

Former Ways Have Ceased:

A Discussion of the Cessation of Prophecy and
Tongues in the Age of the Church

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Introduction:

The work of the Holy Spirit in relationship to prophecy and tongues is a centuries old debate. Varying views of interpretation have been offered which have led to the formation of new denominations, divisions within academic circles, and confusion among the laity. The modern assault on the validity of the canon has caused many to question their belief in the Bible and furthermore prominent evangelicals often claim to have received “special revelations” from God. Most Christians understand that the “gift of prophecy” was given to the Old Testament prophets who fill the middle portion of their Bibles but few understand how the issue of prophecy impacts their view of the church and the Scripture.

This paper will argue that the gifts of prophecy and tongues that were exhibited during the prophetic and apostolic ages ceased with the closing of the New Testament canon. More specifically, it will examine the prophetic work of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament, in the lives of the Apostles, and discuss the landmark shift that occurred at Pentecost. 1st Corinthians 13-14 and the Westminster Confession of Faith will then be examined to argue for the cessation of prophecy/special revelation in light of the sufficiency of Scripture.

The Holy Spirit in Old Testament Prophecy:

Aside from the most notable reference to the Holy Spirit “hovering over the water” in the creation account of Genesis 1, the work of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament is largely seen through the work of the prophets. God prophesied to Jacob through Isaiah, "For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour my Spirit upon your

offspring, and my blessing on your descendants.”¹ Similarly, in Isaiah 32:14-18, the prophet predicted a time when the Holy Spirit would bring great renewal by turning the wilderness into a fruitful field. The prophets Ezekiel and Joel also predicted a time when the Holy Spirit would come in greater fullness and mark God’s new covenant with His people. This specific, revelatory work of the Holy Spirit was also affirmed in the Nicene Creed of 325 AD which reads, “And I believe in the Holy Ghost...who spoke by the prophets.” The writer of Hebrews also affirmed this truth when he wrote, “Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets.”²

When examining the characteristics of Old Testament prophets, the Scriptures equate true prophecy with being the actual words of God. Numbers 23:19 states “God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it?” In Exodus 7:1-2, God spoke to Moses and said, “See, I have made you like God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron shall be your prophet. You shall speak all that I command you, and your brother Aaron shall tell Pharaoh to let the people of Israel go out of his land.” The Hebrew construction in verse 1 is important because it literally reads “I have set/made you a god to Pharaoh.” Currid writes, “Moses will operate with divine authority and, like the true God, will make his word known through a prophet.”³

Similar constructions invoking divine authority are found throughout the prophetic books. The prophet Jeremiah used this same thought pattern when he wrote “The word of the

¹ Isaiah 44:3, ESV.

² Hebrews 1:1, ESV.

³ John D. Currid, *A Study Commentary on Exodus: Volume 1 Chapters 1-18* (New York: Evangelical Press USA, 2000), 154.

Lord came to me saying..."⁴ The prophet Malachi also began his book by calling it, "The oracle of the word of the Lord."⁵ Victor Budgen writes, "This is the tone throughout all genuine prophecy. 'Perhaps' and 'maybe' are not in its vocabulary."⁶ However, the certainty and infallibility exhibited in the Old Testament prophets is to be properly understood in light of the work of the Holy Spirit. 2 Peter 1:21 states, "For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit." Prophets spoke with the authority of God, and the Holy Spirit was vital to their ministry. The Spirit gave them confidence and strength when they spoke against sin, and the Spirit was the active revelatory agent working to inspire their words.

As God spoke through the Old Testament prophets, his primary role for them was declarative in nature. Warfield wrote, "In all cases, however, prophecy is the free gift of the Spirit of God to special organs chosen for the purpose of the revelation of His will."⁷

Deuteronomy 18:18 sheds light on the role of the prophet concerning God's revelation to man. It reads: "I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command them." Thus, these prophets both declared and wrote God's revelation as they were guided by the Holy Spirit. Smeaton writes, "The prophetic Spirit imparted a supernatural illumination in virtue of which they understood fully what they were commissioned to announce..."⁸

⁴ Jeremiah 1:4, ESV.

