

EARNESTLY DESIRING PROPHECY: UNDERSTANDING AND OBEYING THE  
COMMAND OF 1 CORINTHIANS 14:1

By

Chadwick Haygood  
B.S., University of North Alabama, 2004

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Thesis Advisor: \_\_\_\_\_

Dr. Guy Prentiss Waters, Ph.D.

RTS Global President: \_\_\_\_\_

Dr. James Anderson, Ph.D.

## ABSTRACT

There is little debate among Christians today that God has given gifts to the church for her growth and maturation. There is a lot of debate, however, regarding what gifts remain active today and are to be exercised among the body of Christ. This debate has been long-standing and seems to have gained steam in recent years. While the belief in the continuation of all spiritual gifts seems to be gaining broader acceptance, others have been passionate at disproving such beliefs.

At the heart of this debate over spiritual gifts are two gifts: the gift of tongues and the gift of prophecy. Many gifts remain to edify the church, yet these two gifts spark heated debate among the Christian church. The intended use of these gifts, their revelatory nature, their role in the church's foundation, and their authoritative manner cause much division among Christians and Bible scholars.

There is no limit to the attention that can be given to these two gifts, but due to the Bible's clear indication of its importance and primacy, this thesis will be devoted primarily to examining the gift of prophecy. It is my conviction that the gift of prophecy, like all of God's gifts, has been given to the church for her edification until Christ returns. Prophecy described in the New Testament has undergone a fundamental change from its Old Testament counterpart. It no longer carries the weight of authority it once had and is a means by which God brings blessing to Christians. Therefore, God has commanded all Christians to earnestly desire prophecy for the building up of the church.

In examining the gift of prophecy, we will begin in chapter 3 by considering the work of the Holy Spirit generally: observing his role in salvation, holiness, and in giving gifts to the church. In chapter 4 we will examine spiritual gifts by specifically defining spiritual gifts,

determining their role in the church today, observing the arguments for the continuation and/or cessation of certain gifts, and then conclude by looking at the Bible's priority structure for spiritual gifts.

Chapter 5 will be dedicated to examining the critical passage of 1 Corinthians 12 through 14. In chapter 6 this thesis will narrow in on the gift of prophecy as we look at New Testament prophecy as compared with the Old Testament, as well examine prophecy as teaching, and revelation.

Lastly, in chapter 7 we will consider what it means to obey 1 Corinthians 14:1 which says, "Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy." This will be followed by concluding the thesis in chapter 8 at which time we will have come to understand that the New Testament gift of prophecy is one in which God gives revelation to the believer where he or she then communicates that revelation to others for their edification. While it is not authoritative in the same sense as Old Testament prophecy, God has commanded us all to pursue this gift for the benefit of the body of Christ.

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## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Christians are people who take the commands of God seriously. Prior to knowing Christ, the commands of God expressed in the Bible are considered by some to be burdensome, like a large weight that is impossible to carry. For others outside of Christ, the Bible's commands are considered archaic and irrelevant to daily living and the pursuit of joy. Christians, however, relate to God's demands differently. Our obedience to his commands brings us delight and peace. Rather than being a source of legalism, the Christian's pursuit of obedience is an expression of his or her love for Christ. Christians have a disposition toward God's commands that is radically different than an unbeliever's attitude.

One of the reasons a Christians looks at the Bible's instruction differently is because we know God's commands to be good. They are good for our individual lives, the lives of our families, the lives of those around us, and the lives within the church. They express God's wisdom and as we follow them, we anticipate the inevitable outcomes of blessing and joy.

Sadly, there are many times that Christians fail to obey God's commands. On one hand, disobedience may be the result of willful rebellion against God. On the other hand, disobedience may be the result of ignorance as we fail to know or recall the Bible's imperatives. These failures hinder our spiritual growth and, at times, will hinder the growth of others.

In 1 Corinthians 14:1, we read imperatives, that is commands from God that he is eager for us to obey. 1 Corinthians 14:1 says, "Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy." These commands demand our obedience as much as any other command of Scripture. Obedience to these commands, like obedience to all other commands, fosters our spiritual growth. Additionally, obedience to these commands will result in the spiritual growth of not only ourselves, but in the spiritual growth of the body of Christ.

Scripture defines Christians as “members” of the “body” of Christ.<sup>1</sup> Once saved, we are joined to Christ and each become members of his body. Scripture declares that Christ is the head of his body<sup>2</sup> and just as the physical body works in harmony because its members obey the head, so the body of Christ functions properly as we obey our head, Jesus Christ. Like our physical bodies, the body of Christ is capable of more than can be imagined. Through this body the Kingdom of God is advanced, Christians are made more like Jesus, sin is defeated, and despair is replaced with hope. This body, the body of Christ, is an amazing tool.

The strength of this body is contingent, to some extent, on our obedience to God’s commands, including the commands of 1 Corinthians 14:1. Unfortunately, among many churches, especially those considered “Calvinistic”, not every member is functioning at full strength. Members of the body are becoming weak because they are not being used. While there are many reasons why members of the body of Christ may go unused, a primary reason is a failure to obey 1 Corinthians 14:1. Neglecting these commands has led many believers to suffer from the absence of spiritual gifts, which God has given to the church for her edification.

God has given his people wonderful gifts that are to be used within the body. Like our hands, feet, eyes, and ears, we need each member using their gift appropriately in order for the church to fully accomplish its ministry. This point is articulated well by Wayne Grudem as he defined the intent of spiritual gifts this way: “Spiritual gifts are given to equip the church to carry out its ministry until Christ returns.”<sup>3</sup> Additionally John Frame said in his recently published systematic theology, “Now, if you are a believer in Christ, God has given you one or more gifts that the church needs for its ministry. If you are a pastor or other church leader, one of your chief responsibilities is to help your people identify their spiritual gifts, and then to stir up those gifts

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Corinthians 12:12

<sup>2</sup> Ephesians 5:23

<sup>3</sup> Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester, England: Zondervan Pub. House, 1994), p.1018

so that they can flourish in the body.”<sup>4</sup> The unfortunate reality is that there are many members in Christ’s body that have atrophied, are paralyzed, or are weak and no longer function. This weakness has hindered the body of Christ and prevented her from reaching her full potential.

What if I told you that God has given a gift to the church that would encourage those in despair? What if there was a gift that God intended to be used in the church to strengthen her, but had long been neglected? What would we do if we knew that God wanted us to pursue a particular gift because it was intended to be a particular blessing to the church? There is! He has! This gift is the gift of prophecy. God has given to the church the gift of prophecy and he has commanded that we earnestly desire to prophesy.<sup>5</sup> God has given this gift to the church so that she can be encouraged and cared for.

The church today is in need of understanding, seeking, and applying the gift of prophecy as the New Testament defines it. In the pages that follow, we will be examining the necessity of the Holy Spirit’s work within the body of Christ, the role of prophecy today, and the church’s need to apply this gift for sake of Christian growth and encouragement. We will also give attention to the varieties of interpretations offered by scholars regarding this important gift. As a result, we will come to understand that God has given the church very clear commands. 1 Corinthians 14:1 commands us to “pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy.” God’s desire is for us to joyfully obey these commands through which we can expect his body to grow and flourish.

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<sup>4</sup> John M. Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (New York, NY, United States: P & R Publishing, 2013), p.928

<sup>5</sup> 1 Corinthians 14:1

## CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

The topic of spiritual gifts in general and prophecy in particular are topics that have received a lot of attention throughout church history. There has been more than a little ink spilled over this issue and in recent years the attention devoted to it has only increased. In recent decades, the devotion to these topics has risen in large measure because of the prevalence of churches that claim to be “charismatic”, that is they believe that all of the gifts mentioned in Scripture are available to the church today. Both in defense and in opposition to this movement, contributions have been made from both pastoral and academic levels.

It is important to know that there are currently four views that have been adopted regarding the gifts of the Holy Spirit. They are: the cessationist view, the open-but-cautious view, the third-wave view, and the Pentecostal/charismatic view.<sup>6</sup> These views represent significant categories that classify contemporary understandings of the gifts. In some cases, only small nuances separate two groups. For example, the third wave and open-but-cautious view may find themselves in agreement on many things while holding small disagreements on certain aspects of the spiritual gifts, particularly in regards to contemporary application. Robert Saucy, representing an open-but-cautious view said, “My primary concern with the Third Wave position is the apparent assumption that the miraculous activity of the apostolic age should be normal for the church today.”<sup>7</sup> Considering the overlap of three views that argue for the continuation of all

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<sup>6</sup> These four views are articulated thoroughly in a book I will be referring to later entitled, *Are Miraculous Gifts For Today?: Four Views*, which is one book in a series edited by Wayne Grudem and Stanley Gundry. The contributors to this work are: Richard Gaffin, Jr. (cessationist), Robert Saucy (open-but-cautious), Samuel Storms (third wave), and Douglas Oss (Pentecostal/charismatic).

<sup>7</sup> Wayne Grudem and Stanley Gundry, eds., *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today? Four Views* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub., 1996), p. 226

spiritual gifts as well as our limited focus on the gift of prophecy, we will limit the scope of views to only two: the cessationist and continuationist<sup>8</sup> positions.

One of the most important contributions in defense of the cessationist position came from late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century theologian Benjamin Warfield. In his work *Counterfeit Miracles* he stated his aim clearly when he said, “My design is to state and examine the chief views which have been held favorable to the continuance of the charismata beyond the Apostolic age. In the process of this examination occasion will offer for noting whatever is needful to convince us that the possession of the charismata was confined to the Apostolic age.”<sup>9</sup> Warfield cited the post-Reformation era to reinforce his claim when he said, “The theologians of the post-Reformation era, a very clear-headed body of men, taught with great distinctness that the charismata ceased with the Apostolic age.”<sup>10</sup> Throughout this work Warfield makes a strong case that historical interpretations lean heavily toward a cessationist understanding. While interacting with contrary claims, he uses arguments from church history to validate his claim. Of Chrysostom Warfield said, “Every variety of miracle properly so-called Chrysostom declares to have ceased.”<sup>11</sup>

Warfield’s claim of the cessation of certain “miraculous” gifts is found to be in agreement with John Calvin. In his famous *Institutes of the Christian Religion* he stated, “But that gift of healing, like the rest of the miracles, which the Lord willed to be brought forth for a time, has vanished away in order to make the new preaching of the gospel marvelous forever. Therefore, even if we grant to the full that anointing was a sacrament of those powers which

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<sup>8</sup> In a subsequent chapter we will see how the term “charismatic” is an unhelpful one in referencing spiritual gifts. Therefore, the term “continuationist” will be used to designate the view popularly known as “charismatic”.

<sup>9</sup> Benjamin Warfield, "Warfield - counterfeit miracles," monergism.com, 1918, accessed August 12, 2016, [https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/warfield/warfield\\_counterfeit.html](https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/warfield/warfield_counterfeit.html).

<sup>10</sup> Ibid

<sup>11</sup> Ibid

were then administered by the hands of the apostles, it now has nothing to do with us, to whom the administering of such powers has not been committed.”<sup>12</sup>

One of the main difficulties in understanding and applying the gift of prophecy is clarifying the terms related to prophecy as well as agreeing to a definition. It is critical to clarify terms and definitions. This is true of many spiritual gifts listed in Scripture and regarding prophecy is it very important.

Following in Warfield’s footsteps, there have been many cessationist defenses put forward. The late Edmund Clowney, a former president of Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, made his argument in his work *The Church*. When introducing his argument, Clowney writes a very helpful clarification when he said, “All that we are is his: we cannot sharply distinguish between new supernatural gifts of the Spirit and ‘natural’ gifts renewed by the Spirit. We have nothing that we have not received.”<sup>13</sup> It is common to view a number of gifts as “miraculous” while considering others as “natural” or “ordinary” gifts. As Clowney points out, however, each gift is supernatural as it is a gift given by the Holy Spirit and necessarily “supernatural.”

Clowney made the argument that miraculous signs were given to the Apostles in order to validate their work. Clowney wrote, “Paul’s calling as an apostle was validated by the miraculous signs he could perform, the ‘signs of an apostle’ (2 Cor. 12:12).”<sup>14</sup> Additionally, Clowney adds, signs and wonders were given to attest to the revelation of Jesus. He said, “The New Testament provides us with the reason for the signs and wonders worked by the Lord and

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<sup>12</sup> John Calvin and John T McNeill, *Calvin: Institutes of Christian Religion: Vol 1*, 23rd ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster/John Knox Press,U.S., 1960), p.1467

<sup>13</sup> Edmund P. Clowney, *The Church: The Use of Scientific Research in the Church’s Moral Debate*, ed. Gerald Bray (Downers Grove, IL, United States: Inter-Varsity Press,US, 1995), p.240

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.* p.241

his apostles. They attest God's revelation in Jesus Christ, and its transmission through witness of his resurrection, inspired to communicate his word to the church."<sup>15</sup>

In this work Clowney also makes a case for the authority of prophecy. The issue of authority is important for determining the place of prophecy today as well as the relationship between New and Old Testament prophecy. Clowney said, speaking of the gift of distinguishing between spirits mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12, "it is the very authority of prophecy that makes discrimination of spirits so essential." According to Clowney, the gift discrimination was important *because* prophecy was authoritative and therefore the church had needs for discerning between true and false prophets.

Clowney also saw equivalency between Old Testament and New Testament prophecy, a point which we will observe to be critical in the discussion of New Testament prophecy. In *The Church* Clowney contends, contrary to Wayne Grudem, that the New Testament use of the word "prophet" ought not be distinguished from inspired prophets. He said, "the word 'prophet' was used in the Greek version of the Old Testament, and continues to be used in the New Testament for those who promised the coming of Christ. God sent prophets and apostles to his people of old (Lk. 11:49), and Jesus will send prophets and wise men and scribes (Mt. 23:34). That promise of Jesus and the Pentecost sermon of Peter indicate how the Old Testament concept of prophecy carried over into the New Testament Church. Agabus, a New Testament prophet, introduces his message with the Old Testament formula 'Thus says the Holy Spirit'."<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> *ibid* p.243

<sup>16</sup> Edmund P. Clowney, *The Church: The Use of Scientific Research in the Church's Moral Debate*, ed. Gerald Bray (Downers Grove, IL, United States: Inter-Varsity Press, US, 1995), p.258

Richard Gaffin contributes to the debate as well through his article “Where Have All the Spiritual Gifts Gone?”. In this work Gaffin reminds us, like others before him, that the question is not whether or not all the gifts of the Holy Spirit have ceased. The argument is solely over the continuation of a limited number of gifts. In this work Gaffin makes a case for the cessation of the office of Apostle, an argument that many noncessationists will agree with, and along with that cessation makes a case for the cessation of prophecy as well.

