
Chapter 8.7

Answering Arguments Against *Historicism*

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Primary Points

- *Historicism* is our label for those who recognize the fact that the *Scripture* and *sign gifts* such as divine knowledge, prophecy, healing, and tongues ceased with the completion of the reception, recording, recognition, and sufficient distribution of the NT revelation.
- The most important evidence for *historicism* comes from the intended purpose of the *Scripture* and *sign gifts*.
- At least one of the first century *Scripture* and *sign gifts*, apostleship, is widely recognized as ceasing during the early history of the Church, and never to be in operation again.
- Ephesians 2:19-20 would seem to add prophecy to the list of gifts with a relatively temporary purpose.
- Hebrews 2:3-4 also suggests a limited time and purpose for these gifts.
- The later letters of the NT do not refer to these gifts at all.
- The Apostle John's warning in the Revelation also clearly implies that the Church was no longer to expect any more revelation.
- The reception of biblical revelation, and the supernatural gifts that accompanied it, *did* cease.
- Acts is *primarily* a book of history, not instruction or doctrine. Indeed, the Acts of the Apostles was given to us so that we may witness the *unique* power with which the Church came into existence; but it is limited, just as the OT is, in dictating what the modern Christian experience is to be like.
- Acts 2:16-21, the foundational passage for *prophetism* and essentially *charismaticism* itself reflects the near/partial and far/complete fulfillment of biblical prophecies and its full contents cannot be applied to this age.
- We might be more open to believe that everything the Apostles experienced is to be our experience as *charismaticism* claims, if even they could duplicate the miraculous and revelatory powers of the Apostolic Age. They don't.

A) A Summary of Biblical Evidence for *Historicism*

Historicism is our label for those who recognize the fact that the *Scripture* and *sign gifts* such as divine knowledge, prophecy, healing, and tongues ceased with the completion of the reception, recording, recognition, and sufficient distribution of the NT revelation. Several arguments for *historicism* have been discussed at length elsewhere.¹ They are repeated briefly here only to supplement the arguments from the text of 1 Corinthians 13:8-12.

The most important evidence comes from the intended purpose of the *Scripture* and *sign gifts*. If their specific purpose was in fact to communicate and authenticate NT revelation in the absence of NT Scripture in order to implement the New Covenant, as was done with the implementation of the Old Covenant with the written OT, then the debate over their cessation would seem settled. We defend the purposes of these gifts elsewhere.²

At least one of the first century *Scripture* and *sign gifts*, apostleship, is widely recognized as ceasing during the early history of the Church, and never to be in operation again.³

Ephesians 2:19-20 would seem to add prophecy to the list of gifts with a relatively temporary purpose:

Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household [the Church] built on the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.

The gift of prophecy is described with apostleship as a foundational gift upon which the Church is built. It is clear that once a foundation is built, its construction must cease in order for anything to be built on it, again implying that these gifts were temporary and have now ceased, never to return. Accordingly, we have noted in revelatory history that when a superior mode of divine revelation is available (e.g. Christ, Scripture), inferior modes cease (e.g. prophecy).

Hebrews 2:3-4 also suggests a limited time and purpose for these gifts:

How shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed [past tense] to us by those who heard Him. God also testified [past tense] to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to His will.

No doubt this passage concerns at least the *sign gifts*, prophecy (in the ability to predict the future) and tongues being among them.

The later letters of the NT do not refer to these gifts at all. This absence is particularly significant in the pastoral letters where Paul's last instructions regard teaching truth that has already been revealed, rather than seeking more revelation.