⁵ Malachi 1:1, ESV.

⁶ Victor Budgen, *The Charismatics and the Word of God: A Biblical and Historical Perspective on the Charismatic Movement* (England: Evangelical Press, 2001), 12.

⁷ Benjamin B. Warfield, *Biblical Doctrines* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2002), 114.

⁸ George Smeaton, *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1997), 128.

These men were called by God and then given “the prophetic gift” to declare God’s message to His people. These prophetic utterances were preserved in writing and received into the early canon of Scripture as being God’s revealed Word to His people. However, not all so-called prophecy was received as infallible and recorded in the canon. Deuteronomy chapters 13 and 18 give us insight into the testing of prophets. Both chapters tell the readers to see if the prophet’s words come to pass if the person declared them in the name of the Lord. If not, or if the prophet tried to lead the people astray, the false prophet was to be executed. True prophets of God never shirked this test because they knew it was the Lord who sent them.

The Holy Spirit in the Apostolic Age:

As the age of the prophets closed with the writings of Malachi around 435 BC, the Old Testament canon closed and no more words were added to the record. Early Jewish historian Josephus affirmed this notion when he wrote, “From Artaxerxes to our own times a complete history has been written, but it has not been deemed worthy of equal credit with the earlier records, because of the failure of the exact succession of the prophets.”⁹ After the coming of the Messiah and the calling of the twelve, in the New Testament church age God chose to speak through the apostles who continued to write down Scripture as the Holy Spirit led them. Murray writes, “...as we study the content of Scripture it becomes obvious that much that is contained...is the product of supernatural revelation...the product of immediate communication from God to the mind of man.”¹⁰

⁹ Flavius Josephus, *Against Apion* (trans. W. Whiston; New York: AC Armstrong & Sons, 1889), 406.

¹⁰ John Murray, *Studies in Theology* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2005), 38.

Even though the time of the prophets had passed, the gift of prophecy was still active into the New Testament period. In Matthew 11:13-14 (in fulfillment of Malachi 4:5) Jesus links John the Baptist with the prophet Elijah. Jesus said, “For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John, and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come.” Thus, John the Baptist becomes a link between the Old and New Testaments and points to the fact that these two important figures are seen as having the same prophetic mission. Using Warfield’s previous definition, both Elijah and John the Baptist were called by God to be “organs chosen for the purpose of the revelation of His will.” John came declaring the coming of God’s Kingdom, Jesus inaugurated the Kingdom of God, and through the ministry of the apostles the message of the Kingdom was spread.

“The supernatural gifts in the New Testament were very abundant, but all culminated in the Apostles, who were organs of Christ’s revelation to the Church, and invested with an ecumenical commission which extended to all lands and which endures through all time.”¹¹ Given that there is no specific job description for an apostle outlined in Scripture, it is difficult to understand the full extent of the apostles’ ministry during the New Testament. According to Acts 1 and the Gospel of Luke, the qualifications for an apostle were that they had to have personally seen Christ after His resurrection and been specifically commissioned by Christ as an apostle. Luke 6:13 sheds light on this commissioning: “And when day came, he [Jesus] called his disciples and chose from them twelve, whom he named apostles.”

The qualification of being an eyewitness to the resurrection in light of Acts 1:8 gives us insight into the primary function of the apostles after the ascension. Christ first promises the

¹¹ Smeaton, *Holy Spirit*, 129.

gift of the Holy Spirit and then charges them to “be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth.” After Christ’s resurrection and ascension into heaven, the age of the church began, and the Spirit was given to guide, strengthen, and comfort the apostles as they ventured out to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In essence, the apostles became the foundational witnesses of the church. “So important was this original group of twelve apostles, the ‘charter members’ of the office of apostle, that we read that their names are inscribed on the foundations of the heavenly city: the new Jerusalem.”¹² In its description of the heavenly city, Revelation 21:14 states, “And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them the twelve names of the apostles of the Lamb.”

