair question one might pose is whether one can actually hold to a cessationist viewpoint, as MacArthur does, and also say that prophecy and the word of knowledge would continue on throughout the church age until the eternal state arrives.³¹

Another explanation is that “the perfect” is a reference to the second coming of Christ holding the idea that the prophetic gifts will remain active until the return of Jesus Christ.³² Interestingly, as R. Fowler White has noted, there are those who come from both the cessationist and non-cessationist camps who claim this explanation as part of their position.³³ Obviously both cannot be correct, and it is entirely possible that neither is correct.

A third explanation says that “the perfect” is a reference to the completed canon of Scripture that came about with the arrival and finishing of the Book of Revelation, hence producing a full canon of Scripture.³⁴ There are a number of conservative commentators who affirm this position, holding that the close of the NT brought about an

³¹ MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos*, 81. One of the reasons why MacArthur can take this approach is that he allows for a definition of prophecy and word of knowledge that is not revelatory in character. He essentially defines prophecy as preaching and word of knowledge as a keen ability to understand Scripture. His definition of prophecy (a definition that some would not concur with) permits him to deny that there is an ongoing reception of actual, fresh prophetic revelation directly from God. Hence, he still holds to a cessationist viewpoint.

³² F. F. Bruce, *The New Century Bible Commentary: I & II Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 128.

³³ R. Fowler White, “Richard Gaffin And Wayne Grudem On 1 Cor 13:10: A Comparison Of Cessationist And Noncessationist Argumentation,” *JETS* 35:2 (June 1992): 173. Gaffin, the cessationist, holds this view point but so does Grudem, the non-cessationist. According to Grudem, this text (1 Cor 13:10), provides “a clear biblical statement that Paul expected the gift of prophecy to continue through the entire church age and to function for the benefit of the church until the Lord returns,” 180.

³⁴ W. Harold Mare, “1 Corinthians,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 10, Frank E. Gaebelein, gen. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 268.

end to the prophetic and sign gifts. While each of these views has certain elements to commend them, each one of them falls short of satisfying Paul's argument.

There is a fourth explanation which does a much better job of explaining Paul's unfolding message. This viewpoint, which one might call "the mature body" view, holds that the prophetic gifts and sign gifts would come to a point of cessation when the body of Christ would come to a certain level of maturity.³⁵ The Tyndale Bible Commentary exemplifies this explanation:

In 13:10 Paul explained that the temporal gifts would pass away when the "end" came. There are three main views on the identity of the "end": (1) the complete canon of Scripture, (2) the second advent of Christ, and (3) the maturity of the body of Christ. The third approach is broad enough to embrace the relative maturity implied in the illustration of 13:11 as well as the absolute maturity that is depicted in 13:12. The church would be mature at the return of Christ (13:12) or at the point where continuing revelation would no longer be necessary (13:11). The spiritual gifts are for the present period of immaturity; the period before believers see God face to face.³⁶

There are several reasons why this view commends itself as being the best explanation for the meaning of "the perfect." The first reason is based upon the lexical evidence. Lexically speaking, there is good reason to say that a preferable translation of the Greek expression τὸ τέλειον (*to teleion*) in 1 Corinthians 13:10 is that of "maturity." The basic semantical force of the Greek term (whether in verbal or nominal form) is that of maturity. One lexical source suggests various ideas like "meeting the highest standard, complete, expert, being mature, full-grown, adult" or even being "fully developed in a

³⁵ A cessationist view (i.e., one that says that God brought an end to the revelatory gifts and miraculous confirmatory gifts by the end of the apostolic age) does not deny that earth will once again see a surge of prophetic and miraculous activity during the tribulation period (e.g., Rev. 11:3, 10; cf. Joel 2:28-32). This prophetic and miraculous activity, though, will not be due to the exercise of these gifts within the body of Christ, for the church will have already been taken into glory at the rapture immediately prior to the commencement of the seven-year tribulation.

³⁶ Robert B. Hughes, J. Carl Laney and Robert B. Hughes, *Tyndale Concise Bible Commentary*, Rev. Ed. of: *New Bible Companion*. 1990.; Includes Index., The Tyndale reference library (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, 2001), 556.

moral sense.”³⁷ It is not that the English word “perfect” may never be an acceptable English term for a particular context, but it is the fact that this term may obscure the real force of the true idea, especially in this present context. Thus, the force of this Greek expression has to do with a quantitative idea rather than a qualitative idea, a relative idea. This is the kind of understanding that needs to be emphasized when explaining 1 Corinthians 13:10. A qualitative idea of perfection would be, for example, like the idea of getting 100% on an examination versus anything less than 100% (for anything less is not “perfect”). This kind of qualitative idea, however, is not the force of τέλειος (*teleios*). The semantic force of this term has more to do with the quantitative idea of maturity as opposed to immaturity or fullness as opposed to incompleteness.