More strongly, however, is Gaffin’s argument in his book *Perspectives on Pentecost*. In this work he states plainly that “there are several lines of the New Testament teaching that in their convergence point to the conclusion that prophecy and tongues were intended to cease prior to Christ’s return and have in fact ceased.”<sup>17</sup> A main factor for Gaffin is the prophet’s role in in the foundation of the church. He says, “Ephesians 2:20 associates ‘prophets’ with the apostles in the activity of foundational witness or word ministry.”<sup>18</sup> Gaffin does describe the church as a gathering of prophets but offers this particular understanding as he says, “according to the New Testament *all* believers are prophets: the whole church is a congregation of prophets...in the sense that the words of God are accessible to all, and that by the Spirit’s work the laws and statutes of the covenant are a testimony written in the hearts and manifested in the lives of all.”<sup>19</sup>

Yet another voice in the choir of cessationism comes from one of my favorite teachers and preachers, Sinclair Ferguson. In his book *The Holy Spirit* Ferguson says, “The New Testament, however, also emphasizes that the ascended Christ strengthens the unity of the

p.89

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<sup>17</sup> Richard B. Gaffin, *Perspectives on Pentecost* (United Kingdom: EVANGELICAL PRESS, 2004),

<sup>18</sup> *ibid* p.93

<sup>19</sup> *ibid* p.59

diverse members of his body by gifts of another kind which are also given through the Spirit.”<sup>20</sup> Like Warfield, Ferguson makes the claim that certain gifts were given for the express purpose of attesting to the ministry of the Apostles. This purpose necessarily meant that they were given for only a temporary period. He says, “Apostles exercised a foundational ministry which was given appropriate attestation. As a result, manifestation of the Spirit which served as confirmations of new revelation appeared in the churches. The primary function of these gifts itself suggests their impermanence.”<sup>21</sup>

Ferguson also addresses the gift of prophecy. While responding to Wayne Grudem, who we will soon consider, Ferguson argues in favor of the inspirational nature of prophecy. He makes the case that Grudem’s argument for two levels of prophecy is unconvincing.<sup>22</sup> Confronting Grudem’s argument from the example of Agabus, Ferguson says, “Luke’s record certainly gives no indication that Grudem’s hypothesis was the working assumption of either Agabus or Paul.”<sup>23</sup>

Another notable and outspoken voice for the case of cessationism has been pastor John MacArthur of Grace Community Church in California. His earlier book *Charismatic Chaos* was an effort to point out doctrinal errors and unbiblical practice of the charismatic movement. By critiquing the “Word of Faith” movement as well as criticizing the authority of experience over Scripture, MacArthur brings to light the errors of preachers such as Benny Hinn and other evangelists on television. Some of MacArthur’s more recent efforts, however, have directed the critique at those he would call friends. In 2013 he hosted the “Strange Fire” conference to

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<sup>20</sup> Sinclair B. Ferguson, *Holy Spirit: Contours of Christian Theology* (United States: Inter-Varsity Press, US, 1997), p.207

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*, p.226

<sup>22</sup> *ibid.* p.220

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* p.216

confront what he considered to be continuationist errors. In his book by the same title, *Strange Fire*, he says, “charismatic theology has made no contribution to true biblical theology or interpretation; rather, it represents a deviant mutation of the truth.”<sup>24</sup> In his estimation, it is the exaltation of experience over truth that drives charismatic understanding. He says, “Pentecostals and charismatics elevate religious experience over biblical truth. Though many of them pay lip service to the authority of God’s Word, in practice they deny it.”<sup>25</sup>

When speaking directly of the gift of prophecy, MacArthur also confronts the idea proposed by Grudem of two types of prophets. He says, “In an attempt to circumvent the clear-cut parameters of Scripture (and maintain some form of modern prophecy), charismatics are forced to propose there are actually two kinds of prophets described in Scripture – one that was infallible and authoritative, and a second kind that was not.”<sup>26</sup> He goes on to say, “Charismatics may claim that New Testament prophets were not held to the same standard as their Old Testament counterparts, but such an assertion is entirely without warrant.”<sup>27</sup> For MacArthur, the idea of a contemporary gift of prophecy working in the church in a manner that is non-authoritative is unbiblical and therefore unnecessary.

There are more than a few contributions to the cessationist understanding of spiritual gifts. Among them are prominent theologians who have offered clear defenses of cessationist positions. In particular, dealing with the gift of prophecy, it is apparent that these contributors consider the gift of prophecy to have a temporary, authoritative, and foundational role in the

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<sup>24</sup> John MacArthur, *Strange Fire: The Danger of Offending the Holy Spirit with Counterfeit Worship* (Nashville, Tennessee, USA: Nelson Books an imprint of Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2013), p.xvi

<sup>25</sup> *ibid*, p.16

<sup>26</sup> *ibid*, p.118

<sup>27</sup> *ibid*. p.119

church. Against this view are several careful and notable pastors and theologians. Among them are: Sam Storms, John Piper, Don Carson, Gordon Fee, and Wayne Grudem.

Sam Storms is a pastor and theologian who has written on the issue of spiritual gifts. In his article “Why I Am A Continuationist” he said, “beginning with Pentecost and continuing throughout the book of Acts, whenever the Spirit is poured out on new believers they experience his charismata. There is nothing to indicate these phenomena were restricted to them and then. Such appear to be both widespread and common in the NT church. Christians in Rome, Corinth, Samaria, Caesarea, Antioch, Ephesus, Thessalonica, and Galatia experience the miraculous and revelatory gifts. It's difficult to imagine how the NT authors could have spoken any more clearly about what new covenant Christianity is supposed to look like. In other words, the burden of proof rests with the cessationist. If certain gifts of a special class have ceased, the responsibility is his or hers to prove it.”<sup>28</sup> In examining 1 Corinthians 13:8-12 he says, “Here Paul asserts that spiritual gifts will not ‘pass away’ (vv. 8-10) until the coming of the “perfect.” If the “perfect” is indeed the consummation of God's redemptive purposes as expressed in the new heaven and new earth following Christ's return, we can confidently expect him to continue blessing and empowering his church with the gifts until that time.”<sup>29</sup>

When writing about the gift of prophecy, Storms says, “In 1 Corinthians 14:25, Paul described prophecy as disclosing the ‘secrets’ of the heart. On numerous occasions, I have witnessed this phenomenon. Men and women who believed their thoughts, their fantasies, their sins and their plans for the future were secretly hidden, even from God, were shocked by the

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<sup>28</sup> Sam Storms, "Why I am a Continuationist," [thegospelcoalition.org](http://thegospelcoalition.org), January 22, 2014, accessed August 12, 2016, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/why-i-am-a-continuationist>

<sup>29</sup> *ibid*

revelatory activity of the Spirit. Paul describes only one of the many ways a person might respond to the prophetic gift: ‘He will fall on his face and worship God, declaring that God is certainly among you.’<sup>30</sup>

Popular pastor John Piper makes a similar case when he says, “Prophecy in this ‘third category’ (the New Testament gift of prophecy) is a regulated message or report in human words usually made to the gathered believers based on a spontaneous, personal revelation from the Holy Spirit for the purpose of edification, encouragement, consolation, conviction or guidance but not necessarily free from a mixture of human error, and thus needing assessment on the basis of the apostolic (Biblical) teaching and mature spiritual wisdom.”<sup>31</sup> Piper makes the claim that the New Testament gift of prophecy continues to be valid and useful for the church today and therefore should be earnestly desired.

New Testament scholar Don Carson wrote an important work entitled *Showing the Spirit: A Theological exposition of 1 Corinthians 12-14*. This work has proved to be substantial in the defense of continuationist pneumatology in general and prophecy specifically. In this work, Carson critiques the argument of Benjamin Warfield. As noted earlier, Warfield argued that certain gifts were given for the attestation of Jesus and the Apostles. In response to that argument, Carson says, “This argument stands up *only* if such miraculous gifts are theologically tied *exclusively* to a role of attestation; and that is demonstrably not so.”<sup>32</sup> According to Carson,

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<sup>30</sup> Sam Storms, *The Beginner’s Guide to Spiritual Gifts* (New York, NY, United States: Bethany House Publishers, 2013), p.109

<sup>31</sup> John Piper, "The new testament gift of prophecy," [desiringgod.org](http://www.desiringgod.org), March 26, 1990, accessed August 12, 2016, <http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/the-new-testament-gift-of-prophecy>.

<sup>32</sup> D. A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit: A Theological Exposition of 1 Corinthians 12-14*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 1987), p.156

the gifts of the Holy Spirit are not only connected with the attestation of the ministry of Jesus but also with the new age that Jesus' work on the cross is inaugurating.

In addition to his defense of the ongoing relevance of all the Spirit's gifts, Carson says of prophecy that, "when Paul presupposes in 1 Corinthians 14:30 that the gift of prophecy depends on revelation, we are not limited to a form of authoritative revelation that threatens the finality of the canon...Such prophecies must still be evaluated, and they are principally submissive to the apostle and his gospel."<sup>33</sup> This distinction is important to understanding New Testament prophecy.

The most extensive writing on the work of the Holy Spirit from a continuationist perspective may come from theologian Gordon Fee. His commentary work on 1 Corinthians has been an important work on this issue. His book *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* is perhaps an even more thorough treatment of Paul's understanding of the Spirit's work. This extensive work adds to the conversation on prophecy. Regarding authority, Fee says, "But it is also clear that it does not have independent authority, the combined evidence of 1 Thes 5:21-22 and 1 Cor 12:10 and 14:29 indicates that all prophesyings must be 'discerned' by the Spirit-filled community."<sup>34</sup> Unlike others, Fee understands New Testament prophets to be in succession to those in the OT but to be of a different nature. He says, "That also means that he undoubtedly saw the 'New Testament prophets' as in the succession of the 'legitimate' prophets of the Old Testament...But the *nature* of the prophecy was also understood to be of a different kind, precisely because of their present eschatological existence."<sup>35</sup> Like Carson, the work of the

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<sup>33</sup> *ibid.*, p.164

<sup>34</sup> Gordon D Fee, *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (United States: Hendrickson Publishers, 2009), p.891

<sup>35</sup> *ibid.* p.892

Holy Spirit takes on new significance as it represents the new eschatological reality among the church subsequent to Christ's resurrection.

In addition to Storms, Piper, Carson, and Fee, Wayne Grudem has made significant additions to writing on prophecy. His *Systematic Theology* has proven to be a significant work in addressing many theological topics while also addressing the continuation of the Spirit's gifts. Two chapters are devoted to spiritual gifts, while one entire chapter devotes significant attention to the gifts of prophecy and tongues. More specifically, Grudem has written on the gift of prophecy as described in the New Testament in his work *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today*. For those considering the issue of prophecy, Grudem cannot be ignored.

Grudem claims that Old Testament prophets find similarity with New Testament Apostles, not New Testament prophets. He says, "There is little if any evidence for a group of *prophets* in the New Testament church who could speak with God's very words and who had the authority to write books of Scripture for inclusion in the New Testament. On the other hand, there is a very prominent group of people in the New Testament who do speak with absolute divine authority and who did write most of the books of the New Testament. These men are called not 'prophets,' however, but 'apostles.' In many ways they are similar to the Old Testament prophets."<sup>36</sup>

According to Grudem, a prophecy as spoken of in places like 1 Corinthians 14 is a revelation from God that comes to an individual spontaneously. It is something distinct from teaching. It does not have the same authority as Scripture. A prophecy can be mixed with error. In his systematic theology, Grudem defined prophecy this way, "telling something that God has

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<sup>36</sup> Wayne Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today* (Wheaton, IL: Good News Publishers, 2000), p.27

spontaneously brought to mind.”<sup>37</sup> Grudem makes the case that prophecy is a blessing to the church, it has been given for the ongoing edification of the body of Christ and therefore should be desired and pursued.

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<sup>37</sup> Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester, England: Zondervan Pub. House, 1994), p.1049

### CHAPTER 3 THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The thought of earnestly desiring spiritual gifts may sound frightening or irresponsible to some. Both of these thoughts can be traced to the despicable abuses that seem to accompany such earnestness for spiritual gifts. The abuses are articulated well by pastor John MacArthur as he says, “Preposterous examples of charismatic recklessness grow more and more numerous as the fringes of the movement spin out of control. If anything, radical charismatics have increased in influence and visibility, with no end in sight.”<sup>38</sup>

In light of such abuses, it is easy for us to misunderstand or even disobey commands such as 1 Corinthians 14:1. An imperative to earnestly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy, may seem to be out of place in the modern confusion of the work of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, in order to properly heed the command of 1 Corinthians 14:1, we need to consider the variety of ways that the Holy Spirit is at work. In order to properly understand and apply *any* gift of the Holy Spirit, it is imperative that we understand the works of the Holy Spirit in a broad sense. What has the Spirit been sent to do? What is his function among the Godhead? By answering these questions, which this chapter will endeavor to do, we will have a proper framework to begin understanding spiritual gifts generally and the gift of prophecy properly. By setting the spiritual gifts in the overall framework of the work of the Holy Spirit, we may earnestly desire spiritual gifts to the degree that pleases God. In other words, by considering the work of the Holy Spirit in general, we will recognize our need for the Holy Spirit to know God and advance in godliness, while at the same time not elevating our pursuit of spiritual gifts to a

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<sup>38</sup> John F MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1993), p. 16

level of priority God does not intend. By considering the Holy Spirit's work of salvation, holiness, and giving gifts we will avoid the abuses of radical charismatics while being faithful to the commands of Scripture to earnestly desire spiritual gifts.

### Salvation

The first thing that we must understand regarding the nature of the work of the Holy Spirit is that he has one primary aim in all of his work, to glorify Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit is not given to bring attention and glory to his own name. Rather, his aim is to bring about awareness and glory to the name of Jesus. This is the testimony of Jesus in John 16:12-15, "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you."

Jesus taught the disciples that subsequent to his death they would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. He would guide the disciples into all truth, declare to them the things to come, and also glorify Jesus. Therefore, the gifts that he gives to the body are aimed at glorifying Jesus. Spiritual gifts are not meant to glorify the recipient of the gift but are meant to point us and others to Jesus Christ. Faithfulness to obey 1 Corinthians 14:1 is necessarily motivated by a desire to glorify Jesus Christ.

The primary way that the Holy Spirit works to glorify Jesus is through his work in salvation. Through salvation the Holy Spirit works to open eyes to the beauty and Lordship of Christ. We read this in 1 Corinthians 12:1-3 where it says, "Now concerning spiritual gifts,

brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed. You know that when you were pagans you were led astray to mute idols, however you were led. Therefore, I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says ‘Jesus is accursed!’ and no one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except in the Holy Spirit.”

How does one profess Christ as Lord? One confesses Jesus Christ to be Lord by the work of the Holy Spirit. Apart from his work of grace in the hearts of his people, no one would declare that Jesus is Lord. As Gordon Fee notes in his commentary, “Paul’s point, of course, is that just as formerly they had been ‘led about and carried away’ to mute idols, so now one who is possessed by the Spirit of the living God is led to the ultimate Christian confession: ‘Jesus (the crucified one) is (by his resurrection) Lord (of all the universe).’ As in 2:10-13, only one who has the Spirit can truly make such a confession because only the Spirit can reveal its reality.”<sup>39</sup> Sinclair Ferguson said it this way, “The central role of the Spirit is to reveal Christ and to unite us to him and to all those who participate in his body.”<sup>40</sup>

The work of the Holy Spirit is to lead one to confess Jesus Christ as Lord. Through the work of salvation, one’s eyes are made aware to Christ’s Lordship. One apprehends Christ’s death on the cross, the power of his resurrection, and his rule over all. Through the work of the Spirit, one submits to Christ’s rule and acknowledges him as Lord over all. This is the Holy Spirit’s primary work in the world, to glorify Jesus by bringing people to acknowledge his Lordship. As Gordon Fee said, “The presence of the Spirit in power and gifts makes it easy for God’s people to think of the power and gifts as the real evidence of the Spirit’s presence. Not so

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<sup>39</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 8th ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, William B. Publishing Company, 1959), p.582

<sup>40</sup> Sinclair B. Ferguson, *Holy Spirit: Contours of Christian Theology* (United States: Inter-Varsity Press, US, 1997), p.100

for Paul. The ultimate criterion of the Spirit's activity is the exaltation of Jesus as Lord. Whatever takes away from that, even if they be legitimate expressions of the Spirit, begins to move away from Christ to a more pagan fascination with spiritual activity as an end in itself."<sup>41</sup>

It is important to note the miraculous nature of salvation. This work is miraculous in that only through the Holy Spirit does a person yield in submission to Jesus Christ. Does God work miraculously in the world today? Yes, the very nature of salvation proves that God intervenes in the world today through the person and work of the Holy Spirit. The church is dependent on the Holy Spirit in order to bring glory to Christ through salvation. In order to earnestly desire spiritual gifts, we must primarily yearn for the Holy Spirit to apply Christ's redemption to his people, because this is his primary activity. Yet this work of salvation is not the sum total of the Spirit's work. Not only does the Spirit work to make a person aware of Christ but he also works to move his people toward Christlikeness through the process of sanctification.