In addition to the qualification of being an eyewitness to the resurrection, it is the commission by Christ that is most helpful in our understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit through the ministry of the apostles. Smeaton writes, “The same Spirit spoke in both economies, the prophets by the Spirit foretelling the Messiah’s advent and the apostles by the same Spirit announcing the historic fact.”¹³ Using Smeaton’s thought process, under the old economy the prophets proclaimed “Someone is coming!” while under the new economy the apostles proclaimed “Someone has come and will come again!” Thus, the gift of the Holy Spirit was given to the apostles to increase their effectiveness as witnesses of Christ announcing the parousia. Just as the prophets were called by the Spirit to declare the advent of the Lord in the Old Testament, the apostles were called to declare the return of the Lord in the New Testament.

¹² Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 908.

¹³ Smeaton, *Holy Spirit*, 293.

This apostolic proclamation of the Kingdom of God was also accompanied by gifts of the Spirit along with signs and wonders that certified the witness of the apostles. Hebrews 2:3b-4 reads, "This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to His will." Signs and wonders were given to the apostles to attest to God's revelation in Jesus Christ and the witnesses of Christ's resurrection were inspired to communicate His Word to the church. Clowney states, "Apostolic miracles sealed the final revelation given in Christ, preserved for us in New Testament Scripture."¹⁴ Furthermore, Clowney distinguishes between the prophetic work of the apostles and the work of modern pastors and evangelists. He writes, "The same heightening that produced the signs of miraculous healing also operated with respect to God's word. By the unction of the Spirit, the Lord's evangelists and pastors today regularly proclaim the word of God. But in the apostolic gifts of prophecy and tongues, words of the Lord were directly inspired by the Spirit."¹⁵

The Holy Spirit and the Day of Pentecost:

The powerful work of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, detailed in Acts 2, marked a dramatic shift in how the Spirit functioned in the church. Gaffin writes, "It is fair to say that everything said in the New Testament about the Spirit's work looks forward or traces back to Pentecost."¹⁶ As previously mentioned, the Spirit gave more effectiveness in witness and

¹⁴ Edmund P. Clowney, *The Church: Contours of Christian Theology* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1995), 242.

¹⁵ Clowney, *The Church*, 243.

¹⁶ Richard B. Gaffin Jr., *Perspectives on Pentecost: New Testament Teaching on the Gifts of the Holy Spirit* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 1979), 14.

ministry but the Spirit also allowed the apostles to more effectively proclaim the gospel, have power over sin and demonic forces, heal the sick, and perform many different signs and wonders. All of these “gifts of the Spirit” accompanied “the gift of the Spirit” given at Pentecost. “The work of the Spirit (the gift) is experienced by all in the church, but the Spirit given on the principle of universal donation is to be distinguished from those workings of the Spirit (the gifts) variously distributed within the church.”¹⁷

Gaffin goes on to further distinguish “the gift” from “the gifts” by thinking about the work of the Holy Spirit in two separate eschatological categories. The gift of the Spirit given to the whole church serves as an eschatological reality that is experienced by all, while the various gifts of the Spirit serve as signs of the reality but are sub-eschatological in nature. This method of categorization is given only to highlight the uniqueness of the Pentecost event in the life of the church. Under this rubric, the Pentecost event is to be understood as “part of the once-for-all accomplishment of redemption (*historia salutis*) rather than as a part of its ongoing, continuing application (*ordo salutis*).”¹⁸ However, the benefits given to the apostles as a result of Pentecost were ongoing in nature, though not salvific.