One can see this sense illustrated all throughout the Bible (even in the LXX translation of the OT), but one sees it most clearly in Paul’s usage. In Philippians 3:12, for example, after Paul had just told the Philippians in verse 11 about wanting to live a virtuous, resurrection kind of life, he immediately assured the Philippians that he had not yet arrived at that level of personal maturity (τετελείωμαι). This kind of personal maturity is something that believers should strive for, but Paul denied that he had personally arrived at this kind of spiritual maturity. Interestingly, though, three verses later in verse 15 Paul does claim to be among those who had already arrived at a certain kind of spiritual maturity (τέλειοι) in Christian thinking and living. This is the kind of humble maturity that recognizes that as long as a man is in this world he is still going to

³⁷ William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, "Based on Walter Bauer's Griechisch-Deutsches Wörterbuch Zu Den Schriften Des Neuen Testaments Und Der Frhchristlichen [Sic] Literatur, Sixth Edition, Ed. Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland, With Viktor Reichmann and on Previous English Editions by W.F. Arndt, F.W. Gingrich, and F.W. Danker.", 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 995.

have a struggle with the abiding sin nature.³⁸ The operative principle that one needs to see, though, is that the force of the Greek word τέλειος has to do with a relationship between immaturity and maturity. Sometimes this maturity is viewed from the perspective of the individual (e.g., Col 1:28), but in other places it has reference to a corporate and collective kind of maturity with the corporate body of Christ as the focus (e.g., Eph 4:13).

The passage in Ephesians 4:13 is especially important for the present discussion because of its parallel to the Corinthian context. Both passages utilize the concept of “the body” as the metaphor for referring to the corporate church (i.e., each passage has a corporate focus and not an individual focus). Both passages are dealing with spiritual gifts to the body of Christ. Both passages are showing that God used revelatory gifts to bring fresh prophetic truth to the body and that it is this prophetic revelation that brings edification and growth. Both passages emphasize that God produced the fresh revelation by revelatory gifts to the body of Christ (e.g., apostles and prophets), but also that this prophetic truth continues to disseminate throughout the body of Christ through various speaking gifts (i.e., evangelist, pastor, teacher, exhortation). Both passages also make reference to the fact that this edification and growth was working toward a point of “maturity” (1 Cor 13:10; Eph 4:13). According to the Ephesian passage, when the corporate church arrives at this “maturity,” Paul said that the church would no longer be characterized as being like children who are easily led astray and deceived by false doctrines (4:14-16). At this point, the key observation that one should notice is the fact that this maturity is something that takes place within the church age. It clearly is not

³⁸ This remnant of sin nature will abide until (A) the Christian dies and goes into the presence of Christ or (B) Christ first returns and with the rapture brings the church into a glorified resurrection condition (Phil 3:20-21).

referring to something like the death of the believer, the return of Christ, the eternal state, or a completed canon of Scripture. The maturity Paul refers to is clearly one which belongs to the body of Christ.

Paul's use of this term throughout 1 Corinthians confirms the idea that "maturity" is a preferable concept and translation for τὸ τέλειον (*to teleion*) in 1 Corinthians 13:10. Earlier in the epistle when he speaks about those who have come to a saving faith in Christ, he refers to them as "those who are mature" (τοῖς τελείοις).³⁹ That is, they are no longer those without spiritual maturity, but are now among those who have entered into a new stage of spiritual standing.⁴⁰ The relative concept of maturity shows itself once again in 1 Corinthians 14:20. Paul is giving the Corinthians yet another rebuke for their lack of spiritual maturity in their thinking about spiritual gifts. He gives them the following command: "Brethren, do not be children in your thinking; yet in evil be infants, but in your thinking *be mature*" (τέλειοι γίνεσθε, *teleioi ginesthe*). The contrast is explicit and clear. He does not want them to think and act as those who are immature, but as those who are mature.

The key point that the reader should take note of is this: the best rendering for the expression τὸ τέλειον (*to teleion*) in 1 Corinthians 13:10 is the translation "maturity." Specifically, Paul is speaking about a corporate maturity for the corporate body of Christ, the metaphor he has been using to describe the church all throughout 1 Corinthians 12-14 in his discussion about spiritual gifts.

³⁹ "Maturity" was the preferred translation of the NASB at this point.

⁴⁰ There is good contextual reason for believing that Paul's words may have included polemical jabs at the Corinthians with their vain delight in worldly wisdom, philosophical reasonings and eloquent speech. Paul thus reminds them that real maturity comes through faith in Jesus Christ.

A second factor that supports the mature body view is the fact, as noted in the Tyndale commentary, that this view has the contextual backing of both verses 11 and 12. Throughout his letters, Paul makes multiple statements showing that he expected an imminent return of Christ which would bring about the rapture of the church and hence a removal of the church from this earth.⁴¹ The truth is that if the return of Christ had come during the apostolic age as Paul expected, that would have ushered the church into a state of absolute prophetic knowledge. This is the very point that Paul illustrated in verse 12.