The Apostle John's warning in the Revelation also clearly implies that the Church was no longer to expect any more revelation that would be normative for the universal Church to believe and obey. Among the very last biblical words, of the very last revelatory Apostle, we read:

I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. (Rev 22:18)

While many doubt that this warning has any relevance to the debate over whether the revelatory gifts of the Apostolic Age have ceased, we believe the thoughts of the highly respected Reformed theologian, Robert Reymond, are worth consideration:

In this verse John writes: "I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book." There can be no doubt that John's warning here against adding words to "the prophecy of this book" has immediate reference to the Book of Revelation itself; in short, John opposes any and all tampering with his Patmos prophecy. This cannot be controverted and no one denies it.

But does John's warning here have exclusive reference only to the Book of Revelation? While good scholars have said so, good reasons exist to believe that the warning applies to all the prophetic Scriptures construed as a unitary whole.

Consider the fact that this portion of the Word of God not only deals with "last things" but also was the last portion of the New Testament to be written. It is quite conceivable that John could have had before his mind the entire corpus of prophetic writings (his own and those preceding his) when he issued his warning, for doubtless John knew he was the last of the apostles, and there is evidence that by the last decade of the first century the several literary parts of our New Testament were already regarded as God's word to his church and were being gathered together in codex or "book" form.

It should also be noted that the Book of Revelation, by the very nature of its content, in no sense stands in isolation from the other prophetic writings of Scripture. To the contrary,

John presents us with more direct allusions to the prophetic Scriptures of the Old Testament, verse for verse, than perhaps any other writer of New Testament literature.

In other words, from his vantage point in history, under inspiration John reaches far back, as it were, into Old Testament prophecy, brings both its weal and its woe forward and integrates them with his own and then relates the whole to the farthest reaches of this age. So there is a real sense in which the very subject which he treats unites his prophecy with the earlier prophetic writings, and unites them together in such a way that to add to his book is just to add to their book of prophecy. Standing midway, as he does, between all the former prophetic writings and the eschaton itself, John by means of the most comprehensive and extensive prophetic statement of them all brings past and future together with his own book serving as the uniting "linchpin" for prophecy and fulfillment.

When the all-time-encompassing manner in which John handles his material is kept in mind, it is readily perceptible that John's warning against adding to "the words of the prophecy of this book" must be construed in the widest and most comprehensive sense possible and not in the more restricted sense as is often done.

Once this is realized, it follows that Revelation 22:18, in its warning not to add anything to the prophetic Scriptures *per se*, envisions a completed canon, with the addition of the Book of Revelation itself constituting the concluding segment; and thus this verse becomes one of the strongest affirmations in the New Testament that the revelatory process ceased with the writings of the apostle John.⁴

And as we have demonstrated elsewhere, the reception of biblical revelation, and the supernatural gifts that accompanied it, *did* cease.⁵

B) Answering Arguments Against *Historicism*

B.1) The Misuse of Acts: *Where are the Apostles?*

Any honest student of the Bible recognizes that special care must be taken when attempting to apply the events recorded in it to our own time. Along with trusting their emotional experiences too much, the fundamental error of *charismaticism*⁶ is this very

thing. They claim a greater spirituality and faith because they expect and supposedly experience a greater array of the events in Scripture.

It is tempting, of course, to think that all that we see in the Bible is for us today, but that is shoddy hermeneutics. We do not attempt to apply all of the OT commands and practices to our lives. The same is true even of the NT. For example, Christ told the disciples, **“Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel”** (Matt 10:5-6). We readily recognize this command as only applying to the Twelve disciples for a specific and unique period of time.

Likewise, the Acts of the Apostles are just that, and record the abilities and actions of a very special group of men at a very special time- the inauguration of a New Covenant and the Church. It is clear that not all of what our first century brothers and sisters experienced is to be experienced by us today and therefore a good deal of caution must be used in any modern claim to phenomena in the early Church. Acts is *primarily* a book of history, not instruction, devotion, or doctrine. Indeed, the Acts of the Apostles was given to us so that we may witness the *unique* power with which the Church came into existence; but it is limited, just as the OT is, in dictating what the modern Christian experience is to be like.