With Christ’s “great commission” to the apostles in Matthew 28 and His charge to go out into the world carrying the good news of the gospel, John captures another aspect of Jesus’ words to His apostles. Not surprisingly, Jesus’ focus is incredibly Trinitarian as He explains the relationship of the Father and Son to the work of the Spirit. Jesus says in John 14:16-17, “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit

¹⁷ Gaffin, *Perspectives*, 43.

¹⁸ Gaffin, *Perspectives*, 22.

of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you."

This passage is pivotal in our understanding of the Holy Spirit because Christ is saying that the coming of the Spirit is economically equal to Himself. This is significant because Christ is telling the apostles that after He leaves, He will dwell with them through the work of the Holy Spirit, though not in bodily form. "Pentecost means that the Spirit is now present and active in the covenant community on the basis, and as the climax, of the finished redemptive accomplishment of Christ...the gift of the Spirit is nothing less than the gift of Christ himself to the church."¹⁹ Thus, as the apostles go out into the world, their Savior will accompany them wherever they go while ruling from the right hand of the Father. This relationship only underscores God's transcendence over creation while being immanent among His people.

Varying Views on the Gifts of the Spirit:

With the backdrop of Pentecost and the commissioning of the apostles in Acts 1:8, it is important to understand the nature of the apostolic gifts and examine whether or not they are active today. As the discussion begins it is important to develop a working definition of a spiritual gift. Gaffin writes, "Spiritual gifts comprise all the ways in which God by the power of his Spirit uses Christians as instruments in His service."²⁰ Similarly, Grudem writes, "A spiritual gift is any ability that is empowered by the Holy Spirit and used in any ministry of the church."²¹ These definitions point to the fact that there are a wide range of gifts given to further the

¹⁹ Gaffin, *Perspectives*, 20.

²⁰ Gaffin, *Perspectives*, 48.

²¹ Grudem, *Systematic*, 1017.

ministry of the church. However, both writers agree that there should be a subtle distinction made between Spirit-given gifts related to natural ability and miraculous gifts.

This distinction is important because most of the debate has been over the continuation of the miraculous gifts, most notably: ongoing prophecy and tongues. Thankfully, this long standing debate does not focus on the natural gifts of the Spirit that so many in the church benefit from, namely: teaching, mercy, administration, wisdom, etc. The distinction made henceforth should only be understood as a semantic distinction used only to narrow the topic down to current debate. The Apostle Paul recognizes the overarching work of the Spirit in 1 Corinthians 12:4-6 when he writes, “Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of activities, but the same God who empowers them all in everyone.”

Regarding miraculous gifts, there is a spectrum of views represented. On one end of the spectrum, the Pentecostal movement claims that the miraculous gifts are still active and available to all believers today. The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church states, “Its adherents emphasize the corporate element in worship and lay special stress on the practice of the gifts listed in 1 Corinthians and recorded in Acts.”²² Many argue that the gift of tongues is the sign that always accompanies a post-conversion ‘baptism of the Holy Spirit.’ However, this line of thinking runs contrary to the New Testament’s teaching on the Holy Spirit. As previously mentioned, the “gift” of the Holy Spirit is given to all Christians but there are different “gifts” of the Spirit that are manifested in the church. Under the Pentecostal movement, the gifts mentioned in Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, and Ephesians 4 were given to continue in the church until Christ’s return. Gaffin sums up the mindset of this group towards the orthodox

²² F.L. Cross, ed., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Oxford University Press, 1983), 1062.

view: "That certain gifts have ceased is seen as a desperate ploy in flagrant disregard of plain biblical teaching, a lame, after the fact rationalization of a church embarrassed by the absence of these gifts in its midst."²³

On the opposite end of the spectrum, a separate group claims that the miraculous gifts ceased with the death of the apostles and the closing of the canon. This group, aptly referred to as "cessationists," argues that the miraculous gifts were given as foundational signs to authenticate the apostles during the earliest days of the church after the ascension of Christ. Furthermore, they claim that the miraculous gifts are no longer needed as authenticating signs today because the age of the apostles has ceased and the age of the church has begun.