Paul also knew, however, that there was the distinct possibility that a delay in the *parousia* (i.e., the “coming” of Christ) would produce a situation that would allow for a gradual process of maturation within the body of Christ. The progressive unfolding of NT revelation would continue adding to the prophetic knowledge of the body, thus permitting a progressive process of edification and maturation for the corporate body of Christ. The church would thus grow from a state of doctrinal (and practical) infancy (which began at Pentecost) into a state of doctrinal and practical maturity. Furthermore, New Testament prophetic revelation would be the crucial element to help bring about this process of maturation. Then, once this maturity arrived, there would no longer be any need for those prophetic gifts (nor for the confirmatory gifts which bore witness to the prophetic messengers and authenticated this new message about the glorified Messiah) which were there to provide that NT revelatory truth. Verse 11, then, provides the immediate illustration to exemplify the concept that Paul stated in verse 10. In the same way that Paul himself grew from a state of infancy and immaturity into a state of

⁴¹ In 1 Thessalonians 4:15, 17 Paul includes himself as being part of those who will get caught up to heaven at the rapture. In Philippians 3:20 Paul says that he is among those who were eagerly awaiting the coming of Christ. In 1 Corinthians 15:50-58 Paul includes himself among those who will receive a transformation from this mortal realm into the immortal resurrection realm at the coming of Christ, a strong motivation for persevering faith (v. 58).

manhood and maturity, so too the church would grow and become mature, eventually eliminating the need for further prophetic knowledge. A number of NT scholars have pointed out that verse 11 provides this immediate illustration for the idea of gradual maturation.⁴²

This explanation flows very smoothly with the entire contextual argument. It also is an explanation that satisfies the reason why Paul gave two kinds of illustrations about how this process might unfold (vv. 11-12). This writer commends the mature body view as that which best explains Paul's intention.

There still remains a question, however, about what the nature of this maturity is, and when the arrival of this maturity took place. There is good reason to believe that Paul's parallel discussion of gifts in Ephesians 4:11-16 provides insight to these questions.

Paul's Teaching to the Ephesians

Space does not allow a detailed explanation of the entire Ephesian epistle, but it is crucial that one understand some of the contextual background to Paul's discussion about spiritual gifts in Ephesians 4:7-16 and how all of this relates to 1 Corinthians 13 and the doctrine of cessationism.⁴³

⁴² E.g., Robert L. Thomas, "1 Cor 13:11 Revisited: An Exegetical Update," *TMSJ* 4:2 (Fall 1993): 189-190; Donald G. McDougall, "Cessationism In 1 Cor 13:8-12," *TMSJ* 14:2 (Fall 2003): 177-213.

⁴³ One should be mindful of the fact that Paul wrote the book of 1 Corinthians while he was in Ephesus for a period of three years. Thus, it should not be surprising to consider the fact that he might have taught some of these same spiritual gifts truths to each group in an overlapping way: some of it got taught to the Ephesians in person; some of it got taught to the Corinthians at that same time in 1 Corinthians; and some of it got taught later when Paul wrote Ephesians during his first Roman imprisonment.

The Creation of Peace and Unity in the Church. In Ephesians 2:11-22 Paul gave the Ephesians a very significant explanation about the fact that the work of Jesus Christ and arrival of the church produced a radical change in relationship between the Jew and Gentile worlds. His point in making this expanded explanation was to emphasize the dispensational reality that in the body of Christ Jew and Gentile are one and have an absolutely equal spiritual standing in Christ. Before the church, the Gentiles were strangers and aliens to a covenant standing, but in Christ they are brought near (Eph 2:11-13). The point is this: Gentile Christians have the same standing in Christ as Jewish believers.⁴⁴ This was a staggering, new thought for the Jew—even the believing Jew—and one which was certainly unpalatable for the Jew who did not understand the nature of the church.

Paul goes on to say that the work of Christ produced “peace” (2:14: “For He Himself is our peace, who made both *groups into* one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall”), in particular, shows Paul, a peace between the Jew and the Gentile. Paul goes on to say that the cross of Jesus Christ has made “the two into one new man, *thus* establishing peace” (15). For the second time in two verses, Paul uses the word “peace” to describe this new relationship between the Jew and Gentile who have come into a union with one another in Christ, for in Christ in the “enmity” between the Jew and

⁴⁴ This was a staggering reality for the Jew to hear and as the NT shows, it was perhaps *the* major theological challenge of the apostolic age. As the NT shows, a number of those Jewish believers who had professed Jesus had problems in accepting the non Jew as a spiritual equal: (1) a difficulty in accepting the Samaritans (Acts 8), (2) a resistance to preach the gospel to the Gentiles (as seen by the way that God had to bring Peter a vision in Acts 10 to get him to see the point, and (3) an unwillingness to accept Gentiles even after God had already made it clear that they had an equal standing with the Jews through faith in Christ (Acts 10:34, 45, 47; 11:2-3, 17-18; 15; Gal 2:10-14).

Gentile world has been abolished (2:16).⁴⁵ The work of Christ brought in a new age for mankind in which Jew and Gentile, by their union to Christ in the body of Christ, now become “one new man.” The enmity that did separate is now gone and the two can be one in Christ, a unity that never existed as long as the Law of Moses was in force to set the Jews apart from the Gentiles.