### Holiness

In addition to the work of salvation that the Holy Spirit works in those whom God has chosen, the Holy Spirit has been sent into the world to work among God's people to cultivate holiness, or Christlikeness. The ongoing progress of becoming more like Jesus Christ is commonly referred to as sanctification. However, Gordon Fee makes the case that the Apostle Paul's use of this terms is typically in a different sense, referring to salvation. He says, "Paul's primary use of the term 'sanctification' is also a metaphor for conversion, not as a reference to a

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<sup>41</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 8th ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, William B. Publishing Company, 1959), p.582.

work of grace following conversion. This can be seen most clearly in 2 Thes 2:13, where Paul refers to the Thessalonians' experience of salvation as being effected 'by sanctification of the Spirit and belief in the truth.'<sup>42</sup> Therefore, it is appropriate to say that the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of a Christian is a work of holiness.

When God calls us to himself, he calls us to lives of holiness because he is holy. Ephesians 1:4 says, "even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him." Again in 1 Peter 1:15-16 we read, "but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy.'" The call of God to come to him is one where we find grace, mercy, forgiveness, eternal life but also a life of holiness. His command for all of his people is to be holy.

In this pursuit of holiness, God has not left us alone to fight for ourselves. Instead, God has given us help in the person of the Holy Spirit. John Frame says, "the main emphasis of the Bible in the Spirit's work is that he gives us what we need for our present, continuing walk with God."<sup>43</sup> The Holy Spirit plays an important role in the life of every Christian to give us what we need to grow in holiness. Frame goes on to say, "He is the One who equips us to serve God, to preach, to pray effectively. He regenerates us, gives us the new birth. He sanctifies us, makes us holy in thought and deed, putting to death the sins of the body."<sup>44</sup> R.C. Sproul also adds, "the term *holy* is attached to His title because of the particular task the Spirit performs in our redemption. Among the persons of the Trinity, the Spirit is the principal actor who works for

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<sup>42</sup> Gordon D Fee, *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (United States: Hendrickson Publishers, 2009), p.859

<sup>43</sup> John M. Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (New York, NY, United States: P & R Publishing, 2013), pp.925-926

<sup>44</sup> *ibid*, p.926

our sanctification, enabling the process by which we are conformed to the image of Christ and made holy.”<sup>45</sup>

Considering the work of holiness that the Holy Spirit does in a Christian’s life, it is not surprising that the Apostle Paul summarizes the Christian walk as one done “by the Spirit.” In Galatians 5:16 we read, “But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.” Gordon Fee says, “The central role of the Spirit is most clearly spelled out in Gal. 5:13-6:10, where with a series of verbs modified by the phrase *pneumati*, Paul urges the Galatians to ‘make a completion’ by means of the same Spirit by whom they had been converted. They are commanded to ‘walk by the Spirit,’ and promised that those who so walk ‘will not fulfill the desires of the flesh.’”<sup>46</sup>

Holiness is an ongoing work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of God’s people. From the moment of our conversion, we are set on a course of becoming more like Jesus Christ. It is impossible to accomplish this work on our own, so God has sent the Holy Spirit to indwell his people in order that they may grow in holiness. With his help, sin is put to death and we become holy in our thoughts and deeds.

This work of holiness is especially important to the obedience of 1 Corinthians 14:1. It is the unfortunate reality that many so-called continuationists commend themselves for their devotion to the spiritual gifts but have erred in understanding the Holy Spirit as one who works holiness in his people. John MacArthur says, “The tragic irony is that the movement labeling itself ‘Spirit-filled’ is notorious for sexual immorality, financial impropriety, and ostentatious

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<sup>45</sup> R. C. Sproul, *Who Is the Holy Spirit?* (Orlando, FL, United States: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2012).

<sup>46</sup> Gordon D Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (United States: Hendrickson Publishers, 2009), p.879

worldliness in the lives of its most visible members.”<sup>47</sup> In order to faithfully obey Scripture, Christians must be diligent to obey *all* of Scripture. While God has commanded us to earnestly desire spiritual gifts, we must just as earnestly pursue holiness that follows in Christ’s pattern.

### Giving Gifts

In addition to making us holy, the Holy Spirit gives gifts to Christians. The gifts that he gives, to whom he gives them, and when he gives them is his prerogative. Twentieth century preacher Martyn Lloyd-Jones said, “It is He who decides and not us. He decides what particular gift to give to a particular person. And I wonder whether we are going too far when we say that the idea of the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit in the dispensing of these gifts carries implicitly not only the *which* and the *to whom* but also the *when*; that it is the prerogative of the Holy Spirit, in His sovereign power as one of the three Persons in the blessed holy Trinity, not only to decide what person and what gift, but also when to give particular gifts, to withhold them if He chooses and to give them if He chooses. He is Lord.”<sup>48</sup> The New Bible Dictionary likewise says, “The gifts are distributed by the Holy Spirit according to his sovereign will (1 Cor. 12:11) and an individual believer may receive one or more of them (1 Cor. 12:8f.; 14:5, 13).”<sup>49</sup>

1 Corinthians 12:7-11 says, “To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to

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<sup>47</sup> John MacArthur, *Strange Fire: The Danger of Offending the Holy Spirit with Counterfeit Worship* (Nashville, Tennessee, USA: Nelson Books an imprint of Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2013), p.205

<sup>48</sup> Lloyd-Jones, David Martyn. *God the Holy Spirit*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1997. Print.

<sup>49</sup> Putman, W. G. “Spiritual Gifts.” Ed. D. R. W. Wood et al. *New Bible dictionary* 1996 : 1130. Print.

another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.” God, through the Spirit, gives gifts to men and women for the building up of the church. The gifts that he gives are from God and are an extension of his very self. As pastor Sam Storms says, “Spiritual gifts are not God bestowing to His people something external to Himself. They are not some tangible ‘stuff’ or substance separable from God. Spiritual gifts are nothing less than God Himself in us, energizing our souls, imparting revelation to our minds, infusing power in our wills and working His sovereign and gracious purposes through us.”<sup>50</sup>

Our gifts are given to us according to the grace of God, who Himself works in a number of ways, gifts, and ministries. Gordon Fee makes this plain when he writes, “Everything, absolutely everything - gifts, persons, church - owes its origin to the one God who works all things in all of His people.”<sup>51</sup> The gifts that God has given to the church are the product of his gracious and wise design. For his own purposes and with an aim to bring glory to his own name by building up his church, God has given spiritual gifts to the church. Therefore, the church should be diligent in our desire for these gifts as well. We do not have the prerogative to willfully ignore his command to earnestly desire the spiritual gifts. Instead, we should humbly and gratefully desire these gifts that God has given to us.

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<sup>50</sup> Wayne Grudem and Stanley Gundry, eds., *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today? Four Views* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub., 1996), p.13

<sup>51</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 8th ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, William B. Publishing Company, 1959), p.583

The Holy Spirit works to accomplish many things on the earth for God's glory. He works to bring glory to Jesus Christ by opening people's eyes to the beauty and Lordship of Christ. Additionally, the Holy Spirit works in the lives of those who have been redeemed to grow them in holiness or Christ likeness. Lastly, the Holy Spirit gives gifts to the church as he sovereignly desires. As we have seen, the gifts of the Holy Spirit are God himself in us. We should conclude, therefore, that putting 1 Corinthians 14:1 in proper perspective means that we will yearn for the exaltation of Christ through salvation and expect his ongoing work to produce lives that conform to the image of Jesus Christ. Only then may we appropriately follow the commands of 1 Corinthians 14:1. Reorganizing these priorities is contrary to the Holy Spirit's mission in the world.

## CHAPTER 4 SPIRITUAL GIFTS

We have considered the priorities of the Holy Spirit in chapter 3. Now, we must move forward into more specific consideration of spiritual gifts. Once again, our objective is to understand the command of 1 Corinthians 14:1, “Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy.” It will be impossible to obey this command, however, if we are unable to discern what is a spiritual gift. Additionally, we will fail to be earnest in our desire for spiritual gifts if we do not recognize our need for such gifts. Lastly, we will neglect this command in some degree if we believe some gifts to have ceased. Therefore, this chapter will be devoted to determining these three things about spiritual gifts: the definition, the need, and the continuation or cessation of spiritual gifts. By considering these three aspects we will be well positioned to examine the theological and practical implications of the Spirit’s gifts to the church while also positioning ourselves to faithfully obey the command of 1 Corinthians 14:1.

### Definition

Determining a precise definition of spiritual gifts is not as easy as we might expect. Unfortunately, the Bible does not offer a specific definition for us. However, a definition is not beyond our reach. As noted earlier, Wayne Grudem defines spirituals gifts as “any ability that is empowered by the Holy Spirit and used in any ministry of the church.”<sup>52</sup> As one can tell, this definition is quite generic, and rightfully so. *Any* ability that is used for the good of the church and under the governance of the Holy Spirit is a spiritual gift. Richard Gaffin says it this way,

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<sup>52</sup> Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester, England: Zondervan Pub. House, 1994), p.1016

“whatever about me is taken over in the service of Christ and his church – and that even includes aptitudes and capacities I had before I became a believer – is a spiritual gift.”<sup>53</sup> It is clear that even unbelievers have been given abilities and talents. Unbelievers may be able teachers, hospitable, and merciful. Once converted, an unbeliever may carry these gifts into the service of the church. Now, empowered by the Holy Spirit, these gifts that were once used in rebellion against God are used in the edification of his church.

The Bible lists spiritual gifts in no less than five places: 1 Corinthians 12:8-11, 1 Corinthians 12:28, Romans 12:6-8, Ephesians 4:11, and 1 Peter 4:11. While extensive, these lists are by no means exhaustive. John Frame says, “The biblical lists of gifts are not exhaustive. Notice that they differ from passage to passage. Any divinely given ability that edifies the church should be considered a spiritual gift. I wouldn’t hesitate to say that the ability to sing in worship is a spiritual gift. Or the ability to cook meals for church gatherings or mercy ministry. Or the ability to manage finances for the church body.”<sup>54</sup> The variety of each list as well as the definition noted by Gaffin and Grudem earlier ought to lead us to consider, as Frame states, that there are a wide variety of gifts not necessarily limited to the gifts mentioned in Scripture.

There have also been several attempts to categorize spiritual gifts. One such attempt has been to consider certain gifts “charismatic” while considering others to be “noncharismatic”. This distinction is intended to separate certain miraculous gifts from what is commonly considered “non-miraculous”. Richard Gaffin appropriately says that this distinction is not helpful. He says, “To refer to the gifts and activities listed in Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, and

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<sup>53</sup> Wayne Grudem and Stanley Gundry, eds., *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today? Four Views* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub., 1996), p.62

<sup>54</sup> John M. Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (New York, NY, United States: P & R Publishing, 2013), p.928

Ephesians 4 as charismatic in order to distinguish them from presumably noncharismatic gifts and function in the church is at best misleading.”<sup>55</sup> Gaffin, instead, says that the whole church is charismatic. He says, “‘gift’ (*charisma*) is a flexible term, used in various senses. These, however, are not unrelated. The consideration that apparently underlies and unifies them, giving rise to the flexibility noted, is this: every gift (*charisma*) is a manifestation of grace (*charis*), and any manifestation of grace can be termed a gift.” And then Gaffin adds, “Both in its origin and continuation the church exists solely by God’s grace. The *whole* church, then, in *all* its aspects and activities is properly seen as charismatic. From an individual angle, the life of faith is such by grace (Eph. 2:8) and so in its entirety, from beginning to end, charismatic.”<sup>56</sup>

When we consider the definition of spiritual gifts, it is important to see that all of the abilities given to the people of God and empowered by the Holy Spirit for the good of the church are gifts. Additionally, each of these gifts are manifestations of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:7) and are gifts of God’s grace. Terms such as “charismatic” and “noncharismatic” prove to be unhelpful at best if not misleading. Therefore, a helpful definition for spiritual gifts would be: any ability given by the gift of God’s grace that is empowered by the Holy Spirit and used for the edification of the church. This is what 1 Corinthians 14:1 has called us to desire. By earnestly desiring the spiritual gifts, we are commanded to earnestly desire those gifts of God’s grace that will be used to edify the church.

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<sup>55</sup> Richard B. Gaffin, *Perspectives on Pentecost* (United Kingdom: EVANGELICAL PRESS, 2004),

<sup>56</sup> *ibid.* p.47

## Need

Though we are now aware of how to define a spiritual gift, unless we are also aware of the church's need for them, we will not desire them. Does the church need these gifts? Considering the confusion that surrounds these gifts, would it not be better to disregard these abilities? Are they truly necessary? From our definition above, one phrase demonstrates the need the church has for spiritual gifts: "used for the edification of the church." God has given manifestations of the Spirit to each Christian for the good of the body of Christ. God's intended purpose is the good of all. This is made plain throughout the Bible. In Romans 12 we read, "For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another." In the context of spiritual gifts, the metaphor of the body is introduced to emphasize the importance of each part for the benefit of the whole. Gaffin states, "From beginning to end gifts are given for service in the church. There are no exceptions to this consideration."<sup>57</sup> God has designed the physical body to be interdependent. In order to function properly, our bodies depend on the variety of its members. The body of Christ has been similarly designed.

1 Corinthians 14:1 commands us to not only desire spiritual gifts, but to earnestly desire spiritual gifts. If we fail to recognize the interdependence that is foundational to the nature of the church of Christ, our desire will be less than earnest. However, by understanding the need of the body of Christ we will discover and earnestness in our desire. This desire is an expression of our love for the fellow members of the body of Christ. Therefore, recognizing our interdependence is critical to our pursuit of spiritual gifts.

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<sup>57</sup> Richard B. Gaffin, *Perspectives on Pentecost* (United Kingdom: EVANGELICAL PRESS, 2004), P.

This need, however, is challenged as some would contend that certain gifts that the Holy Spirit has given the church have passed away, or ceased in their function. This view does not contend that the body is made up of independent members who do not need one another. Rather, the cessationist view believes that certain gifts of the Spirit are no longer necessary as they have served their function in the church. This view, along with the continuationist view will now be considered because of its importance in interpreting the need of prophecy today.

### Continuation or Cessation

Cessationism is generally the belief that what may be considered the “supernatural” or “miraculous” or “sign” gifts that we read about in Scripture and see at work in the New Testament have ceased. A cessationist generally believes that gifts like healings, miracles, tongues, interpretation of tongues, and perhaps even a specifically defined form of prophecy has ceased. A cessationist believes that these gifts ended when the ministry of the Apostles ended and therefore they are no longer present in the church. Also, due to their absence it is determined that there is no reason to seek after these gifts. The reason many cessationist believes this is because they hold the view that these gifts were given for the purpose of validation Christ, the Gospel, the Apostles, and Scripture. They believe that these gifts were used through Jesus as a validation that He was the coming Messiah and to demonstrate that His kingdom had indeed come through Christ.