Others still argue that the prophetic gifts were originally given to the apostles but that they gradually phased out into the third century with the rise of Constantine. B.B. Warfield, a key proponent of cessationism, argued against this view in his book *Counterfeit Miracles*. He argued, "The facts are not in accordance with it...there is little or no evidence at all for miracle working during the first fifty years of the post-Apostolic church."²⁴ Jon Ruthven, Assistant Professor of Systematic Theology at Regent University, argues against Warfield's assessment. He states, "The central fault of Warfield's cessationism is that it is far more dogmatically than scripturally based. His cessationism represents a failure to grasp the biblical portrayal of the eschatological outpouring of the Spirit of prophecy..."²⁵

²³ Gaffin, *Perspectives*, 89.

²⁴ Benjamin B. Warfield, *Counterfeit Miracles* (New York: Scribners and Sons, 1918), 8.

²⁵ Jon Ruthven, "On the Cessation of the Charismata: The Protestant Polemic of Benjamin B. Warfield," *JSPS* 12, (1990): 14-31.

Paul's words to the Corinthian Church:

With the plethora of views offered on the continuation/cessation of the prophetic gifts, it is important to understand the Apostle Paul's teaching on the subject in 1 Corinthians 14. Paul was writing the Corinthian church for multiple reasons, but one of them was using corporate worship for building up the church instead of seeking personal attention. Much of the debate regarding ongoing revelation centers on the meaning of the Greek word *glossa*. Herman Haarbeck writes, "Originally it meant the tongue of humans and animals in the physiological sense, the organ of taste and speech. Figuratively *glossa* stands for the faculty of speech, utterance, and also language. It can also denote an obscure linguistic expression which requires explanation."²⁶

What is interesting to note is that the word Paul uses, *glossa*, is also used to denote "language" in both the confusion of tongues at Babel found in Genesis 11:7 of the LXX and in the division of the tongues of fire at Pentecost in Acts 2. At Babel, God confused the *glossa* of a sinful people to scatter them over the earth, and at Pentecost "the apostles, filled with the Holy Ghost, spoke with other or new tongues of 'the wonderful works of God' so that the people of every nation under heaven understood in their own language."²⁷ This points to the idea that the supernatural impartation of tongues refers to a known language system rather than just a string of human sounds (as would be denoted by the Greek word *battalogo* meaning "stammering or babbling"). Thus, there is a close connection between speaking in tongues and

²⁶ H. Haarbeck, "γλωσσα," *NIDNTT* 3:1078-80.

²⁷ C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *The Pentateuch* (vol. 1 of *Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes*; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1973), 176.

the interpretation of those tongues. Paul mentions this in verse 10, “There are doubtless many different languages in the world, and none is without meaning.”

“The nature of glossolalia [a word of Greek origin but not found in the NT] in Corinth is important because it is well established that contemporary tongue-speaking does not have linguistic structure...”²⁸ Paul speaks against this man-centered practice in verse 9 when he writes, “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.” Paul is not discounting the presence of prophetic tongues, but he refutes the thinking of the Corinthians (and also modern Pentecostals) that the presence of tongue-speaking is the ultimate sign of true conversion. However, he does predict the termination of the special apostolic gifts in 1 Corinthians 13:8 when he writes, “...But where there are prophecies, they will cease; and where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away.”