What Paul is doing is giving the Ephesians an explanation of the nature of the church. The church is a spiritual body that consists of a union of every individual who has professed genuine faith in the glorified Savior. Jews and Gentiles have a new kind of union that never existed in ages past. As Paul goes on to explain in chapter three, this relationship is a new dispensational truth that had never before been foretold by OT prophets.⁴⁶ The fact is that OT prophets had never foretold this unique spiritual body, and so one must be careful about expecting that the early church would have automatically understood this relationship. The reality is that many, if not all, failed to understand this truth in the earliest days of the church. It was not until God’s spokesmen (like the Apostle Paul in particular) began unfolding this doctrine in the NT era that a proper understanding of this reality really began to unfold.

The Preservation of Peace and Unity in the Church. In chapter four Paul begins exhorting the Ephesians on the manner in which they are to live out this new standing in Christ. One of the things he commands them is that they should be “diligent to preserve

⁴⁵ Leon Morris, *Expository Reflections on the Letter to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 66. Morris highlights the fact that the work of Jesus Christ on the cross eliminated the “strong division that effectively prevented friendship or fellowship between them.”

⁴⁶ Cf. Eph 3:3-6: “[B]y revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief. By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; *to be specific*, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.”

the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (4:3). The careful reader will immediately be struck by the fact that Paul makes this reference to “the bond of peace” and the fact that there is a “unity” which has been produced in the church by the Holy Spirit. In this command, Paul is referring to the same peace and same unity that he had been describing in the preceding two chapters, the peace and unity that God created in the body of Christ when He brought the Jew and Gentile world together in the church. As Hoehner has noted,

This unity is portrayed by the bond between Jews and Gentiles who have become one new person in Christ. The bond consisting of peace is possible because Christ brought peace between these two former enemies (2:14-16). Hence, there is no exhortation to establish peace because it has been done in Christ.⁴⁷

As Hoehner notes, careful attention to this command in verse 3 shows that it is not that the church should create this unity, but rather that she should “preserve” this unity. God Himself created the unity at Pentecost (an ontological reality), but now He is commanding the church to preserve it (i.e., to live out a practical and functional unity).

Chafer’s comments on this issue are helpful:

This unity, it will be observed, is that already made by the Spirit and is not a unity which is formed when believers are faithful to each other. . . . That a unity is divinely accomplished and does exist is demonstrated by the seven cardinal factors which enter into it. These seven the Apostle asserts when he goes on to state, “There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.” . . . In His prayer for oneness (John 17:21-23) Christ said that through this unity for which He prayed the world would come to believe concerning Himself.⁴⁸

As Chafer notes throughout this section, the reality is this: in the Upper Room Discourse, Jesus Christ prayed for a spiritual unity among His people and this is exactly what He

⁴⁷ Harold Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 513.

⁴⁸ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1976), 5:159.

Himself brought into being on the Day of Pentecost when the Lord, by His Spirit, brought into existence an intimate union between all of His people, Jew and Gentile alike.⁴⁹

The Means for Peace and Unity in the Church. The discussion about spiritual gifts in verses 4:7-16 dovetails right into the whole discussion very nicely: (1) revelatory gifts bring this fresh prophetic truth that builds up the body of Christ,⁵⁰ and (2) the speaking gifts continue to disseminate this new truth for the working out of God's purposes of edifying the church and bringing her to maturity.⁵¹ The outworking of this divine purpose comes in the following verses where Paul describes the equipping of saints, the work of ministry, and the building up of the body of Christ (4:12). God's purpose has its ongoing outworking, then, in the way that "the holy Spirit gives the gift of teaching to those called to teach the church."⁵²

Paul then goes on to speak of a certain kind of goal in God's design when he refers to this process of maturation continuing "until we all attain to the *unity* of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ" (4:13).⁵³ The goal, says Paul, is growth towards

⁴⁹ Ibid., 158.

⁵⁰ E.g., the apostles and prophets of 4:11.

⁵¹ E.g., the evangelists, pastors and teachers of 4:11.

⁵² MacArthur, *The Master's Plan for the Church* (Chicago: Moody, 1991), 225. MacArthur emphasizes that this giftedness is not merely a natural ability, but rather is a "Spirit-given endowment."

⁵³ Ridderbos speaks of this "building up of the church" in the sense that the Paul was foreseeing the time when the church would become "full grown" over against its former status of being child like when yet "underage" (Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975], 271).

maturity.⁵⁴ It is crucial that one recognize that in this discussion about gifts and the edification of the corporate body of Christ, Paul clearly speaks about growth toward a maturity that will be reached within the church age. He is not speaking about the *parousia* when he talks about God's purposes,⁵⁵ but maturity within the church age.