Likewise, God gave these gifts to Apostles. God gave the Apostles these gifts to validate that they were truly from God and that their message was from God. This was especially important as the Apostles began to write authoritatively to the churches they ministered to. What they wrote, which eventually became the Scriptures that the church has

today, needed validating if those readers would accept it as true, from God, and authoritative. Therefore, God granted these gifts to them so that his Word would be accepted and given its proper place. Sinclair Ferguson says, “Consistent with this pattern, the work of Christ and the apostles was confirmed by ‘signs and wonders’.”<sup>58</sup> He goes on to say, “Consistent with this is the way in which these unusual phenomena serve as confirmatory signs of genuine apostolic ministry. For Paul they are among ‘the things that mark an apostle – signs, wonders, and miracles’.”<sup>59</sup> Additionally, Gaffin writes, “Within the New Testament the only specific instances of the actual exercise of these gifts [healing and working of miracles], given by the ascended Christ, are documented in Acts. But these (whether by the apostles themselves, by those they laid hands on, or by others), as noted above, accompany the unique and finished apostolic spread of the gospel that concerns Luke.”<sup>60</sup> Now that the church has the Word in its completed form, according to this position, the church no longer needs these gifts. The cannon has now been closed, there is no adding to Scripture and the message of a preacher or one declaring anything from the Lord can and should be validated, not by gifts, but by Scripture. Scripture is the highest authority and everything, including signs and wonders, should be measured by it. There is now no need for the validating ministry of these signs and wonders and so the cessationist rejects that these miraculous and sign gifts are necessary for the church today.

Taking into account the use of gifts as a validation of Jesus Christ, the Apostles and Apostolic message, as well as the message of the Scriptures, it is important to take into account the foundational work of the Apostles and these gifts associated with them. In other words,

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<sup>58</sup> Sinclair B. Ferguson, *Holy Spirit: Contours of Christian Theology* (United States: Inter-Varsity Press, US, 1997), p. 225

<sup>59</sup> *ibid*

<sup>60</sup> Wayne Grudem and Stanley Gundry, eds., *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today? Four Views* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub., 1996), p.42

during these times of validation, a foundation was being laid and during such time the need for these gifts arose. Gaffin cites Ephesians 2:20 to make this case, “Ephesians 2:20...points to the temporary, noncontinuing role of the apostles in the life of the Church. Their place was in the foundational era of the Church's history. Their function was to provide revelatory, infallibly authoritative, canonical witness to the consummation of salvation history in Christ's finished work. That function does not belong to the superstructure period to follow but provides the completed basis on which that superstructure, as it continues to be built, rests.”<sup>61</sup> Additionally, Gaffin adds, “the distinction, apostolic-postapostolic is not imposed on the New Testament and church history, but is given by the New Testament itself. The Pastoral Epistles, in particular, are written to make provision for the postapostolic future of the church.”<sup>62</sup> Sinclair Ferguson agrees when he says, “The continuationist-restorationist view does not take sufficient account of the fact that the New Testament itself divides the last days into apostolic and post-apostolic dimensions or periods. There is a foundation-laying period, marked by the ministry of the apostles and prophets, and there is a post-foundational, post-apostolic period in view. It should not surprise us that phenomena occur in the former period which are not designed to continue beyond it, and more than the miracles of Moses, Elijah or Elisha continued to be performed by their gifted successors.”<sup>63</sup> Thomas Schreiner likewise says, “Paul says the church is ‘built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets’ (Eph. 2:20). I conclude that all we need to know for salvation and sanctification has been given to us through the teaching of the apostles and prophets, and

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<sup>61</sup> Richard Gaffin, "Where Have All the Spiritual Gifts Gone?," *Modern Reformation*, 2016, accessed August 12, 2016, <http://www.modernreformation.org/default.php?page=articledisplay&var1=ArtRead&var2=422&var3=main>.

<sup>62</sup> Richard B. Gaffin, *Perspectives on Pentecost* (United Kingdom: EVANGELICAL PRESS, 2004), p.90

<sup>63</sup> Sinclair B. Ferguson, *Holy Spirit: Contours of Christian Theology* (United States: Inter-Varsity Press, US, 1997), p.229

that this teaching is now found in the Scriptures. Now that God has spoken in the last days through his Son (Heb. 1:2), we don't need further words from him to explain what Jesus Christ has accomplished in his ministry, death, and resurrection. Instead, we are 'to contend for the faith that was delivered to the saints once for all' through the apostles and prophets (Jude 3)."<sup>64</sup>

This foundation, upon which the church has been and continues to be built, has been established and therefore the need for the gift of apostle has ended. According to some, so has the need for prophecy ended. Again, Schreiner says, "If the gift of apostleship has ended, then other gifts may have ceased as well, since the foundation has been laid by the apostles and prophets (Eph. 2:20). I conclude from this point that the gift of prophecy has ended also, for the prophets identified here are the same sort mentioned elsewhere (cf. 1 Cor. 12:28; Eph. 3:5; 4:11). The early churches didn't have the complete canon of Scripture for some time, and hence an authoritative and infallible prophetic ministry was needed to lay the foundation for the church in those early days."<sup>65</sup> Gaffin also says, "In terms of the deed-word correlation that marks the giving of revelation throughout redemptive history, their witness is the foundational witness to the work of Christ; to the once-for-all work of Christ is joined a once-for-all witness to that work. Here is the matrix for the New Testament canon, for the emergence of a new body of revelation to stand alongside what eventually becomes the Old Testament. With this foundational revelation completed, and so too their foundational role as witnesses, the apostles and, along

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<sup>64</sup> Thomas Schreiner, "Why I am a Cessationist," [thegospelcoalition.org](http://thegospelcoalition.org), January 22, 2014, accessed August 12, 2016, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/why-i-am-a-cessationist>.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

with them, the prophets and other associated revelatory word gifts, pass from the life of the church.”<sup>66</sup>

In light of such arguments, however, we must consider a rebuttal by Sam Storms as he says, “To suggest that Ephesians 2:20 has in view *all possible prophets* active in the early church does not measure up to what we read about this gift in the rest of the New Testament. It would require us to believe that all those who prophesied on the day of Pentecost and in the years following, ‘sons and daughters...young men...old men...servants, both men and women,’ were laying the foundation of the church. The cessationist is asking us to believe that the long-awaited promised in Joel 2 of the unprecedented outpouring of the Holy Spirit on ‘all people’ (Acts 2:170, with its resultant revelatory activity of dreams, vision, and prophecy, was exhaustively fulfilled in only a handful of individuals whose gifting functioned in an exclusively foundational, initiatory, and therefore temporary fashion! Does this theory adequately explain the text?”<sup>67</sup>

Also, 1 Corinthians 14:1 seems to inherently contradict the idea of prophecy working solely in a foundational role in the church. Again, Storms says, “Are we to believe that Paul exhorted all believers in every church to earnestly desire that they exercise foundational significance for the universal church? (1 Corinthians 14:1, 39) On the contrary, prophecy is to be desired because its purpose is to communicate revelation from God that will ‘encourage’ those who are discouraged, ‘comfort’ those who are disconsolate, and ‘strengthen’ those who are weak and untaught. (1 Corinthians 14:3)”<sup>68</sup> If this command was obeyed as Paul encouraged, many would have exercised the gift of prophecy and, according to Gaffin, would have worked to

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<sup>66</sup> Wayne Grudem and Stanley Gundry, eds., *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today? Four Views* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub., 1996), p.44

<sup>67</sup> *ibid*, p.79

<sup>68</sup> *ibid*, p.80

contribute to the foundation of the church. Storms adds, “There must have been thousands upon thousands of revelations and prophetic utterances throughout the hundreds of churches over the course of the years between Pentecost and the close of the New Testament canon. Are we to believe that this multitude of prophetic words constituted the once-for-all foundation of the church?”<sup>69</sup> It seems best to conclude that the instruction of 1 Corinthians 14:1 intended to exercise a role in the church that went beyond the foundation.

We must be careful to recognize that a cessationist does believe that the Spirit is active to convict of sin, draw people to Jesus, open one’s eyes to understand the Word of God, and even give us gifts, except gifts mentioned before such as healing, miracles. A cessationist believes that miracles happen and people are indeed healed. Richard Gaffin says, “I do not deny that God heals (miraculously) today. He may choose to do so, no matter how hopeless and terminal a prognosis is medically, in response to the individual and corporate prayers of his people. James 5:14-16, for instance, points us to that, no matter how we settle the details of their interpretation.”<sup>70</sup> One who, like Gaffin, considers themselves to hold a cessationist position does not do so in an effort to limit God or “put God in a box”, but instead contends that certain gifts are no longer necessary for the building up of the church. Schreiner agrees as he says, “What about miracles and healings? First, I believe God still heals and does miraculous things today, and we should pray for such. Scripture isn’t as clear on this matter, and thus these gifts could exist today. Still, the primary function of these gifts was to accredit the gospel message, confirming that Jesus was both Lord and Christ. I doubt the gift of miracles and healings exists

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<sup>69</sup> *ibid*, p.81

<sup>70</sup> Wayne Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today* (Wheaton, IL: Good News Publishers, 2000), p.42

today, for it isn't evident that men and women in our churches have such gifts. Certainly God can and does heal at times, but where are the people with these gifts? Claims for miracles and healings must be verified, just as the people verified the blind man's healing in John 9. There is a kind of biblically warranted skepticism.”<sup>71</sup>

An additional reason given by cessationists is in regards to the interpretation of 1 Corinthians 13. Some would argue that from this passage it is indicated that certain gifts have ceased. According to the interpretation held by some, it is believed that the “perfect” of 1 Corinthians 13:10 refers to the canon of Scripture and once the canon was completed, the “partial”, that is prophecy, tongues, and knowledge passed away. Sinclair Ferguson, while not holding this position himself, makes this point when he said, “Paul’s statement that ‘when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears’ has sometimes been understood by cessationists to refer to the completion of the canon of Scripture, and with it the cessation of the special gifts of which prophecy, tongues and revelatory knowledge are representative.”<sup>72</sup> This interpretation, however, is unconvincing.

It is better to understand that the coming of perfection as mentioned in verse 10 refers to the second coming of Christ that the church is still awaiting. Sam Storms says, “Here Paul asserts that spiritual gifts will not “pass away” (vv. 8-10) until the coming of the “perfect.” If the “perfect” is indeed the consummation of God's redemptive purposes as expressed in the new heaven and new earth following Christ's return, we can confidently expect him to continue

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<sup>71</sup> Thomas Schreiner, "Why I am a Cessationist," [thegospelcoalition.org](http://thegospelcoalition.org), January 22, 2014, accessed August 12, 2016, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/why-i-am-a-cessationist>.

<sup>72</sup> Sinclair B. Ferguson, *Holy Spirit: Contours of Christian Theology* (United States: Inter-Varsity Press, US, 1997), p.226

blessing and empowering his church with the gifts until that time.”<sup>73</sup> Verse 12 points this out when Paul says, "For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known." The church is awaiting a day when our knowledge will be similar to God's. God knew Paul completely. He was aware, and is aware, of Paul fully and completely. There is coming a day when we will know, not omnisciently, but free from the need of mediations like prophecy or tongues. We will be free from inability to understand God and we won't be limited as we are today. John MacArthur, an outspoken cessationist and popular pastor, said of 1 Corinthians 13:10 and 12 that, “The believer’s entrance into the Lord’s presence best fits Paul’s use of ‘perfect’ in 1 Corinthians 13:10. This makes sense of Paul’s later statement in verse 12 about believers seeing Christ ‘face to face’ and possessing full knowledge – descriptions that cannot be realized this side of glory.”<sup>74</sup>

While this argument against a cessationist objection to the continuation of all spiritual gifts is compelling, it is not watertight. Schreiner says, “Doesn't 1 Corinthians 13:8-12 teach that the gifts last until Jesus comes again? Certainly this text teaches that the gifts could last until Jesus returns. There's no definitive teaching in the Bible that they've ceased. We might even expect them to last until the second coming. But we see hints from Ephesians 2:20 and other texts that the gifts played a foundational role. I conclude, then, that 1 Corinthians 13:8-12 permits but doesn't require the gifts to continue until the second coming. And the gifts as they are practiced today don't fit with the biblical description of these gifts.”<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Sam Storms, "Why I am a Continuationist," [thegospelcoalition.org](http://thegospelcoalition.org), January 22, 2014, accessed August 12, 2016, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/why-i-am-a-continuationist>.

<sup>74</sup> John MacArthur, *Strange Fire: The Danger of Offending the Holy Spirit with Counterfeit Worship* (Nashville, Tennessee, USA: Nelson Books an imprint of Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2013), p. 149

<sup>75</sup> Thomas Schreiner, "Why I am a Cessationist," [thegospelcoalition.org](http://thegospelcoalition.org), January 22, 2014, accessed August 12, 2016, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/why-i-am-a-cessationist>.

Perhaps even more compelling than the interpretation of 1 Corinthians 13 is the recognition of relative silence regarding the spiritual gifts from the apostolic authors. It is cited by cessationists that outside of 1 Corinthians 12 and 14 there is little mention of gifts like prophecy and tongues. Ferguson says, “Outside of 1 Corinthians there is no record of either the occurrence or regulation of this phenomenon.”<sup>76</sup> According to such a view, the lack of mention would indicate that these gifts were intended to fulfill a temporary function in the church, specifically one to confirm the message and role of the Apostles. Warfield presses firmly on this argument in his work, which was originally a series of lectures, entitled *Counterfeit Miracles*. He said, “It is observable further that, throughout the whole patristic and medieval periods at least, it is difficult to discover any one who claims to have himself wrought miracles.”<sup>77</sup>

However, despite the many good arguments offered, there is an interpretation of the work of the Spirit that is equally valid and credible, stating that these gifts, while functioning to confirm the role of Apostles, are still available to the church today and are given for her edification. Contrary to the cessationist position stands the “continuationist” position. A “continuationist” believes that all of the gifts that were in operation in the New Testament and in the first century church are still active today and are available for the church. One believes that the Spirit continues to grant to the church all of the gifts, including tongues, prophecy, healing, utterances of knowledge, miracles, etc. Some within the continuations umbrella also believe that because the gifts are available today, they should be sought after by the church today and practiced regularly.

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<sup>76</sup> Sinclair B. Ferguson, *Holy Spirit: Contours of Christian Theology* (United States: Inter-Varsity Press, US, 1997), p. 229

<sup>77</sup> Benjamin Warfield, "Warfield - counterfeit miracles," monergism.com, 1918, accessed August 12, 2016, [https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/warfield/warfield\\_counterfeit.html](https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/warfield/warfield_counterfeit.html).