There is a historical fact that many in *charismaticism* ignore when they wish to make the Acts of the Apostles a doctrinal book for the modern Church. That historical fact is that the central characters of the book, Apostles, no longer exist. If Acts is a historical account of the ministry of a unique group of men, a ministry which no longer exists, then we had better be careful about what we expect to apply to our own day.

Accordingly, the respected NT scholar D. A. Carson writes:

The essential salvation-historical structure of the Book of Acts is too often overlooked by charismatics. Therefore, as [even the Pentecostal NT scholar Gordon] Fee laments, the exegesis of Acts in most charismatic circles is hermeneutically uncontrolled. The way Luke tells the story, Acts provides not a paradigm for individual Christian experience, but the account of the gospel's outward movement, geographically, racially, and above all theologically.⁷

Therefore, there are all kinds of unique experiences recorded in Acts. For example, we do not feel compelled to cast lots in order to choose leaders (cf. Acts 1:26).⁸ There has never been another recorded instance of the Spirit manifesting Himself in the sound of a rushing wind loud enough to draw thousands of people (cf. 2:1-41).

⁹ Christians do not worship today in Jewish temples (cf. 2:46; 3:1) or live communally (cf. 4:32-35). Therefore, the Church has historically recognized that the Acts of the Apostles are not to be read indiscriminately as the norm for subsequent generations of Christians.

Even *prophetism* refuses to claim God is granting new Scripture-quality revelation today as He did in Acts. Therefore, we are agreed that there are some fundamental occurrences in Acts that have no place in Christianity today. Accordingly, we have written at length elsewhere of the marked discontinuity in the biblical history of *extraordinary* means of divine revelation.¹⁰

B.2) Acts 2:16-21: Where is the Blood & Fire?

On the day of Pentecost, the Apostle Peter gave the following explanation for the tongues phenomena that occurred:

This is what was spoken by the Prophet Joel: "In the last days, God says, I will pour out My Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on My servants, both men and women, I will pour out My Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy.

I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord. (Acts 2:16-21)

Teachers within *prophetism* routinely mention this passage as support for claiming that we are currently in an age of prophecy, tongues, revelatory visions and dreams, and miracle working in general. A full explanation of this passage is beyond the scope of this topic and its interpretation affects many areas of theology including pneumatology and eschatology. Still, some points can be made here.

First of all, it is obvious that the Apostle does not intend to literally apply all of Joel's prophecy to the Church Age. Although the Apostles did receive the Spirit and no doubt prophesied (cf. Acts 19:6), the "**wonders in the heaven above**" including "**blood and fire and billows of smoke**" and the "**sun**" being "**turned to darkness and the moon to blood**" clearly pertain to "**the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord**" when Christ

returns to Earth (cf. Matt 24:29-31; 2 Thess 1:6-10), and especially with the judgments as described in Revelation (cf. 8:5-10; 9:2-18).

This reflects the fact that Joel's prophecy specifically applies to the nation of Israel and only *after* Christ's Second Advent. It reads:

Then you will know that I am in Israel [after Endtime judgments described previously in Joel 2], **that I am the LORD your God, and that there is no other; never again will My people be shamed.**

And afterward, I will pour out My Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on My servants, both men and women, I will pour out My Spirit in those days.

I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood [right] **before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD.**
(Joel 2:27-31)

The prophecy of Joel that Peter quotes did not directly pertain to Pentecost, or the founding of the Church, but rather events occurring after Christ comes to Earth in His Second Coming. Evidently, during that time, the saved remnant of the nation of Israel will all have the Holy Spirit poured out on them and even their children will be Prophets and their old men receiving divine revelations as well.

Obviously, then, some of these specific prophecies have not yet come true. Neither in apostolic days, nor in modern *prophetism* do we have testimonies of youths ("**sons and daughters**" and "**young men**" [*neaniskoi*: "youths"] in contrast to "**old men**") receiving and communicating direct divine revelation from God. It is clear that the prophecy includes child Prophets, and there has been none that we are aware of throughout Church history, nor in the modern *prophetist* movement.