Once again, the careful reader will immediately recognize in verse 13 that Paul is using terms that he has already used in the preceding context in verse 3, specifically the word "unity" (ἐνότητα, *henoteta*). It would seem that there is a good contextual reason for holding that this reference to "the unity of the faith" has a direct relationship to what Paul said ten verses earlier when he spoke about "the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."⁵⁶ To be specific, here in verse 13 Paul is explaining the fact that the practical unity of the church (i.e., the practical unity of the Jew and Gentile world) would come about when the church arrives at a doctrinal maturity through the teaching of fresh, NT, prophetic truth about the nature of God's redemptive work through Jesus Christ.⁵⁷ When

⁵⁴ Morris notes that Paul's use of the term τέλειον (*teleion*) is best understood as having the idea of maturity with the sense of having reached "an aim or end." The idea here is not the idea of perfection, but maturity (*Expository Reflections on the Letter to the Ephesians*, 129). Morris goes on to note that this kind of maturity will help the church from being deceived and led astray by some of the false teachings that were plaguing it (*Ibid.*, 129-130); Hoehner also emphasizes the idea that τέλειον (*teleion*) should properly be understood as "mature." The concept is that of "matured" as opposed to a child. . . . It cannot have the ethical sense of complete perfection, since this only comes at the *parousia* (2 Cor 4:13-5:10; Phil 3:20), but rather it has the ethical idea of fully grown or mature. This is in contrast to the immature and unstable children mentioned in the next verse" (*Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*, 554-555).

⁵⁵ Absolute ethical perfection certainly will come to the church at the *parousia*, but this is not what Paul is teaching here.

⁵⁶ In the NT, the term unity occurs only here in Ephesians 4:3 and 13. Morris notes this connection when he writes that "a few verses earlier he has spoken of being diligent to 'keep the unity of the Spirit' (v. 3)," but now "he speaks of unity as a goal to be pursued" (*Expository Reflections on the Letter to the Ephesians*, 128).

⁵⁷ Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*, 553. As Hoehner, notes, the focus here is on "a practical unity of faith in conjunction with the body of believers," the same unity that the church was commanded to preserve in verse 3, the unity that God created between Jew and Gentile in the body of Christ when He brought them together at Pentecost (513). The reader is asked to make special note of the fact that Paul's references to "unity" and "maturity" here in 4:13, actually here in the whole discussion

this maturity arrives, Paul goes on to say, the church will then no longer be as susceptible to the same kinds of doctrinal and practical problems as what characterized it throughout the apostolic age.⁵⁸

Hoehner brings attention to several very important exegetical details concerning Paul's meaning of this expression "mature" τέλειον, *teleion*). As he puts it, the maturity of the corporate church is what Paul has in mind here (i.e., it is not a focus on individual Christians). Paul's focus is on the "corporate body of believers" here.⁵⁹ Hoehner also draws the crucial connection that exists between Paul's words here in 4:13 and the earlier discussion in chapter two:

This is analogous to 2:15 where Jews and Gentiles were created into one new person (εἰς ἓνα καινὸν ἄνθρωπον) and brought into one body (2:16). The use of the generic ἄνθρωπος in 2:16 is to show that a new humanity has come into existence, whereas in the present context Paul uses a term used to distinguish between the sexes or in this case between a boy and an adult man.⁶⁰

Hoehner is right for drawing this connection to the former context, for all of this is part of one unfolding discussion. Too often there is a failure to see how the author (namely Paul) has been presenting one unfolding message. This discussion in 4:13 involving unity in the body and growth towards maturity must take into account Paul's discussion about the nature of the body that he gave earlier in chapter 2. O'Brien has noted this

about gifts and their purpose in 4:7-16, ties in with Paul's teaching about ecclesiology beginning back in chapter 2. To be specific, the maturity of 4:13 has to do with an ecclesiological, doctrinal maturity involving the church's understanding of how God has brought Jew and Gentile together in the body of Christ.

⁵⁸ Verses 14-16 describe the fact that once this maturity arrives, the same kinds of problems will no longer be present. This is not to say that the church came into a state of doctrinal or practical perfection, but only that the special problems that characterized immaturity would cease to hold sway.

⁵⁹ Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*, 555; O'Brien also emphasizes the fact that Paul's focus is not on individuals or individual local churches, but upon "God's people collectively." See Peter T. O'Brien, *Paul's Letter to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 305.

⁶⁰ Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*, 555.

crucial connection, pointing out that the unity and maturity being spoken of in chapter 4 must be seen in the context of Paul's discussions in chapter 2 where Paul spoke of God bringing together Jews and Gentiles as one new man in the body of Christ:

The unity which has been inaugurated in Christ through the events through the events described in 2:11-22, and which readers are strongly urged to *maintain* (i.e., 'the unity of the Spirit,' v. 3), is here spoken of as a unity to which they are to *attain*.⁶¹

The Nature of Peace and Unity in the Church. So, what is the term that Paul uses in verse 13 to describe this mature man? It is the Greek term τέλειον (*teleion*), the very same term that he used in 1 Corinthians 13:10. Doctrinal maturity, in particular a doctrinal maturity about the nature of the church and the reality that God has brought together the Jew and Gentile world as spiritual equals in the body of Christ, will usher in a significant change in God's redemptive program. As noted here in Ephesians 4:14-16 it will bring about an end to certain kinds of doctrinal problems that characterized its time of infancy and immaturity. As noted in 1 Corinthians 13:8-10, it will also usher in a new phase in the church age in which there would be an end of the revelatory and confirmatory gifts. Cessation of these two kinds of gifts will take place when this maturity arrives.