One reason cited is, as it is often stated, nowhere in the New Testament is it taught that these gifts will cease and because of that there is a need for the ministry of prophecy, tongues, interpretations, etc. in the church today. According to this position, these gifts will not end until Jesus returns at which time there will be no need for them. Sam Storms says, “The Bible gives no evidence indicating that they are not valid. Such was the principal focus of what has preceded. This is not, however, a mere argument from silence, because the New Testament is *anything but silent* concerning the *presence* of these gifts in the church...It is difficult to imagine how the New Testament authors could have said any more clearly than *this* is what new covenant Christianity was supposed to look like.”<sup>78</sup>

It remains true that the Bible is the church’s highest authority. Spiritual gifts do not supersede Scripture’s authority. As 2 Timothy 3:16-17 says, “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.” It is also true that certain gifts were given to validate the ministry of the Apostles and the Scriptures they wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, but as it has been demonstrated already, this is not the only purpose for the Spirit’s gifts. They have also been given to the church for the continued building up and edification of her members, as 1 Corinthians 12:7 points out. Again, Sam Storms says, “Cessationists often argue that signs and wonders as well as certain spiritual gifts served only to confirm or authenticate the original company of apostles and that when the apostles passed away so also did the gifts. The fact is no biblical text ever says signs and wonders or spiritual gifts of a particular sort authenticated the apostles. Signs and wonders authenticated Jesus and the

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<sup>78</sup> Wayne Grudem and Stanley Gundry, eds., *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today? Four Views* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub., 1996), p.205

apostolic message about him. If signs and wonders were designed exclusively to authenticate apostles, we have no explanation why non-apostolic believers (such as Philip and Stephen) were empowered to perform them”<sup>79</sup>

Similarly, in 1 Corinthians 14:3 we read that one who prophesies does so for the building up, encouragement, and consolation of the gathered people. And again 1 Corinthians 14:5 teaches that the goal is that the church would be built up. Because God has given gifts for this purpose, all gifts ought to be desired and practiced within the church, especially the gift of prophecy. Storms again says, “Nothing I read in the New Testament or see in the condition of the church in any age, past or present, leads me to believe we have progressed beyond the need of the *charismata*.”<sup>80</sup> Max Turner adds, “the prophecy and tongues of the apostolic church were not related to the preparation of Scripture, nor understood as ‘sign gifts’ in an evidentialist sense. They performed a wide range of beneficial functions within the church, and in individual discipleship, and were not in any way rendered significantly less ‘needed’ (nor less desirable) by the completion of the canon (as cessationists claim).”<sup>81</sup>

This is why 1 Corinthians 14:1 says, “Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy.” God tells the Corinthians, those who needed no encouragement to pursue spiritual gifts, to earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy. If the church in Corinth would benefit from such encouragement, so will the church today. God has commanded the church to earnestly pursue all of his gifts.

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<sup>79</sup> Sam Storms, "Why I am a Continuationist," [thegospelcoalition.org](http://thegospelcoalition.org), January 22, 2014, accessed August 12, 2016, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/why-i-am-a-continuationist>.

<sup>80</sup> Wayne Grudem and Stanley Gundry, eds., *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today? Four Views* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub., 1996), p.205

<sup>81</sup> Max Turner, *The Holy Spirit and Spiritual Gifts: In the New Testament Church and Today* (Carlisle, Cumbria: Paternoster Publishing, 1996), p.283

As we take into account the various passages and arguments surrounding the continuation of the spiritual gifts we find reason to believe that they continue to be available to the church today. Certain spiritual gifts were indeed used in the period of foundation for the church. However, contrary to Gaffin's argument, the division of apostolic-postapostolic periods is not plain in the New Testament. Rather, the plain divide in the New Testament begins with the introduction of the New Covenant era, an era marked by the Holy Spirit's presence and activity. This era includes the Holy Spirit's work in giving gifts, a work that continues today and has not ceased. This work will not cease until the return of Christ. God gives spiritual gifts to the church as Ephesians 4:11-13 says, "And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,". Sam Storms says, "I believe all the gifts of the Holy Spirit are valid for the contemporary church for these reasons. (1) The Bible gives no evidence indicating they are not valid...(2) The ultimate purpose of the each gift is to build up the body of Christ...(3) First Corinthians 1:4-9 implies that the gifts of the Spirit are operative until 'our Lord Jesus Christ [is] revealed'...(4) I believe that these gifts have been designed by God to characterize the life of the church today...(5) I do not believe the Holy Spirit simply inaugurates the new age and then disappears."<sup>82</sup>

Until the church meets the measure of the fullness of Christ, she need these gifts. The church should pursue them and desire them. God desires to use them here, within the church to encourage, mature, teach, and grow the body of Christ. The gifts are the ministry of Christ

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<sup>82</sup> Wayne Grudem and Stanley Gundry, eds., *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today? Four Views* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub., 1996), p.206

among the church, so that the body can live more like him, bring him more glory, and make the Gospel the center of the church's aim.

## CHAPTER 5 EXAMINING 1 CORINTHIANS 12 THROUGH 14

One of the most critical elements in interpreting Scripture is the principle of context. An early lesson for all students of the Bible is in order to understand a particular passage's meaning, that passage *must* be interpreted according to the context in which that passage is set. Therefore, in order to understand the instruction of 1 Corinthians 14:1, it is necessary for us to consider the context in which the passage rests. 1 Corinthians 14:1 is set among three of the most significant chapters in the Bible regarding spiritual gifts. While other passages speak about spiritual gifts, 1 Corinthians is of particular importance for a number of reasons. To begin, these chapters offer the most extensive teaching on spiritual gifts that we find in Scripture. In addition, they should be important because of the genre of literature 1 Corinthians falls under. Appealing to the book of Acts may seem tempting to interpreters, but we must keep in mind that Acts is a historical narrative. 1 Corinthians, however, offers clearer and more detailed instruction because of its role as an epistle. In addition, 1 Corinthians was written by the Apostle Paul to a church that was guilty of focusing too strongly on spiritual gifts. The church had become guilty of pride and arrogance due to their exercise of spiritual gifts. As a result, Paul wrote to this church in order to correct their error and foster a correct approach to the exercise of spiritual gifts. Also, because this church focused their attention on the gift of tongues, Paul encouraged them to instead seek after gifts that served to edify the entire church body, which Paul makes plain that prophecy does.

Therefore, 1 Corinthians 12, 13, and 14 are very important for us to understand the imperative of 1 Corinthians 14:1. Again, Paul's concern is to encourage the Corinthians toward a proper pursuit and exercise of spiritual gifts with a special emphasis on prophecy. For these

reasons, we will devote significant time to these three chapters to foster our own interpretation of 1 Corinthians 14:1 and lead us toward a proper application.

### 1 Corinthians 12

The first thing that one should notice when observing 1 Corinthians 12 is that the gifts of the Spirit are not the product of man or his ability. Instead, like salvation mentioned earlier, God is the One who gives gifts to the church. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 12:4-6, “Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone” Then again in verse 11, “All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.”

God, through the Spirit, gives gifts to men and women for the building up of the church. The gifts that he gives are from God and are an extension of his very self. As pastor Sam Storms says, “Spiritual gifts are not God bestowing to His people something external to Himself. They are not some tangible ‘stuff’ or substance separable from God. Spiritual gifts are nothing less than God Himself in us, energizing our souls, imparting revelation to our minds, infusing power in our wills and working His sovereign and gracious purposes through us.”<sup>83</sup>

Our gifts are given to us according to the grace of God, who Himself works in a number of ways, gifts, and ministries. Gordon Fee makes this plain when he writes, “the opening paragraph (vv.1-3) put the work of the Spirit into a proper Christological perspective; this section

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<sup>83</sup> Wayne Grudem and Stanley Gundry, eds., *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today? Four Views* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub., 1996), p.13

puts it into a proper theological one. Everything, absolutely everything - gifts, persons, church - owes its origin to the one God who works all things in all of His people.”<sup>84</sup>

All of these gifts come from the working of God. Verse six of chapter twelve indicates that it is God who empowers all gifts. God is the sole deliverer and power behind each gift. This truth should inform our understanding of the gifts of the Spirit. Because all gifts are from God, pride should be eliminated from an application of each gift. In Corinth, pride seemed to be the outcome of the presence of God’s gifts. Much like the modern-day culture of Evangelicalism, pride is often the predominate attitude accompanying the Spirit’s gifts rather than an attitude of humility.

Simon Kistemaker commented on the appropriate attitude regarding spiritual gifts, “No one should boast of having received a greater gift or a higher position in the church than other members, because all gifts and positions derive from the Lord. On the night of his arrest, Jesus washed the feet of his disciples and said, ‘I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him.’ (John 13:15-16). Service in church and community ought to be rendered in the spirit of Jesus, who endows and empowers his people with talents and abilities. Jesus is the same for every believer and shows no favoritism. He fully acknowledges the service of each individual, whatever it may be, when it is humbly performed for him (Matt. 25:34-40).”<sup>85</sup> As we will soon see, the opening instruction of 1 Corinthians 14:1 is, “pursue love.” Such love begins as we humbly acknowledge that the Spirit’s gifts are just that, a gift from God.

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<sup>84</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 8th ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, William B. Publishing Company, 1959), p.583

<sup>85</sup> Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 1993), pp.418-419

The second thing we notice from 1 Corinthians 12 is that God gives gifts to each one of us. All of God's children are given a spiritual gift from God. 1 Corinthians 12:7-11 says, "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills." Every Christian has been empowered by the Spirit of God with a spiritual gift. Kistemaker writes, "Too often, ministers of the gospel, evangelists, and missionaries are considered to be the only recipients of special gifts. Too often, a distinction is made between sacred and secular occupations. Kingdom service is frequently understood to be performed by those people who have been ordained to serve the Lord in special ministries. Paul writes that the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each believer. That is, the Holy Spirit dwells in every believer (6:19) and thus makes his presence known with some indication of gifts. In the life of every Christian, the Holy Spirit reveals himself in one way or another."<sup>86</sup> The church is full of gifted people, given gifts by God for the good of the body. It is therefore appropriate for the *entire* body of Christ to actively obey 1 Corinthians 14:1. This is not a command for a select few but a command for all that the Holy Spirit dwells within.

A third aspect we notice from 1 Corinthians 12 is that, while given to everyone, spiritual gifts are not the same among each Christian. As 1 Corinthians 12:7-11 says, one gift is given to

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<sup>86</sup> Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 1993), p.420

some while another gift is given to others. The variety of gifts are spread among the body of Christ. Among other things, this variety demonstrates that as a body, the people of God are interdependent. God has given gifts to the body to demonstrate that as a body, it's members need each other. Gordon Fee states, "Paul's point seems clear: Diversity, not uniformity, is essential for a healthy church. At the same time he urges that all of this is God's doing and part of his divine purposes, a point he repeats throughout. The one God who is himself characterized by diversity within unity has decreed the same for his church."<sup>87</sup> The Apostle Paul expresses this in 1 Corinthians 12:14-20, "For the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot should say, 'Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body, that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear should say, 'Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,' that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body."

As we saw in an earlier chapter, not one member of the body, because of his or her particular gift, can say to another member that he or she is unnecessary. As a body with various members, each needs the other to function properly. Like the natural body, one may function without a particular member, but not with complete efficiency or ability. Without an eye, the body is weaker and without a hand the ability of the body is diminished. The body needs every member. In the same way, the body of Christ is dependent on every member and every gift. A church that is healthy is one in which every member is using his or her gift for the sake of others.

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<sup>87</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 8th ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, William B. Publishing Company, 1959), p.583.

These gifts express our interdependence as God intends to use them for the good of others. Also, this truth indicates how important the gift of prophecy is for the body of Christ. As an interdependent body, we need each gift God has given to work so that the body will grow. To neglect or disobey 1 Corinthians 14:1 will result in body that functions below its complete ability.

In order to understand spiritual gifts it is critical to understand why God gives gifts to the church. This stood at the heart of the Corinthian problem. The church had begun to believe that some members were more important or more “spiritual” than others because of their experience with a particular spiritual gift. Such a thought, however, was at odds with the very purpose of spiritual gifts. God’s gifts are not intended to glorify the recipient of a gift. Instead, God gives gifts for the common good of the entire body. 1 Corinthians 12:7 says, “To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.” As Gordon Fee states, “the gifts are for the building up of the community as a whole, not primarily for the benefit of the individual believer.”<sup>88</sup> Wayne Grudem likewise says, “Spiritual gifts are given to equip the church to carry out its ministry until Christ returns.”<sup>89</sup> Therefore, one should not become boastful or arrogant concerning a gift, because that gift is intended to be used for the edification of others. The gifts are intended to help us fulfill the command to love one another. We are called to be self-sacrificing even in the exercise of our spiritual gifts. Gifts are given to serve, not to exalt one individual. On this issue Leon Morris writes, “The gifts are not given for rivalry or jealousy but for the common good. That is the point of it all. Spiritual gifts are always given to be used, and

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<sup>88</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 8th ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, William B. Publishing Company, 1959), p.589

<sup>89</sup> Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester, England: Zondervan Pub. House, 1994), p.1018

to be used in such a way as to edify the whole body of believers, not some individual possessor of a gift. A schismatic individualism contradicts the purpose of the gifts.”<sup>90</sup>

Far too often a spiritual gift causes one to boast in themselves and to boast in one’s own ability. This is antithetical to the nature of gifts. A gift did not originate with an individual nor was it intended to magnify a particular individual. As John Stott wrote, “All spiritual gifts, then, are service gifts. This is their purpose. They are not given for selfish but for unselfish use, namely for the service of other people. Each of the lists of charismata in the New Testament emphasizes this. ‘To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good’. It follows that their comparative importance is to be assessed by the degree to which they ‘edify’ or build up the church. That is why the teaching gifts are of paramount importance, for nothing builds up the church like the truth of God’s Word.”<sup>91</sup>

The purpose of the spiritual gifts is that they would be used in the service of others. As it says in 1 Peter 4:10-11, "As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies-in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.” Every one that has received a gift is instructed to use his or her gift or gifts for the sake of others. Rather than promoting a prideful, selfishness God has given gifts for the sake of loving, self-sacrificial purposes. If the Christian community is to appropriately obey 1 Corinthians 14:1, the

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<sup>90</sup> Leon Morris, ed., *1 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary* (United States: Inter-Varsity Press,US, 2008), p.164

<sup>91</sup> John R. W. Stott and Alec J. Motyer, *The Message of Ephesians: God’s New Society* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press,US, 1984), p.168

desire for self-glorification must not be the motivating impulse. Rather, the aim of earnestly desiring to prophesy must be to serve others.

The most striking way that Paul makes this clear to the Corinthians is through the interjection he makes between chapters 12 and 14 of 1 Corinthians. In between the two most complete instructions on spiritual gifts that are in the Scriptures, Paul takes time to speak about the motive for all work in the church, including the use of spiritual gifts. In order to understand the use of gifts in the church, one must understand the priority of love.

### 1 Corinthians 13

Despite the familiarity that many people have with this chapter, it is safe to assume that most who affirm this chapter have little to no idea about the context that this famous "love" chapter is found. Not that the great truths that are contained in these 13 verses are not able stand alone, they certainly can and often do, but, again, in order to understand what a passage of the Bible means it is necessary that we study the passage by considering the context in which a passage is found. Surprisingly, this famous passage on love isn't found within the context of marriage or any other family relationship. As one can see, the stunning reality is that this passage on love is right in the middle of the most extensive teaching on the spiritual gifts in the Bible.

In order to understand this chapter on love, one must begin in chapter 12 as Paul sets up the chapter by saying in verses 29-31, "Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? But earnestly desire the higher gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way." Paul is writing to show the Corinthians that there is an attitude or a disposition that supersedes all gifts.

Theologian Don Carson says, “Paul's point is that the love that he is about to discuss cannot be classed with the charismata: it is not one charisma of many, but an entire ‘way’ of life, an overarching, all-embracing style of life that utterly transcends in importance the claims of this or that charismata...if too much attention is paid to them, believers may overlook the absolutely crucial importance of the entire way of life that ought to characterize every believer, every person who has been baptized in the Holy Spirit.”<sup>92</sup> To rephrase what Dr. Carson has said, love is to be the mark of true spirituality and as such, it should be the mark of the faithful obedience of 1 Corinthians 14:1.

Evidently many in Corinth had received the gift of tongues and as they exercised this gift they began to think that because they had received such a gift they must be superior to others. They had begun to think, falsely, that others were spiritually inferior to them because they did not possess the gift of tongues and only those with the gift were spiritually mature.