Accordingly, that same movement had better be careful what they attempt to prove from this passage. If not all of Joel's prophecy can be literally applied to the Church Age, then it is obvious that great care must be taken in determining what part can. Nonetheless, in typical fashion, *prophetism* picks out of the passage the parts they want to use and ignores the rest.

It is widely recognized that biblical prophecies often have some characteristics that make them difficult to properly apply. First, they can have a dual fulfillment with one being near future and partial, and the other being far future and full (cf. Isa 7:13-17; cp. Matt 1:22-23). Likewise, prophecies often contain unrecognized

large gaps of time within them (cf. Isa 61:1-2; cp. Luke 4:16-21). Both features would seem to be in play in Peter's application of Joel's prophecy with some near partial fulfillment in the coming of the Spirit, and far future fulfillments after the return of Christ.¹¹

It is clear that Joel's prediction of the unprecedented indwelling of the Holy Spirit can be applied as an ongoing experience of the Church. However, the fact that Joel's prophecy does not even mention the tongues phenomenon that Peter is wanting to explain, would seem to imply that Peter's focus here is on the fact that the Spirit has come, not on the various temporary manifestations that occurred. His specific point was that the men were not drunk, but rather had been indwelt with the Holy Spirit. That was the truly significant thing occurring here, and that is to be the continuing experience of the Church Age.

Such "straining a gnat and swallowing a camel" exegesis is typical of *prophetism*. It is guilty of attempting to make the most significant use of Peter's statement refer to their pet doctrines of ongoing tongues speakers and modern "prophets" in their churches. On the contrary, there is something occurring here that is much more important, and easily missed in *prophetist* dogmatics: the indwelling of the Holy Spirit for the eternal sealing and moral regeneration of all Christians. And this is precisely the part of Peter's meaning that has continued throughout the Church Age, while the miraculous gifts ceased relatively early in its history.

Beyond the monumental indwelling of all of God's people with His Spirit, it is very debatable what modern expositors can pick and choose from Joel's prophecy, or which events on the day of Pentecost were to be the continuing experience of the Church. It has already been noted that there are clearly things in Joel's prophecy that do not literally apply to the continuing experience of the Church Age at all. It has also been pointed out in the preceding section that many of the "fireworks" that accompanied this monumental, revolutionary, and initial indwelling of the Holy Spirit cannot be expected to be the continuing experience of the Church either.

Also, although it is common for NT writers to use OT passages to illustrate a NT concept, all expositors will agree that great care is needed in interpreting these OT quotations and how (or how much) they were to be applied to the present NT context is often unclear and understandably debatable. This is especially true of prophetic OT passages, and this quotation from Joel by Peter is just that. Simply put, the foundational theological passage for *prophetism* and essentially *charismaticism* itself, is Peter's quotation of an OT prophecy in a NT context, a type of NT text that is among the most difficult to precisely interpret and apply.

The best commentary we have found on Acts 2:17-21 comes from the respected NT scholar Richard N. Longenecker in the *Expositors Bible Commentary*:

[Peter's] use of the Joel passage is in line with what since the discovery of the DSS [*Dead Sea Scrolls*] we have learned to call a *peshet* (from Heb. *peser*, "interpretation"). It lays all emphasis on fulfillment without attempting to exegete the details of the biblical prophecy it "interprets." So Peter introduces the passage with the typically *peshet* introductory formula "this is that" (*touto estin to*; NIV, "this is what"). . . .

Debates arise between proponents of "realized eschatology" and "inaugurated eschatology," on the one hand, and between amillennialists (including here postmillennialists) and premillennialists (cf. "The Eschatology of the Bible," Robert L. Saucy, *EBC*, 1:103-26), on the other hand, about how Peter and the earliest followers of Jesus understood the more spectacular physical signs of Joel's prophecy (i.e., "blood and fire and billows of smoke," "the sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood").