Summary

⁶¹ O'Brien, *Paul's Letter to the Ephesians*, 306. O'Brien sees this goal as being fulfilled in a final sense at Christ's coming but, as Paul explains in 4:14-16, this goal of maturity seems to be one that will find realization during the church age; Gaffin is guilty of the same partial error as O'Brien, for on the one hand he points out the connections between Ephesians 4 and 1 Corinthians 13, but he wrongly takes "maturity" in Ephesians 4:13 as referring to the *parousia*. He says, "Almost certainly the 'unity/fullness' of 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 about by Christ's return." See Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., "A Cessationist View," in *Are Miraculous Gifts For Today?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 55. Gaffin is correct in making the connections, but wrong in his interpretation of "maturity." As Ephesians 4:14-16 make clear, Paul is not describing a situation of the church in glory, but a church still on earth, yet having arrived at "maturity."

As this section has demonstrated, a survey of Paul's teachings on spiritual gifts indicates that God's design included a point of cessation for certain kinds of gifts. This does not mean that God brought an end to all gifts, but only certain ones, namely, the revelatory gifts which produced fresh prophetic truth, and the companion confirmatory gifts which God gave for attesting His prophetic messengers and message. God used the fresh prophetic revelation of the NT to bring doctrinal growth within the body of Christ. In this regard, one of the most significant areas of growth was in the church's own understanding of who the church is, a spiritual union of Jew and Gentile in which both groups hold an equal standing in Christ. God saves Gentiles and they obtain a full covenant relationship without ever having to become Jews or identify with the nation Israel.

This kind of truth was a revolutionary kind of message for the Jews. On the one hand, the Jews knew from the Bible that the coming of the Messiah would bring great blessings to the Gentiles, but from the OT prophetic perspective these blessings were always held to be in association with the nation Israel.⁶² It was not until God unfolded NT prophetic truth that the church eventually began to recognize the true nature of the body of Christ. As this truth came, the body of Christ grew and matured until, through the light of a completed NT canon, it came to the level of maturity that God had purposed to produce. Once this maturity arrived, God then brought about a cessation of those revelatory and confirmatory gifts that had helped produce this maturity.

⁶² That is, from the OT perspective, Gentile blessings always were shown to take place through Gentiles coming into a close association with Israel. The earliest Christians (e.g., the apostles) all knew this truth, but they did *not* realize in the early days of the church that Gentile salvation made them complete equals with the Jewish believers. This was the kind of doctrinal growth that the church had to grow into during the apostolic age.

John's Closing Words in the Apocalypse

The closing statements of John's Apocalypse contains the following warning: "I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book" (22:18-19). This book, the last book of the NT canon,⁶³ makes the claim that God will bring judgment on those who claim to add prophetic utterances beyond the closing of this book. Some would argue that this prohibition relates only to the Book of Revelation itself and not necessarily to the entire Bible, but in either case one is left with the same theological truth: God has stated that this prophetic book will be the last prophetic utterance of the church age.

This statement, then, would seem to harmonize very well with the other findings this paper has highlighted. To be specific, a cessation of the revelatory and confirmatory gifts took place once the corporate body of Christ arrived at a certain kind of maturity that God had purposed to accomplish. The need for further prophetic truth no longer existed, so God brought an end to the gifts that brought forth fresh revelation. It was the progressive unfolding of this NT truth that produced this growth in the church and once

⁶³ The dominant testimony of church history from the second century onward is that John received this message from God when he got sent into exile on the island prison colony called Patmos. The near universal opinion (accepting the Preterists who seek to deny this date for theological reasons) is that this took place in approximately the year A. D. 95 about one year before Domitian died. This date makes the Book of Revelation the last book of the NT canon and hence the last of God's prophetic revelation for the remainder of the church age. It would seem that there will be a surge of prophetic activity during the tribulation period, but this cannot be said to be the result of spiritual gifts to the body of Christ, for the church will already be in resurrected glory.

the growth achieved these purposed levels, God brought a cessation to those gifts. The Book of Revelation was that final point of cessation.⁶⁴

Summary

To summarize the biblical and theological observations, then, here are the findings: (1) One must take into account Paul's teachings about spiritual gifts in both 1 Corinthians and Ephesians to get a proper understanding of all that relates to spiritual gifts and the doctrine of cessationism (neither Paul's teaching in Romans 12 nor Peter's teaching in 1 Peter 4:10-11 add helpful data for the cessationism discussion). (2) Both portions of Scripture describe a growth process that leads to "maturity" in the body of Christ. (3) The contextual argument of Ephesians suggests that this maturity would produce a practical unity between the Jew and Gentile world and that the arrival of this maturity would help bring an end to certain doctrinal problems that characterized the church in her days of infancy and immaturity (cf. Eph 4:14-16). (4) Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 13:8-10 indicates that the arrival of this maturity would bring about a cessation of the revelatory and confirmatory gifts, the very gifts which produced the fresh revelation of the NT. (5) There is a close relationship, then, between the end of the canon and Paul's reference to "maturity" in 1 Corinthians 13:10, but only circumstantially. The relationship is that once maturity arrives, there simply will be no more need for additional