Unfortunately, this was the attitude in Corinth and perhaps just as unfortunate, this has become the attitude of many today. Some think that exercising a particular gift of the Spirit is the mark of spirituality. Whether it is prophecy or tongues, it can become easy to think that the exercise of a gift is the unfailing mark of the Spirit’s work. Which is why Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, wrote these words in 1 Corinthians 13. As Fee states, “Love is not an idea for Paul, not even a ‘motivating factor’ for behavior. It *is* behavior. To love is to act; anything short of action is not love at all. Second, love is not set over against the gifts, precisely because it belongs in a different category altogether. For Paul it is not ‘gifts to be sure, but better

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<sup>92</sup> D. A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit: A Theological Exposition of 1 Corinthians 12-14*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 1987), p.57

yet love'; rather is the *way* in which the gifts are to function. To desire earnestly expressions of the Spirit that will build up the community is *how* love acts in this context."<sup>93</sup>

The first way that God teaches this is by pointing out the value of love. Paul describes the value of love in the first three verses of this text. In 1 Corinthians 13:1-3 we read, "If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and have all faith, so as to remove mountains, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing."

In the first two verses of this chapter, several gifts are listed and some of them are even spectacular or miraculous gifts, such as prophecy or speaking in tongues. The one thing that is similar about each of these, as he mentions them, is that without love they are worthless. Even more astounding is the fact that Paul doesn't just say that the gifts are worthless, but in verse 2 he says, "I am nothing." Without love, without love motivating a believer to use his or her gift their exercise has no value in the sight of God. The most gifted Christian is nothing without love. This is what the Corinthian church had become. Again, as Fee says, "theirs was a spirituality that lacked the primary evidence of the Spirit: behavior that could be described as 'having love'."<sup>94</sup>

As a church earnestly desires the spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy, they must keep in mind that gifts are not for self-exaltation. It is not to demonstrate a person's value to the church. The only appropriate motivation is love. A person exercises his or her gift because they love God and want His glory to be seen. Love should be a Christian's way of life and his

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<sup>93</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 8th ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, William B. Publishing Company, 1959), p.628

<sup>94</sup> *ibid*, p.631

constant motivation. Fee says, “in the Pauline parenthesis, for those who ‘walk by the Spirit’ the primary ethical imperative is ‘love one another’.”<sup>95</sup>

Early church father Cyril of Alexandria said, “Here Paul frees the Corinthians from the notion that speaking in tongues is a greater credit to them than interpreting the words of the prophets. For when we first possess and value faith and hope and also love (1 Cor 13:13)—love, that is, of God and our brothers, which fulfills the whole law (Rom 10:4)—then the other gifts can be added. Then, and only then, is the time right for us to be filled with God’s spiritual gifts, and we will enjoy the richness of the Spirit’s blessings.”<sup>96</sup> As Cyril is quick to point out, only through a disposition of love should the church be filled with God’s spiritual gifts.

Theologian Don Carson summarizes this well when he says, “Two centuries ago, Jonathan Edwards probed the question as to what makes the church like heaven. His answer: it is love. The church's manifestation in time of the glories that are yet to come is not accomplished in the gift of tongues, nor even prophecy, giving, teaching. It is accomplished in love. One day all the charismatics who know the Lord and all the noncharismatics who know the Lord will have nothing to fight over; for the so-called charismatic gifts will have forever passed. At that point, both of these groups of believers will look back and thoughtfully contemplate the fact that what connects them with the world they have left behind is not the gift of tongues, nor animosity toward the gift of tongues, but the love that they sometimes managed to display toward each other despite the gift of tongues. The greatest evidence that heaven has invaded our sphere, that

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<sup>95</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> Judith L. Kovacs. *1 Corinthians Interpreted by Early Christian Commentators* (The Church’s Bible; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), p.230

the Spirit has been poured out upon us, that we are citizens of a kingdom not yet consummated, is Christian love.”<sup>97</sup>

### 1 Corinthians 14

Grounded in Paul’s exhortation toward love, we move into chapter 14 and the passage on which this thesis rests. Again, in 1 Corinthians 14:1 we read, “Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy.” Flowing from the context of 1 Corinthians 13, Paul begins this instruction in chapter 14 with two important yet obvious words in light of what preceded: “pursue love.” Fee says, “The command ‘Follow the way of love’ puts into imperative form what was implied throughout the preceding argument. The ‘love’ that they are to pursue, of course, is that described in 12:3-7, since without it the ‘spiritual’ person amounts to zero; furthermore, it is the great imperishable: it alone – not the gifts – will abide into eternity.”<sup>98</sup> Similarly, Kistemaker says, “The verb [pursue] denotes that pursuing something must be done with intensity and determination. That is, we must pursue love with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. In short, Paul exhorts the readers to put the message of his letter of love into practice.”<sup>99</sup> The command of greatest importance in this verse is the first, “pursue love.”

Immediately following the command to pursue love we see another command, “and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy.” Similar to the pursuit of love, there is a clear call to the church from Paul to *earnestly* desire the spiritual gifts. This

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<sup>97</sup> D. A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit: A Theological Exposition of 1 Corinthians 12-14*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 1987), p.77

<sup>98</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 8th ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, William B. Publishing Company, 1959), p.654

<sup>99</sup> Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 1993), p.476

command, like the command to pursue love, cannot be overlooked. Regardless of one's cessationist or continuationist position, this command is clear. Kistemaker says, "The second command is closely tied to the first one, so that the two imperatives in the present tense are nearly synonymous."<sup>100</sup>

Like the command to pursue love, the exhortation to *earnestly desire* is an imperative. God, through Paul, is commanding the church to not only pursue love but to earnestly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy. Calvin said, "Lest the Corinthians should object that they wronged God, if they despised his gifts, the Apostle anticipates this objection by declaring, that it was not his design to draw them away even from those gifts that they had abused — nay rather he commends the pursuit of them, and wishes them to have a place in the Church. And assuredly, as they had been conferred for the advantage of the Church, man's abuse of them ought not to give occasion for their being thrown away as useless or injurious, but in the meantime he commends prophecy above all other gifts, as it was the most useful of them all."<sup>101</sup>

As the church loves one another, they should earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, but especially the gift of prophecy. Sam Storms says, "All churches, no matter how different they may be, have an identical mandate when it comes to obeying Scripture. No one is exempt or special or unique in such a way that they can justify disobedience to God's Word. This is not a suggestion or mere advice or wise counsel. This is a divine command, a mandate from God

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<sup>100</sup> *ibid*

<sup>101</sup> John Calvin and John King, *Commentary on 1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 1974), p.434

himself. If you and I are not earnestly desiring spiritual gifts, especially prophecy, we are disobedient.”<sup>102</sup> God has given us an imperative to desire the gift of prophecy.

It is also important to notice that in 1 Corinthians 14:1, Paul expresses the superiority of prophecy over tongues. This is seen in verse 5 as well, “Now I want you all to speak in tongues, but even more to prophesy. The one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets, so that the church may be built up.” Gordon Fee says, “This verse summarizes vv. 1-4 by making explicit Paul’s preference for prophecy over tongues in the assembly.”<sup>103</sup> To a church that exalted the gift of tongues as supreme above all gifts, Paul issues the command of 14:1 to reorient the Corinthians’ priorities. Paul demonstrated this priority not only through his teaching but also by his own actions. In 1 Corinthians 14:18-19 we read, “I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you. Nevertheless, in church I would rather speak five words with my mind in order to instruct others, than ten thousand words in a tongue.” Again Fee says, “Thus the section comes full circle. If Paul came to them as they wished, speaking in tongues, it would not benefit them. He must speak in intelligible ways.”<sup>104</sup>

Though the Corinthians valued tongues, Paul commands the church to earnestly desire prophecy, not tongues. Paul’s emphatic command in 14:1 is linked to what has been observed earlier regarding the gifts. Prophecy is to be preferred because it speaks to people for their building up. The gift of tongues is directed toward God, but prophecy is directed to people and in the corporate context what the church is called to do is gather for the edification of others,

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<sup>102</sup> Sam Storms, "The power and pitfalls of prophecy (1 Corinthians 14: 1-5)", 2016, accessed August 12, 2016, <http://www.samstorms.com/all-articles/post/the-power-and-pitfalls-of-prophecy--1-corinthians-14:1-5->.

<sup>103</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 8th ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, William B. Publishing Company, 1959), p.658

<sup>104</sup> *ibid*, p.676

as we have seen from 1 Corinthians 12. The church is called to consider the needs of others above their own.

Paul goes on to demonstrate the edifying nature of prophecy throughout the rest of 1 Corinthians 14. First in verses 3-5 we read, “On the other hand, the one who prophesies speaks to people for their building up and encouragement and consolation. The one who speaks in a tongue builds up himself, but the one who prophesies builds up the church. Now I want you all to speak in tongues, but even more to prophesy. The one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets, so that the church may be built up.” And again in verse 19, “Nevertheless, in church I would rather speak five words with my mind in order to instruct others, than ten thousand words in a tongue.”

The aim of the church ought to be to build one another up in Christ. This is not only encouraged by Paul, but commanded by him in 1 Corinthians 14:12, “So with yourselves, since you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit, strive to excel in building up the church.” The aim of all the Spirit’s gifts is the building up of the church. This is what the church should be striving for, building up the entire church body.

This does not mean that a gift such as the gift of tongues is not important, to the contrary Paul says that tongues may be just as edifying as prophecy, if there is an interpretation. This is stated in 1 Corinthians 14:5, “Now I want you all to speak in tongues, but even more to prophesy. The one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets, so that the church may be built up.” But without an interpretation, a tongue is of no benefit to the congregation as one reads in verses 6-9 of chapter 14, “Now, brothers, if I come to you speaking in tongues, how will I benefit you unless I bring you some revelation or knowledge or prophecy or teaching? If even lifeless instruments, such as the flute or the harp, do

not give distinct notes, how will anyone know what is played? And if the bugle gives an indistinct sound, who will get ready for battle? So with yourselves, if with your tongue you utter speech that is not intelligible, how will anyone know what is said? For you will be speaking into the air.” Therefore, it is clear that the church should strive for building up one another as verse 12 again says, “So with yourselves, since you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit, strive to excel in building up the church.”

Therefore, we now see that the Bible has given us a very clear command. The Bible *commands* the church to “pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy.” The command to earnestly desire the spiritual gifts is no more optional than the command to pursue love. However, in our diligent and obedient pursuit of the spiritual gifts Paul says that we must especially desire to prophesy. But what is prophecy? In order to obey this command, we must know the gift that we are commanded to pursue. For this reason, we will now turn our attention specifically to the gift of prophecy in order to understand this gift as taught in the New Testament.

## CHAPTER 6 THE GIFT OF PROPHECY

Now that we have given considerable attention to 1 Corinthians 12 through 14, we need to begin giving significant consideration to questions that arise when we examine the gift of prophecy. We now see that 1 Corinthians 14:1 is an undeniable *command* from God's Word for us to *earnestly* desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy. However, this command necessitates that we understand exactly what is meant by the gift of prophecy. In order to understand the gift of prophecy, we need to understand New Testament prophecy as a gift different from the Old Testament expression of prophecy. Similarly, we need to ask if prophecy is a gift synonymous with the gift of teaching. Lastly, we need to consider the nature of revelation and ask if prophecy ought to be considered revelation. Those three issues we will look at in chapter 6.

### Old Testament and New Testament Prophecy

One reason why the gift of prophecy is not easily defined is because "prophecy" or "prophet" is mentioned throughout the Scriptures in a few different ways. In the Old Testament one obviously reads about prophets. In the New Testament one reads about prophecy among the church, especially in the book of Acts. The term prophet is even used to speak of pagan prophets in Titus 1:12, as Paul describes the Cretian prophets. The idea of prophet and prophecy is not easy to understand.

In contrast to Old Testament prophecy, when one reads the New Testament we see several differences. To begin, there were more than a few prophets in the New Testament. In the Old Testament, prophets were limited in number but as we see in Acts 2, the promise fulfilled

from Joel is that there would be no few prophets. Acts 2:16-17 says, “But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel: 17 ‘And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams;’” As the promise of Joel is fulfilled in the New Testament, prophets and prophecy increased, even among sons and daughters.

Commenting on Numbers 11:29 which says, “But Moses said to him, ‘Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the Lord’s people were prophets, that the Lord would put his Spirit on them!’” Wayne Grudem says, “Here Moses longs not just for the prophetic gift but even more for the widespread personal relationship to God that the gift would indicate, for he knows by experience that prophets walk close to God. This expectation is repeated in Joel’s prophecy (Joel 2:28-29) and finds initial fulfillment in the New Testament church today.”<sup>105</sup> However, Richard Gaffin argues, “Acts 2 and the subsequent miraculous events that Luke narrates are not intended to establish a pattern of ‘repetitions’ of Pentecost to continue on indefinitely in church history. Rather, together they constitute, as already intimated, an event-complex, complete with the finished apostolic program they accompany.”<sup>106</sup> According to Gaffin, the redemptive-historical placement of Acts should lead us to see that the gift of prophecy, as mentioned in Acts 2, was intended to accompany the apostolic mission and thus perished with the Apostles.

Despite Gaffin’s argument, however, the promise made by Peter at Pentecost is best understood as applying to all and it seems clear that Luke, the writer of Acts, believed that these

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<sup>105</sup> Wayne Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today* (Wheaton, IL: Good News Publishers, 2000), p.274

<sup>106</sup> Wayne Grudem and Stanley Gundry, eds., *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today? Four Views* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub., 1996), p.38

gifts would continue to exist in the church subsequent to Pentecost. Max Turner writes, “The nature of the gift of the Spirit which Peter promises to *all* who call on the name of the Lord – even to the hearers’ children’s children – is a Christianized version of Joel’s promise of the ‘Spirit of prophecy’. Prototypical to this are gifts of revelation, wisdom, prophecy, and charismatic praise. It would quite literally be nonsense to suggest the writer of Luke-Acts anticipated the cessation of these: if indeed they ceased, such a state of affairs could only have come as a considerable surprise to him. It would inevitably have seemed like a failure at the very heart of what Joel’s promise of the Spirit was all about.”<sup>107</sup> If we understand this promise according to Peter and Luke, it seems best to understand the gift of prophecy to be one that would continue for the church.

Additionally, when one reads the New Testament it should be observed that New Testament prophets are never connected with Old Testament prophets. Instead, it is the Apostles that are connected with Old Testament prophets. In 2 Peter 3:2 one reads, “that you should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles,” Old Testament prophets are compared, not to prophets of the New Testament, but to the Apostles.

This idea, however, is challenged by Sinclair Ferguson when he says, “While it is true that there are important analogies between the roles of Old Testament prophets and New Testament apostles, if the church had been sensitive to the possibility of a misunderstanding of the term ‘prophet’, it would make no sense to use it all, and certainly not of the apostles.”<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Max Turner, *The Holy Spirit and Spiritual Gifts: In the New Testament Church and Today* (Carlisle, Cumbria: Paternoster Publishing, 1996), p.290

<sup>108</sup> Sinclair B. Ferguson, *Holy Spirit: Contours of Christian Theology* (United States: Inter-Varsity Press, US, 1997), p.215

Ferguson's point is that the New Testament use of prophecy is in the Hebraic sense and therefore it would have only been confusing to his readers for Paul to use the word "prophet" in any other sense than in reference to prophecy comparable to Old Testament prophecy.