A commonly held view in modern evangelicalism is that all of the spiritual gifts mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12 were given to continue in the church until Christ’s return. This is the view held by Dr. Wayne Grudem who argues for a hybrid view of the gifts mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12 based on his exegesis of 1 Corinthians 13:8-13. Based on verses 9-10 which read, “For our knowledge is imperfect and our prophecy is imperfect; but when the perfect comes, the imperfect will pass away” Grudem argues that “the perfect” is Christ and that all of the prophetic gifts will continue until his return. He writes, “In this argument Paul connects the

²⁸ Clowney, *The Church*, 247.

function of prophecy with the time of cessation. It fills a certain need now, but does so only imperfectly.”²⁹

While this view would appear to strike the perfect balance between those who argue for continuity and those who argue for cessation, it is interesting to note how Paul describes the temporary nature of his own apostleship. In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul discusses the historical reliability of Jesus’ resurrection and he mentions that Jesus appeared to Cephas, the five hundred brethren, James, and “then to all the apostles” in verse 7. However, after listing those who were alive and bore witness to Christ’s resurrection, in verse 8 he writes, “and last of all, as unto one born out of due time, he appeared to me.” Paul alludes to his dramatic conversion on the road to Damascus when the Lord appeared to him and commissioned him as the apostle to the Gentiles years after Jesus’ ascension. Paul links himself with this special group of people who also saw Jesus and were commissioned by Him but he also states that he is the last member of this group.

The Temporary, Foundational Role of the Apostles:

As Paul suggests, the apostles served a temporary but foundational role in the early church. Gaffin writes, “The apostles bear witness, authorized and empowered by Christ himself, to his resurrection as the fulfillment of covenant history.”³⁰ Just as the Old Testament prophets received revelation under the inspiration of the Spirit, the New Testament apostles received prophetic revelation that was often authenticated by the giving and interpreting of tongues. The apostolic era of the church was an “open canon” period in which prophecy served

²⁹ Grudem, *Systematic*, 1032.

³⁰ Gaffin, *Perspectives*, 91.

as one of the principal revelatory word gifts given to the apostles and prophets. However, once the apostles died, the foundational age of the church ended as the church of Christ spread and the canon of Scripture closed. Thus, the need for new revelation and authenticating signs ceased along with the writing of new Spirit-inspired Scripture. Gaffin continues, “The overall picture is the replacement of one situation by another: at first, the church’s new canon is the organism of God’s Word being spoken and written by the apostles and prophets (in addition to the Old Testament), and then, beyond the time of the apostles, the finalized, completed organism of the collection of twenty-seven books.”³¹

Calvin commented on the redemptive historical shift that occurred with the closing of the canon and the founding of the early church. Concerning prophets and apostles he wrote, “these functions were not established in the church as permanent ones, but only for that time during which churches were to be erected where none existed before.”³² The apostle Paul also references the foundational work of the prophets and apostles in Ephesians 2:19b-20. He writes, “...you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone.”

Practically speaking a foundation is only built once and the rest of the building is built on that foundation. Paul is referring to the work of the prophets and apostles which ceased once the church began to grow. Prophets and apostles were called to lay the foundation but the chief cornerstone was laid in Christ and the rest of the church took its shape from Him.

Ongoing revelation is not needed because Christ has come and “in him all the fullness of God

³¹ Gaffin, *Perspectives*, 100.

³² John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (ed. J. Mcneil; trans. F. Battles; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), 434.

was pleased to dwell.” (Col 1:19) Gaffin writes, “Revelation is an integral element in the ongoing covenant history which has reached its initial consummation in the sufferings, death, and exaltation of Christ.”³³ Now, the church’s task is to faithfully proclaim God’s revelation of Himself through the preaching of His Word.

With the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, in fulfillment of Joel 2:28-29, the gift of the Spirit was given to all believers. This shift in redemptive history means that the Spirit is now present and active in the new covenant community on the basis of the finished, redemptive work of Christ. In his address to the Ephesian elders, Paul wrote in Acts 20:32, “And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace...” The apostle emphasized the Holy Spirit working through the reading and preaching of the Scriptures as the core of their future ministry.