⁶⁴ Interestingly, Grudem (the non-cessationist) has stated that the inscriptional curse of Revelation 22:18-19 should probably not be restricted only to the Book of Revelation but should be seen as applying to the entire NT canon (i.e., "to the whole Bible that precedes it"). The implication, then, is that this is a warning "to all future generations that all the words that go before are God's very words, and to add to them or take away from them is to invite eternal death" (Grudem, "Scripture's Self-Attestation and the Problem of Formulating a Doctrine of Scripture," in *Scripture and Truth*, 49). One should not minimize the significance of this statement in view of Grudem's view of prophecy, for in these words Grudem has effectively articulated the cessationist viewpoint that holds that God is not giving further direct Revelation beyond the closing of the NT canon. It will not do for one to try and escape the implications of this by saying that supposed present-day prophets who make the claim of speaking God's words are in some kind of different category. There is absolutely no biblical justification for this kind of reasoning.

prophetic knowledge. (6) The prophetic gifts came to an abrupt end and that end was the closing words of the Book of Revelation. (7) There are hints in the NT that the confirmatory gifts (i.e., the sign gifts) may have even come to a gradual point of cessation some time before the cessation of the revelatory gifts. In either case, none of these supernatural gifts continued on past the end of the Book of Revelation and the close of the apostolic age.

Historical Considerations

There is one final line of reasoning that must be brought into the picture, and that is whether or not these biblical claims are in line with the actual experience of the church over these last 2,000 years. This section must by necessity be very brief, but the reader is asked to consider four particular lines of reasoning: (1) historical evidence from the present time period, (2) historical evidence from the medieval era, (3) historical evidence from ancient Eastern Christianity, and (4) historical evidence from ancient Western Christianity.

Present Day Testimony

By this expression, what the writer is asking the reader to do is to consider the present age to ask whether or not this present age has the same kind of prophetic and miraculous activity taking place as what took place in the apostolic age. One certainly hears various claims from the Pentecostal and Charismatic circles, but does the evidence of the present day support the idea that the same kinds of things are happening today as what happened then? Are people writing Scripture today? Do people today give infallible prophecies that are always true? Are people today performing miracles such as

took place during the apostolic age? Are people today speaking actual foreign languages they had never before learned? Despite the impassioned pleas of the Pentecostal and Charismatic world, the emphatic answer to all of these questions is a resounding “No!” None of these things are true of the present age and they have not been true since the close of the apostolic age,⁶⁵ a fact that other prominent theologians have noted throughout church history.⁶⁶ The honest truth of the matter is that the phenomenal, miraculous events of the apostolic age simply are not happening today as they did at that time.

Medieval Testimony

One piece of medieval testimony that is especially interesting comes from the writings of the noted Reformer and theologian John Calvin. In His Institutes, Calvin makes the following comments:

That grace (the gift of apostle) has ceased to be given. . . . Those miraculous powers and manifest workings . . . have ceased, and they have rightly lasted only for a time. For it was fitting that the new preaching of the gospel . . . should be illumined and magnified by unheard of and extraordinary miracles. . . . But the gift of healing, like the rest of the miracles, which the Lord willed to be brought forth for a time, has vanished. . . . The Lord is indeed present with his people in every age; and he heals their weaknesses as often as necessary . . . Still he does not put forth these manifest powers, nor dispense miracles through the apostle’s hands. For that was a temporary gift.”⁶⁷

⁶⁵ These statements are not to deny that God can perform miracles and still continues to do so according to the exercise of His sovereign will. This writer believes that God can and does continue to do miracles, and that these miracles may often be in association with the pleas of His children for direct, supernatural help. Thus, the God of miracles still remains, but the age of miracle workers with their miraculous gifts has ceased.

⁶⁶ In *The Healing Promise* theologian Richard Mayhue includes a very interesting chapter which includes interviews between Christian illusionist Andre Kole and Benny Hinn. After a two year effort to have Benny Hinn provide objective documentation of a genuine miraculous healing of an organic disease, Hinn failed to provide the evidence for even one single legitimate healing, (Eugene: Harvest House, 1994), 57-61.

⁶⁷ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book IV, ed. John T. McNeill, tr. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 1454, 1467.

This is fascinating testimony for several reasons. First, it is fascinating because of the clarity of the testimony: revelatory gifts (e.g., apostles) and confirmatory gifts (e.g., miracles) are no longer present, nor have they been since the apostolic age. A second observation that is worth noting is the fact that miracles had the purpose of authentication. Their dominant function was to confirm fresh prophetic revelation. A third fascinating observation from these words is the fact that John Calvin had no theological agenda in making these statements. It certainly is not as though he was trying to discredit Pentecostal or Charismatic Christianity, a movement that never even came into existence until 1906.⁶⁸ Historical testimony strongly supports the biblical findings which teach cessationism.