Ferguson makes a compelling point regarding this confusion. It does, I believe, fail to take into account the significant change brought about through the New Covenant. The church, as the New Covenant community, experienced a newness that radically shifted their understanding in a number of ways, including their understanding of "prophet". Wayne Grudem says, "Although there was much continuity between the Old Covenant and New Covenant, there was also much difference. In order to emphasize the newness of the New Covenant that Christ established, he may have deemed it appropriate to have a new name to designate the first leaders of the New Covenant community, the church."<sup>109</sup>

Also, the New Testament demonstrates that prophets did not have the same authority as prophets from the Old Testament. Rather than possessing divine authority, prophecy in the New Testament is intended to be tested. 1 Corinthians 14:29 says, "Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said." Others in the congregation are called to "weigh" or test what is said by prophets today. The church is not commanded to receive a prophecy without testing it against the revelation of Scripture. Again in 1 Thessalonians 5:19-21 one reads, "Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies, but test everything; hold fast what is good." Again, the prophecies offered in the New Testament are intended to be tested by the hearers.

Gaffin does not believe that this testing eliminates the authority of prophecy. He says, "What also needs to be grasped is that in the case of genuine prophecies, the need for evaluation

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<sup>109</sup> Wayne Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today* (Wheaton, IL: Good News Publishers, 2000), p.40

does not show that they lack the full authority of God's Word. Rather, this evaluation is of a piece with the positive proving, the affirmative testing Paul the apostle commands for his own teaching in Romans 12:2 and Ephesians 5:10."<sup>110</sup>

To Gaffin's point, D.A. Carson responds, "This is rather more assertion than argument, and it flies in the face of too much of the evidence. If Gaffin is right, why is the authority of prophecy at Corinth so emphatically placed under his own (14:37-38)? Why is it the *prophecy* that is to be judged, and this with a tone that suggests normal operating procedure? If Paul wanted to make the point Gaffin detects, why did he use the verb *krino* instead of the verb *diakrino*?"<sup>111</sup>

Such arguments for the differences between New Testament and Old Testament prophecy seem compelling. These arguments in favor of distinguishing between Old Testament and New Testament prophecies are not without significant counter-arguments. Tom Schreiner writes,

The most significant biblical argument against what I'm saying is the claim that New Testament (NT) prophecy differs from Old Testament (OT) prophecy, for some say OT prophecy is flawless but NT prophecy is mixed with error. But the idea that NT prophets could make mistakes isn't persuasive for several reasons. 1.) The burden of proof is on those who say prophecy in the NT is of a different nature than prophecy in the OT. Prophets in the OT were only considered prophets of God if they were infallible (Deut. 18:15-22), and the same is almost certainly true in the NT. 2.) The admonition to judge prophecies instead of prophets (1 Cor. 14:29-32; 1 Thess. 5:19-20) is often adduced to show that the gift is different in the NT. But this argument is not convincing, for the only way to judge prophets in both Testaments is by their prophecies. We only know prophets aren't from God if their prophecies are false or if their words contradict scriptural teaching. 3.) We have no example of a NT prophet who erred. Agabus didn't make a mistake in prophesying that Paul would be bound by the Jews and handed

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<sup>110</sup> Richard B. Gaffin, *Perspectives on Pentecost* (United Kingdom: EVANGELICAL PRESS, 2004), p.71

<sup>111</sup> D. A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit: A Theological Exposition of 1 Corinthians 12-14*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 1987), p.96

over to the Romans (Acts 21:10-11). To say he erred demands more precision than prophecies warrant. Furthermore, after Paul was arrested he appealed to the words of Agabus, saying he was handed over to the Romans by the Jews (Acts 28:17), so it's clear he didn't think Agabus made a mistake. Agabus spoke the words of the Holy Spirit (Acts 11:28; 21:11), so we have no example in the NT of prophets whose prophecies were mixed with error.<sup>112</sup>

While Schreiner's argument regarding Agabus is quite compelling, there are other arguments to take into consideration. For instance, Sam Storms again says, "In 1 Corinthians 14 Paul exhorts the church to desire spiritual gifts, especially that we might prophesy. Assuming that the Corinthians, and all other churches to which Paul ministered, obeyed this command, there had to have been countless thousands of prophetic words forthcoming in the first century (prophecy is found in the churches in Jerusalem, Antioch, Ephesus, Caesarea, Rome, Corinth, and Thessalonica; no doubt it was also present in Colossae, Philippi, and other cities as well). My question is this: If such words, each and every one of them, were the very Word of God' and thus equal to Scripture in authority, what happened to them?"<sup>113</sup> According to Storms, the absence of record indicates an absence of authority. A very strong statement from Gaffin seems to strengthen Storms' case. Gaffin writes, "New Testament prophecy is revelatory...The words of the prophet are the words of God and are to be received and responded to as such."<sup>114</sup> If Gaffin's statement is true, Storms' question is relevant, "What happened to them?"

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<sup>112</sup> Thomas Schreiner, "Why I am a Cessationist," [thegospelcoalition.org](http://thegospelcoalition.org), January 22, 2014, accessed August 12, 2016, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/why-i-am-a-cessationist>.

<sup>113</sup> Sam Storms, "Why NT prophecy does NOT result in "scripture-quality" revelatory words (a response to the most frequently cited cessationist argument against the contemporary validity of spiritual gifts)," 2016, accessed August 12, 2016, <http://www.samstorms.com/enjoying-god-blog/post/why-nt-prophecy-does-not-result-in-scripture-quality-revelatory-words-a-response-to-the-most-frequently-cited-cessationist-argument-against-the-contemporary-validity-of-spiritual-gifts->.

<sup>114</sup> Richard B. Gaffin, *Perspectives on Pentecost* (United Kingdom: EVANGELICAL PRESS, 2004), p.72

As we obey 1 Corinthians 14:1 by earnestly desiring to prophesy, we will not earnestly desire to imitate Old Testament prophets. This command is not for a select few but is a command for all. The expression of the gift of prophecy will not result in an authoritative message like Old Testament prophecy. Instead, prophecy in the New Testament which is to be desired by all, is to be weighed and carefully examined by the more authoritative Word of God.

### Prophecy as Teaching

Another common understanding of the New Testament gift of prophecy is to relate this gift to the teaching. According to this view prophecy is, as Joseph Fitzmyer would argue, Spirit-empowered preaching. In his commentary on 1 Corinthians, Fitzmyer said prophecy was, “the dynamic and effective Spirit-guided preaching of the gospel Max Turner offered help in this regard when he said, “It need not be doubted that prophecies had didactic and prescriptive elements, nor that those who rose to be recognized as ‘prophets’ in the early church were leaders who were able to preach and to teach. But it is quite another matter to assert that inspired preaching, exegesis or teachings are actually (wholly or in part) what the New Testament *means* by prophecy.”<sup>115</sup> Turner points out that Paul points to prophecy, teaching, and exhortation in Romans 12:6-8 to illustrate a diversity of gifts among the body of Christ.<sup>116</sup> The point seems clear: prophecy is different from teaching and exhortation. While similar threads may run throughout each, they must be considered distinct as gifts given to the church.

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<sup>115</sup> Max Turner, *The Holy Spirit and Spiritual Gifts: In the New Testament Church and Today* (Carlisle, Cumbria: Paternoster Publishing, 1996), p. 202

<sup>116</sup> *ibid*, p.203

Grudem also gave helpful clarifications between prophecy and teaching. Of prophecy he says that it “has two distinct features. First, it must be based on a ‘revelation’: if there is no revelation, there is no prophecy. Second, it must include a public proclamation... Teaching, on the other hand, is always based on an explanation and/or application of Scripture or received apostolic doctrine; it is never said to be based on revelation. That is why teaching has so much more authority for governing the congregation.”<sup>117</sup> Sam Storms adds, “Prophecy, therefore, is not based on a hunch, a supposition, an inference, an educated guess, or even on sanctified wisdom. Prophecy is not based on personal insight, intuition, or illumination. Prophecy is the human *report* of a divine *revelation*. This is what distinguishes prophecy from teaching. Teaching is always based on a text of Scripture. Prophecy is always based on a spontaneous revelation.”<sup>118</sup>

Considering New Testament prophecy as revelation does not come without challenges. If New Testament prophecy is to be desired by all and is considered revelation, it must be distinguished from Scripture, which we know to be a completed revelation from God. Therefore, we will now look at prophecy as revelation

### Prophecy as Revelation

Our last consideration in this chapter will be in regards to prophecy as revelation. This issue may be the heart of the debate regarding the New Testament gift of prophecy. To begin, we should be aware that 1 Corinthians 14 associates prophecy with revelation. In 1 Corinthians 14:29-30 it is said, “Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is

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<sup>117</sup> Wayne Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today* (Wheaton, IL: Good News Publishers, 2000), p.123

<sup>118</sup> Wayne Grudem and Stanley Gundry, eds., *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today? Four Views* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub., 1996), p.207

said. If a revelation is made to another sitting there, let the first be silent.” Wayne Grudem says, “The ‘revelation’ that comes to the prophet is thought by Paul to be of divine, not human, origin. This is evident, first, from the fact that the word Paul uses for ‘revelation’ and its related noun together occur forty-four times in the New Testament, and they never refer to human activity or communication.”<sup>119</sup>

Additionally, Grudem contends that 1 Corinthians 14:29-30 indicates that this revelation (prophecy) comes to the prophet spontaneously. He says, “The thought that occurs to a prophet is pictured as coming to him *quite spontaneously*, for it comes while the first speaker is talking. So this prophecy does not seem to be a sermon or lesson that had been prepared beforehand; it comes rather at the prompting of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>120</sup> Turner also adds, “On the one hand, the revelation that comes to the prophet is distinct and compelling, such that he prophet may (wrongly in Paul’s opinion) feel he could not resist the Spirit, or (rightly in Paul’s view) that he must be given almost immediate hearing if the revelation comes to him during worship.”<sup>121</sup> A prophecy is something that happens spontaneously or “to another sitting there”, individually, and is done by God in that instance. This is something that God brings to a person’s mind. Wayne Grudem says, “Gives insight from God’s perspective.”<sup>122</sup>

Through the gift of prophecy, God gives someone a thought that he or she then shares with others and that word is particularly suited to meet a specific spiritual need of another in the congregation. This may not be known to the speaker but it has this effect. This is seen in 1

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<sup>119</sup> Wayne Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today* (Wheaton, IL: Good News Publishers, 2000), p.96

<sup>120</sup> *ibid*

<sup>121</sup> Max Turner, *The Holy Spirit and Spiritual Gifts: In the New Testament Church and Today* (Carlisle, Cumbria: Paternoster Publishing, 1996), p.199

<sup>122</sup> Wayne Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today* (Wheaton, IL: Good News Publishers, 2000), p.99

Corinthians 14:24-25, “But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or outsider enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all, the secrets of his heart are disclosed, and so, falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you.” God, knowing the secrets of men’s hearts, uses the gift of prophecy to make known these secrets through spontaneous revelation. This is prophecy, biblically understood, at work in the New Testament church.

A central question in relationship to prophecy as revelation pertains to the authoritative nature of prophecy. We might be inclined to believe that since prophecy is a revelation from God, it is necessarily infallible and therefore authoritative. Gaffin says, “The revelation granted to and made known by the New Testament prophets is on a par and of one piece with the inspired revelation received and proclaimed by Paul and the other apostles.”<sup>123</sup> This association would mean that prophecy is authoritative and infallible.

Sam Storms, however, responds by saying, “However, although rooted in revelation, prophecy is occasionally fallible. This sounds contradictory and poses the greatest obstacle to the acceptance of the prophetic gift in the church today.”<sup>124</sup> Grudem also says, “Several instances of the terms ‘to reveal’ and ‘revelation’ show that the report of a ‘revelation’ can often be thought to have only the authority of merely human words – similar, for example, to the authority one would accord a sermon or the advice of a mature Christian. These reports should by no means be ignored, but neither should they be thought to have authority equal to Scripture itself in our lives.”<sup>125</sup> Grudem cites passages such as Philippians 3:15, Romans 1:18, Matthew 11:27, and

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<sup>123</sup> Richard B. Gaffin, *Perspectives on Pentecost* (United Kingdom: EVANGELICAL PRESS, 2004), p.62

<sup>124</sup> Wayne Grudem and Stanley Gundry, eds., *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today? Four Views* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub., 1996), p.207

<sup>125</sup> Wayne Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today* (Wheaton, IL: Good News Publishers, 2000), p.64

Ephesians 1:17 as examples of revelation received from God that would not be considered to be God's very words. This leads Grudem to conclude, "So the terms 'reveal' and 'revelation' by themselves by no means indicate that prophets in 1 Corinthians 14 were thought to speak with a divine authority of actual words. Specifically, the term *apokalypso* in 1 Corinthians 14:30 does not require us to think that a Christian prophet who reported something God had revealed would be speaking the very words of God."<sup>126</sup>

Clowney, however, responds to Grudem by saying, "Dr. Grudem's distinction between receiving true revelation and communicating it infallibly is logically valid, but the Old Testament binds the two together, emphasizing the word."<sup>127</sup> Don Carson, however, makes the point that, "Paul can write to converts and explain some foundational Christian truth, and then add, 'All of us who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God *will make clear* [lit., 'will reveal'] to you' (Phil. 3:15)."<sup>128</sup> In light of this use of the term "reveal" or "revelation" in the New Testament, Carson goes on to say, "Thus, when Paul presupposes in 1 Corinthians 14:30 that the gifts of prophecy depends on revelation, we are not limited to a form of authoritative revelation that threatens the finality of the canon. To argue in such a way is to confuse the terminology of Protestant systematic theology with the terminology of the Scripture writers. The prophecy Paul has in mind is revelatory and Spirit-prompted, and it may, as Turner and others suggest, deal largely with questions of application of gospel truth. None of this means it is necessarily authoritative, infallible, or canon-threatening.

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<sup>126</sup> *ibid.*, p.65

<sup>127</sup> Edmund P. Clowney, *The Church: The Use of Scientific Research in the Church's Moral Debate*, ed. Gerald Bray (Downers Grove, IL, United States: Inter-Varsity Press, US, 1995), p.259

<sup>128</sup> D. A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit: A Theological Exposition of 1 Corinthians 12-14*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 1987), p. 164

Such prophecies must still be evaluated, and they are principally submissive to the apostle and his gospel.<sup>129</sup>

Sam Storms also makes the case that prophecy should be subject to the authority and oversight of pastoral leaders. He says, “in no New Testament text are prophets portrayed as bearing ecclesiastical authority. Church leadership is the responsibility of the elders. The New Testament never says, ‘Be subject to the prophets’; rather, ‘Be subject to your elders.’ Paul did not go from city to city to ordain or appoint prophets, but elders.”<sup>130</sup> As Storms points out, prophecy in the New Testament, being subject to the authority of elders, lacks the authority of Scripture.

God’s revelation contained in Holy Scripture is the only perfect revelation the church has from God. In these Scriptures the church has direct revelation from God. In Scripture we have absolute authority. The Scriptures serve to test all prophecies. A word of prophecy does not contradict and does not hold greater authority over the Bible.

The effect of prophecy as Paul describes is shown in 1 Corinthians 14:3 when Paul says, “The one who prophesies speaks to people for their building up and encouragement and consolation.” There is an obvious fruit of building up when the words of prophecy are spoken. Therefore, we see the obvious connection with 1 Corinthians 14:1 and the nature of prophecy. Prophecy is a spontaneous revelation given by God that, while given by God without error, is subject to fallibility by the prophet. Because of such fallibility, prophecy is not on par with the revelation contained in Scripture. It is, however, given for the good and benefit of the body of

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<sup>129</sup> D. A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit: A Theological Exposition of 1 Corinthians 12-14*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 1987), p. 164

<sup>130</sup> Wayne Grudem and Stanley Gundry, eds., *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today? Four Views* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub., 1996), p.211

Christ. The commands of 1 Corinthians 14:1 are to first pursue love and secondly to earnestly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy.