Therefore, the case for the cessation of prophecy and tongues is sound based on historical and Biblical evidence. First, while God is free to act according to His own sovereign will at anytime, no verifiable prophecy has been recorded in the post apostolic church. Second, in the largest discussions devoted to spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 13-14) Paul declares that prophecy and tongues will cease. Third, prophetic gifts were given to the apostles to help authenticate their witness and the apostolic office itself was only temporary. In 1 Corinthians 15:7-8, Paul argues that he is the last of the apostles. Fourth, the New Testament canon closed with the death of the apostles because revelation was fulfilled with the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. Fifth, after the gift of the Holy Spirit was given to all believers at Pentecost, Paul commended the early church to the Word of God for its future ministry. Finally, Paul tells his

³³ Gaffin, *Perspectives*, 98.

disciple Timothy in 2Timothy 3:16 that the Scripture alone is sufficient for all matters of faith, life, and doctrine.

The Teaching of the Westminster Confession of Faith:

In light of the fact that the Holy Spirit primarily works through the reading and the preaching of His revealed Word, it comes as no surprise that the Westminster Divines began their Confession of Faith with a chapter on the Holy Scriptures. Chapter 1.1 reads “Therefore it pleased the Lord, at sundry times, and in diverse manners, to reveal himself, and to declare that his will unto his church.” One could assume that the Assembly left the door open to different interpretations of “diverse manners” but they continue: “...and afterwards, for the better preserving and propagating of the truth...to commit the same wholly unto writing which maketh the Holy Scripture to be most necessary...” Thus, the Scriptures become the primary means by which God reveals His will to man, yet ultimately through the person and work of Jesus Christ. Due to the sufficiency of the Scriptures the Divines wrote, “...those former ways of God’s revealing his will unto his people [have] now ceased.”

Paragraph 1.6 further expounds this point by stating, “The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for his own glory...is either expressly written down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added...” Concerning the primary work of the Holy Spirit after the cessation of the apostolic gifts the Assembly wrote, “...our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts.”

Concerning ongoing prophetic revelation and the work of the Holy Spirit, the Confession clearly teaches that the Spirit works in the hearts of people to reveal the truth that already exists. As mentioned earlier, the Assembly wrote that the “former ways” have ceased which refers to the prophetic gifts given to the Old Testament prophets and the New Testament apostles. The Scriptures stand alone as the sufficient means by which men are saved because they point to the only name by which men can be saved- Jesus Christ. Calvin wrote, “The prophets and apostles do not boast either of their keenness or of anything that obtains credit for them as they speak...rather, they bring forward God’s holy name...”³⁴

Finally, the Westminster Divines referred to the Scriptures as “the supreme judge by which all controversies of religion are to be determined...and in whose sentences we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in Scripture.” (WCF 1.10) Some charismatic leaders would argue that the Spirit provides divine utterances which bring a fresh word of revelation to humanity. However, the Bible is self-attesting and affirms that “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.” (2 Tim 3:16-17) No additional prophetic utterances are necessary because God has revealed Himself to humanity through Creation, His son Jesus Christ, and the canon of Scripture.

Conclusion:

As we have seen, the giving of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost marked a dramatic shift in the experience and life of the New Testament church. After Jesus’ ascension the apostles were

³⁴ Calvin, *Institutes*, 78.

charged with taking the message of the gospel out to the nations and were given miraculous gifts of the Spirit to authenticate their message during the foundational age of the church. This apostolic age was also a time of revelation as the Holy Spirit continued to inspire men to set down Scripture. The effects of Pentecost were powerful and are still being experienced today. Many hearts have been impacted by the Holy Spirit's work as the Triune God establishes His kingdom in the hearts of men.

The church, founded by the apostles, continues to grow and is still charged with the task of the apostles- to take the gospel forth into the world. The apostles were given the gifts of tongues and prophecy to authenticate their message before the closing of the canon, but now the church has been given a much more powerful authentication. This gift is the very Word of God made effectual unto salvation by the mighty work and power of the Holy Spirit. The salvation promised by God the Father was accomplished by the Son and is now being applied by the Spirit. Thus, the gift of the Spirit is to be understood as the very gift of God Himself as He takes up residence in the hearts of men.

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