Early Testimony in the Eastern Church

Calvin is not alone in church history in making these claims. Early post-apostolic Christianity also provides the same kind historical testimony for cessationism. One of these early sources comes from one of the greatest preachers of church history, the great expositor and theologian John Chrysostom. Commenting on the fact that the gift of tongues ended with the apostolic age and the fact that his age (i.e., fourth and fifth century Christianity) knew very little about tongues, Chrysostom wrote the following:

This whole place is very obscure: but the obscurity is produced by our ignorance of the facts referred to and by their cessation, being such as then used to occur but now no longer take place. And why do they not happen now? Why look now, the

⁶⁸ In *A Theology of the Holy Spirit*, Fredrick Dale Bruner is just one of many historians/theologians who have noted that the Azusa Street Meetings of April 9, 1906 were essentially the beginning of the modern Pentecostal movement (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1998), 48. Thomas reminds the reader that an earlier event in Topeka, Kansas was also quite significant to the modern Pentecostal movement when he writes, “The current Pentecostal movement traces its origin to a revival at Bethel Bible College in Topeka, Kansas that began on January 1, 1901” (Robert L. Thomas, “The Hermeneutics Of Noncessationism, *TMSJ* 14:2 [Fall 2003]: 289).

cause too of the obscurity hath produced us again another question; namely, why did they then happen, and now do so no more?⁶⁹

Chrysostom lived between 345-407 and became the leading figure of Eastern Christianity in the fourth century as the Patriarch of Constantinople. He was a theological giant and highly respected for his exegetically-based, expository preaching. His testimony concerning tongues was that they ended with the apostolic age and never had been seen since. This is a powerful, historical testimony from a noted theologian who made these statements without any theological agenda to drive him. From a statement like this, it is clear that church history provides substantial support for the doctrine of cessationism, at least in this case from the realm of Eastern Christianity. Historical support for a cessationist position is not limited to the East, though, for one can also find early testimony for cessationism from the Western branch of Christianity as well.

Early Testimony in the Western Church

One of the most prominent theologians of the church age is Saint Augustine (354-430), the man who became the Bishop of Hippo in northern Africa. Like Chrysostom, Augustine lived in both the fourth and fifth centuries and was also a man of huge learning and wide influence. Like Chrysostom, Augustine was also widely recognized by the universal church and was also widely familiar with universal Christian beliefs.

Augustine made the following testimony about the gift of tongues and their cessation with the close of the apostolic age:

In the earliest times the Holy Spirit would fall upon believers, and they would speak in languages they hadn't learned, as the Spirit gave them utterance. This was a sign suited to the time. It was fitting that the Holy Spirit be signified by all

⁶⁹ John Chrysostom, *Homilies in First Corinthians: Homily XXIX and XXXVI*, as cited by Thomas Edgar in *Satisfied by the Promise of the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1996), 207.

languages, because the Gospel of God was going to spread over the whole earth by means of those languages. The sign was given and then passed away.⁷⁰

The testimony of Augustine on this issue is very clear: the miraculous gift of tongues was not operative in his day and age. Once again, church history has provided very clear and convincing evidence that the close of the apostolic age also brought about a cessation of the revelatory and confirmatory gifts. Augustine has particularly spoken on this issue of tongues, one of the confirmatory gifts, but the concept of cessationism is clearly present.

As a point of application, then, one should never feel, then, that a present-day stance on cessationism should somehow be viewed as novel or unloving towards the Pentecostal or Charismatic crowds.⁷¹ The Bible teaches the concept of cessationism and history has verified the reality of the issue.

Summary

This brief testimony from church history demonstrates what the biblical evidence declares: the close of the apostolic age brought about an end to the revelatory and confirmatory gifts. The theologians who made these statements had no theological axes to grind in what they said. They were simply making statements of fact: God's prophetic activity and His miraculous attestation of this prophetic activity were confined to the apostolic age and never went beyond it.

⁷⁰ Saint Augustine, *Love One Another My Friends: Saint Augustine's Homilies on the First Letter of John*, tr. John Leinenweber (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1989), 62-63.

⁷¹ It would seem that this is in fact how many today view the doctrine of cessation. It would appear that the widespread presence of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity has produced a situation where those who teach cessationism are now in the minority camp. Those who take this position are sometimes accused of being unloving, divisive, or at the very best narrow minded and closed-minded to the work of God in the present age. The rise and spread of Pentecostalism in twentieth century is what eventually produced this inversion of doctrine, but it certainly does not represent historic Christian orthodoxy.

Summary and Conclusions

In closing, this writer would hope to emphasize to the reader that these theological findings should in no wise cause the non-charismatic Christian to look down upon those in the Pentecostal or Charismatic circles. Without question, there are many within these camps who are both godly and sincere in their faith in Christ.

The writer does hope and pray, though, that this study will be a useful tool for spiritual growth for all who read it. The writer hopes and prays that the reader will consider the issue carefully, for it has been written with a fierce conviction that the Bible is God's inspired Word and that it speaks with clarity on the things God wants His people to know.