The exercise of the gift of prophecy is an exercise of love, as God delivers revelation to us for the good of others. Therefore, we should heed this command while recognizing the necessity of subjecting the content of prophecies to the teachings of Scripture. To fail in these areas will result in either a failure to serve our fellow believers or a failure to humbly submit ourselves to the authoritative Scriptures.

## CHAPTER 7 EARNESTLY DESIRING PROPHECY TODAY

Throughout the previous six chapters we have carefully examined the work of the Holy Spirit while giving particular attention to his work in giving gifts to the church. We have also carefully considered 1 Corinthians 12 through 14 in an effort to correctly interpret 1 Corinthians 14:1. Lastly, in chapter 6 we devoted our attention specifically to the gift of prophecy, gaining insight to the New Testament's teaching on prophecy as a fallible, spontaneous revelation from God that is different from Old Testament prophecy. So far, we can conclude that 1 Corinthians 14:1 is a clear imperative from God to the church. To pursue love and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy is a call that demands our obedience. Therefore, as we conclude, we must give attention to the work of earnestly desiring prophecy today. This chapter will give attention to the orderly pursuit and expression of prophecy today while also offering practical insights into the exercise of this gift.

While we pursue love and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, the Bible makes it clear that the pursuit and exercise of spiritual gifts should be done in a way that demonstrates order, not chaos because God is not a God of confusion, but of peace. In 1 Corinthians 14:26-35 it is demonstrated that order is applied to the use of prophetic gifts. There we read, "What then, brothers? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up. If any speak in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn, and let someone interpret. But if there is no one to interpret, let each of them keep silent in church and speak to himself and to God. Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said. If a revelation is made to another sitting there, let the first be silent. For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be

encouraged, and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets. For God is not a God of confusion but of peace. As in all the churches of the saints, the women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission, as the Law also says. If there is anything they desire to learn, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.” In addition to the command to earnestly desire the spiritual gifts we receive the command to express these gifts in a manner that is consistent with the God of peace. Don Carson says, “That is not wise and biblically informed Christian worship that pursues freedom at the expense of order, or unrestrained spontaneity at the expense of reverence.”<sup>131</sup>

Sadly, this is not the common practice of churches who earnestly desire spiritual gifts. John MacArthur notes, “Bizarre doctrines and behavior have become so commonplace within the Charismatic Movement that they hardly make headlines anymore. Unbiblical practices – like speaking gibberish, falling backward to the floor, laughing uncontrollably, or writhing on the ground – are seen as necessary evidence that the Spirit is moving.”<sup>132</sup> Churches given to the practices above may be considered faithful to 1 Corinthians 14:1, but they grossly fail to honor the Scripture’s full teaching regarding worship, that worship will be done orderly, because God is a God of peace.

In addition to a Christian’s orderly pursuit of 1 Corinthians 14:1, earnestly desiring spiritual gifts demands that we consider the other members of the body of Christ. It is important for each member of the body to ask “why” one is using the gift that God has given to them.

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<sup>131</sup> D. A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit: A Theological Exposition of 1 Corinthians 12-14*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 1987), p.121

<sup>132</sup> John MacArthur, *Strange Fire: The Danger of Offending the Holy Spirit with Counterfeit Worship* (Nashville, Tennessee, USA: Nelson Books an imprint of Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2013). P.6

Gaffigan says, “From beginning to end gifts are given for service in the church. There are no exceptions to this consideration.”<sup>133</sup> He goes on to say, “The diverse, multifaceted manifestation of the Spirit is ‘for the common good’ (v.7). And the consideration that identifies the purpose of all gifts and regulates their exercise is the edification of the church.”<sup>134</sup> Sinclair Ferguson also adds, “Gifts are given to enable their recipients to minister to others. Implied in their possession is the two-fold principle of dependence on Christ and service to others, since the gifts of the Spirit are given essentially to the individual for the edification of others rather than for himself or herself.”<sup>135</sup>

This is especially critical for those who have been given gifts that have public expression. Gifts such as teaching, tongues, interpretation, or prophecy must be carefully considered in regards to one’s motivation because of the tendency of such gifts to produce pride. One must ask about his or her motivation when using such gifts. This is clear in 1 Corinthians 14:1. Paul’s intentionality in commanding the church to pursue love, first and foremost, provides the framework for spiritual gifts to operate within.

Following the command to pursue love and the subsequent command to earnestly desire spiritual gifts, it is important in the practice of spiritual gifts to adhere to Paul’s instruction mentioned above. Today, churches that pursue and practice gifts such as miracles, tongues, and prophecy are also marked with chaos and disorder. Paul gives clear instructions concerning the gift of prophecy. He says, again, that order should mark the corporate context. Only 2 or 3 are to

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<sup>133</sup> Richard B. Gaffin, *Perspectives on Pentecost* (United Kingdom: EVANGELICAL PRESS, 2004), p.49

<sup>134</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>135</sup> Sinclair B. Ferguson, *Holy Spirit: Contours of Christian Theology* (United States: Inter-Varsity Press, US, 1997), p.209

prophecy and others should weigh, or test, what is said. Grudem says, “1 Corinthians 14:29 indicates that the whole congregation would listen and evaluate what was said by the prophet, forming opinions about it, and some would perhaps discuss it publicly. Each prophecy might have both true and false elements in it, and those would be sifted and evaluated for what they were.”<sup>136</sup> Therefore, not only should the prophecy be ordered but the prophecy should be weighed as well. Again in 1 Thessalonians 5:19-21 it is stated, “Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies, but test everything; hold fast what is good.” This, once again, demonstrates that order is characteristic of New Testament prophetic expression. Far from the chaotic expressions that mark charismatic churches today, a biblical expression of spiritual gifts is done with order.

From verses 33-35 of 1 Corinthians 14, Paul addresses women in the corporate context and seemingly makes strong demands in regards to their work in the church. Does this mean that women should be completely silent in church? Should the church interpret this as a complete prohibition against women speaking in church, at all? Is it improper for a woman to speak, read Scripture, share a testimony, pray, or prophecy in corporate worship? One’s understanding is aided by considering other passage in 1 Corinthians. In other places Paul appears to allow women to contribute. In 1 Corinthians 11 we learn about Paul’s instructions to the women concerning head coverings. There he obviously permits a woman to pray or prophecy, albeit with certain restraints, but he certainly allows her contribution.

So would these words contradict themselves? No, but instead Paul is prohibiting the participation of women in the oral examination of a prophecy. We see this from the context of

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<sup>136</sup> Wayne Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today* (Wheaton, IL: Good News Publishers, 2000), p.61

these verses. Paul has been instructing the church about examining a prophecy and it is in the context of that examination that a woman should remain silent. Paul does not prohibit a woman questioning completely, but Paul relegates that questioning to the home, where a woman can ask under the authority of her husband. This interpretation maintains fidelity to both the understanding of 1 Corinthians 11 and the context of 1 Corinthians 14. Grudem says, “The New Testament clearly encourages women to participate fully in giving prophecies in the assembled church. In connection with a discussion of prophecy, Paul does specify that the Corinthians should follow the practice of all the churches at that time, whereby ‘the women should keep silent in the churches.’ However, this does not imply a total silence, but only a silence with respect to the spoken evaluation of prophecies, the topic which Paul has just mentioned in the previous context.”<sup>137</sup> We can be certain that the command of 1 Corinthians 14:1 is for all, men and women alike.

Having offered instruction about how a church may exercise spiritual gifts with order, Paul gives a warning to the church in verses 37-38, “If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord. If anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized.” Paul’s warning here is to heed the words that he has written under divine authority. Will the church recognize his authority over prophets? To ignore Paul’s words is to ignore, not just the congregation or the elders, but to ignore the very commands of God. If a church is to pursue the Spirit, the church must honor the commands of God, in all of Scripture, including those commands that regulate and order the use of spiritual gifts.

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<sup>137</sup> Wayne Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today* (Wheaton, IL: Good News Publishers, 2000), p. 192

In conclusion to his instruction of order in the application of the gifts of prophecy and tongues, Paul concludes this most extensive teaching on spiritual gifts by saying in 1 Corinthians 14:39-40, “So, my brothers, earnestly desire to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. But all things should be done decently and in order.” To a church that needed little encouragement to pursue spiritual gifts, Paul concludes this teaching with encouragement, not discouragement. While it would seem that, considering their many errors, Paul would likely discourage gifts of prophecy and tongues altogether, he actually does the opposite. He completes his instruction by encouraging the church to pursue these gifts.

These are commands that the church must obey today. The church must not only be open to prophecy, but desire it. Today, the church needs to receive and obey the command of 1 Corinthians 14:1 and pursue love but also earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially than we may prophesy. Words from Wayne Grudem are helpful, “Perhaps most Christians have experienced something like this at one time or another. The Lord has brought something to mind, and when it was spoken to someone else it brought forth an immediate response of surprised agreement, or comfort, or repentance, or encouragement. The New Testament writers would call this ‘prophecy’. If we are receptive to such promptings, and if the Lord is pleased to give them to us, it will no doubt open the door to many more opportunities for effective ministry, bringing upbuilding, encouragement, exhortation, and consolation of God’s people.”<sup>138</sup>

The commands of 1 Corinthians 14:1 to pursue love and earnestly desire spiritual gifts naturally begs questions such as “What are my spiritual gifts?” and “How do I earnestly desire spiritual gifts?” By observing the subsequent commands of 1 Corinthians 14 we have seen

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<sup>138</sup> Wayne Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today* (Wheaton, IL: Good News Publishers, 2000), p. 144

that earnestly desiring spiritual gifts will involve an orderly, loving, humble, and submissive attitude. However, there are practical steps that may be followed as we obediently desire spiritual gifts. Therefore, we conclude with several considerations for how we can discern and desire spiritual gifts.

To begin, Wayne Grudem says that we should pray. He says, “But how do we seek more spiritual gifts? First, we should ask God for them.”<sup>139</sup> In order to discover one’s spiritual gift, we can begin with prayer. Again, Grudem says, “In all of this, the person seeking to discover his or her gifts should pray and ask God for wisdom, confident that it will be given according to his promise.”<sup>140</sup> Understanding spiritual gifts to be a manifestation of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:7), Luke 11:9-13 is an appropriate encouragement, “And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”

In addition to prayer, we earnestly desire spiritual gifts as we look for opportunities to serve those around us. We have clearly established that spiritual gifts are God’s gifts to the church that are to be used for the building up of other, therefore as we eagerly desire to serve others, we may be sure that we are eagerly desiring our spiritual gifts to be operating. Richard

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<sup>139</sup> Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester, England: Zondervan Pub. House, 1994), p.1029

<sup>140</sup> *ibid.* p.1028

Gaffin says, “The way to determine our spiritual gifts is not to ask, ‘What is my ‘thing’ spiritually, my spiritual specialty, that sets me apart from other believers and gives me a distinguishing niche in the church?’ Rather the New Testament on the whole takes a much more *functional* or *situational* approach. The question to ask is, ‘What in the situation in which God has placed me are the particular opportunities I see for serving other believers in word and deed?’ ‘What are the specific needs confronting me that need to be ministered to?’”<sup>141</sup>

Sam Storms adds this encouragement, “So, look for a need and meet it. Find a hurt and heal it. Be alert to the cry for help and answer it. Listen for the voice of God and speak it. Identify someone’s weakness and overcome it. Look for what’s missing and supply it. When you do, the power of God—the energizing, enabling, charismatic activity of the Holy Spirit—will equip you, perhaps only once, but possibly forever, to minister hope and encouragement to those in need.”<sup>142</sup> Earnestly desiring spiritual gifts goes hand in hand with an eagerness to care for those around us, therefore, we may expect God to kindly gift us in the ways necessary as we meet the needs of others.

We must also be careful to realize that obeying the commands of 1 Corinthians 14:1 may also lead to unhealthy expectations of receiving certain gifts. In this case, Wayne Grudem is helpful when he says, “A believer should not wrongly evaluate the gifts he does have by being puffed up with pride or full of jealousy over gifts he does not have. He should rest content that the present distribution of gifts has been made by God and should be thought good and right. Therefore, he should make up his mind to be content if he does not receive the gift he asks

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<sup>141</sup> Richard B. Gaffin, *Perspectives on Pentecost* (United Kingdom: EVANGELICAL PRESS, 2004), p.53

<sup>142</sup> Sam Storms, *The Beginner’s Guide to Spiritual Gifts* (New York, NY, United States: Bethany House Publishers, 2013), p.133

for.”<sup>143</sup> After all, God alone is the sole distributor of spiritual gifts. He distributes them according to his wise and sovereign plan for the good of the church and for the glory of Jesus Christ. Our obedience to pursue love and earnestly desire spiritual gifts, especially that we may prophesy should be done with a heart aimed at the glory of Jesus Christ, submitted to God’s sovereign rule, and full of love for our neighbor. This is the character of 1 Corinthians 14:1 today.

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<sup>143</sup> Wayne Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today* (Wheaton, IL: Good News Publishers, 2000), p. 177

## CHAPTER 8 CONCLUSION

Christians are people who take the commands of God seriously. 1 Corinthians 14:1 expresses two explicit commands, pursue love and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy. These commands have been given by God because he is concerned that we love one another by caring for each other through the various expressions of our spiritual gifts. While there are many abuses among churches who claim to be “charismatic” or “continuationist”, these abuses must not hinder our fervent obedience to God’s commands in 1 Corinthians 14:1. Instead, we should eagerly pursue the gifts that he sovereignly gives in order to build up the body of Christ. This will especially occur as we pursue the gift of prophecy.

The gift of prophecy as expressed in the New Testament is not the same as Old Testament prophecy. While truly a revelation from God, prophecy today does not hold the weight of authority as the revealed will of God contained in the Scriptures. Also, the gift of prophecy today does not contribute to the foundational work of the apostles, which has long been completed. Instead, the New Testament gift of prophecy is a gift which is intended to encourage, strengthen, and edify hearers as the message is fallibly expressed. This expression must proceed from an attitude of love for the body of Christ and an aim to see her mature and grow. As this work takes place among the church, we bring glory to Jesus Christ, deepen our personal intimacy with him, and encourage others in their faith as well. For these reasons, obedience to these commands is absolutely critical to the life of the church. Ignoring them will be detrimental to not only our own lives, but to those around us.

Obedying 1 Corinthians 14:1 is a call to not merely pursue the spiritual gifts in themselves, but to actively seek the Holy Spirit. As the Holy Spirit works we can anticipate his grace and

power to abound. We need this power in the church today. Sam Storms, lamenting the impact of the church today said, “The real problems, the painful struggles and our diminishing impact won’t be solved short of a fresh infusion of power—not just any power, mind you, but spiritual power, the kind of power that human flesh can’t produce and education can’t conceive and revamped programs can’t strategize. The Church desperately needs the power of her Lord and the energy and activity of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>144</sup>

D.A. Carson also said, “the church must hunger for personal and corporate submission to the lordship of Christ. We must desire to know more of God’s presence in our lives, and pray for a display of unleashed, reforming, revivifying power among us, dreading all steps that aim to domesticate God. But such prayer and hunger must always be tempered with joyful submission to the constraints of biblical discipline.”<sup>145</sup> There are many ways to pursue God’s presence, not the least of which is to obey his commands: pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy.

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<sup>144</sup> Sam Storms, *The Beginner’s Guide to Spiritual Gifts* (New York, NY, United States: Bethany House Publishers, 2013), p.9

<sup>145</sup> D. A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit: A Theological Exposition of 1 Corinthians 12-14*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 1987), p.188

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