Realized eschatologists and amillennialists usually take Peter's inclusion of such physical imagery in a spiritual way, finding in what happened at Pentecost the spiritual fulfillment of Joel's prophecy--a fulfillment not necessarily tied to any natural phenomena. . . . Moreover, some realized eschatologists and amillennialists, desiring to retain more than just the symbolic, suggest that these signs should be understood as having actually taken place in the natural world "during the early afternoon of the day of our Lord's crucifixion," when "the sun turned into darkness" and "the paschal full moon ... appeared blood-red in the sky in consequence of that preternatural gloom" (Bruce, *Book of the Acts*, p. 69).

On the other hand, certain features in Peter's sermon show his reason for his emphatic citation of Joel's prophecy. These features are Peter's introductory formula "this is that," his alteration of "afterward" (Joel 2:28) to "in the last days," his addition of "God says" at the beginning of the quotation, and his interruption of the quotation to insert "and they will prophesy." He quotes the entire prophecy in Joel 2:28-32 because of its traditional messianic significance and because its final sentence ("And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved") leads logically to the kerygma section of his sermon.

But Peter might not have known what to make of the more physical and spectacular elements of Joel's prophecy, though

he probably expected them in some way to follow in the very near future. (Certainly he could not have foreseen a delay of many centuries before their fulfillment.) So his emphasis was on the inauguration of the Messianic Age ("the last days")--an emphasis we should see as being essential to his preaching and beyond which we are not compelled to go.¹²

Accordingly, *charismaticism* is on rather shaky ground to insist that this passage is a fundamental biblical foundation for their theology. Nevertheless, Pentecostal Douglas Oss not only illustrates the importance of Joel's prophecy to *charismaticism*, but describes why it is foundational:

The cessationist's [i.e. *historicism's*] theological model for understanding miraculous gifts . . . is based on the "open-canon" premise. [They] hold that since the early church . . . did not yet have a New Testament, they needed the utterance gifts to function as a New Testament canon until such time as the canon was complete and available. [They] see this picture in texts such as Ephesians 2:20-22.

At the heart of continuationist framework . . . is the biblical-theological understanding of the "last days." We hold that the experiences described in the New Testament fulfill the "last days" expectation of Scripture [i.e. Joel's prophecy] and are characteristic of the age until the Lord's return.

Both of these "models" or "frameworks," are being used to exclude evidence from the other position. For example, the cessationist can identify any evidence the continuationist can bring against cessationism as belonging to the open-canon period and thus deny its continuing function. Likewise, the continuationist can deny the cessationist's arguments by appealing to the continuing nature of the "last days" and the characteristic miraculous activity of the Spirit that defines the epoch [of the Kingdom of God]. . . . The two paradigms clash profoundly.¹³

Simply put, Dr. Oss is claiming that everything the Apostles experienced is to be our experience because both are in the "last days." Our first point, again, is that we might be more open to believe him if *charismaticism* could in fact duplicate the miraculous and revelatory powers of the Apostolic Age. In fact, however, their "tongues speakers" do not miraculously speak in real human foreign languages as occurred in Acts 2:4-12. Their "prophets" do not perfectly predict the future as Prophets in Acts did (cf. Acts 11:28; 21:10-11; Deut 18:17-22). And their "miracle workers" do not heal

commandingly, powerfully, and convincingly as biblical miracle workers did.¹⁴

Charismaticism is asking us to believe something that in reality is not happening. And, in fact, hasn't happened for over 1600 years of Church history. If that 1600 years has been in the "last days" that the Apostle spoke of, and modern *charismaticism* was to be a part of it, then the movement has no good explanation of why it simply has not been the case.¹⁵

If *Charismaticism* really wishes to emphasize the "'last days' expectation of Scripture" as being descriptive of our experience, why are they so silent on the Apostle's warning that:

There will be terrible times in the last days. . . . For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.
(2 Tim 3:1, 4:3-4)

It is only on Judgment Day that we will know for sure, but it is our suggestion that just this kind of false teaching will be revealed as *charismaticism's* greatest reflection of "last days" characteristics. It certainly has not been in some supposed superior possession of the Holy Spirit. They are not experiencing the "greater works" of regeneration and subsequent virtuous fruits of the Spirit any more, and perhaps even less, than other Christians.¹⁶

B.3) Ephesians 4:11-13: *What is necessary for the maturity of the Church?*

The Apostle wrote to the Ephesians:

It was He who gave some to be Apostles, some to be Prophets, some to be Evangelists, and some to be Pastors and Teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.
(Eph 4:11-13)

Obviously, the Apostle is teaching that God granted certain ministry gifts to the Church to facilitate its spiritual maturity. *Prophetists* suggest that the gift of prophecy, or Christian Prophets,

are accordingly needed today, as the Church has not yet reached its full maturity.

First of all, most *prophetists* agree that “**Apostles**” are no longer being given to the Church, in the sense that Paul was using this term here. Apparently then, this most important of all gifts for the sake of Church has not been needed for its maturity since the first century.

The reason for this is that apostleship was for the purpose of forming the foundation of the Church, not the continuing building of its superstructure. The same is true of Prophets. Accordingly, the Apostle places the gift of prophecy with apostleship as a foundation-laying gift for the Church in this very letter to Ephesians. Elsewhere we have written:

Perhaps the clearest indication of the authority of NT Prophets was their equality with NT Apostles. Accordingly, the Apostle Paul said of Christian Prophets:

In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy Apostles and [NT Christian] Prophets, with Christ Jesus Himself as the chief cornerstone. (Eph. 3:4-5)

In terms of speaking direct revelation from God, Christian Prophets in the early Church possessed the same ability as the revelatory Apostles. This is why the Apostle Paul makes the rather remarkable statement that the Church was “**built on the foundation of the Apostles and [NT] Prophets, with Christ Jesus Himself as the chief cornerstone**” (Eph. 2:20). Both revelatory Apostles and Christian Prophets uniquely possessed the New Covenant revelation upon which the Church was founded, and because all divine revelation is absolutely and equally authoritative, Apostles and Prophets were equally authoritative.¹⁷

B.4) 1 Corinthians 1:7: *grace does not equal gifts*

Paul states in 1 Corinthians 1:4-7:

I thank my God always concerning you, for the grace [charity] of God which was given you in Christ Jesus, {5} that in everything you were enriched in Him, in all speech and all knowledge, {6} even as the testimony concerning Christ was confirmed in you, {7} so that [ōste: “therefore”] you are not lacking in any gift

[charismati], awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ (NASB).

Some use this verse in support of the idea that the *Scripture* and *sign gifts* were to last until the return of Christ.¹⁸ Several things should be noted however.

First of all, Paul is making no connection between the Corinthian's gifts and the return of Christ. The Greek does *not* provide a conjunction between the statement concerning the abundance of their "gifts of grace" and the return of Christ. This is correctly reflected in the NASB translation above.

However, several translations insert a conjunction, resulting in the impression that there is some intended connection between the grace gifts of the Corinthians, and the return of Christ. The NIV illustrates this false impression when it translates "**you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed.**" The conjunction "**as you**" is not in the original Greek and it implies that the Corinthians will not lack any spiritual gift *while*, or during the whole time that they might "**wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed.**"

Compare this to the more accurate NASB which says, "**you are not lacking in any gift, awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ.**" Paul is simply making two *separate* statements about the Corinthians: 1) they have an abundance of "gifts of grace", and 2) they are waiting for Christ's return.

While there is no conjunction between the gifts and the return of Christ in the text, there is a conjunction in the text that is being ignored. The Apostle says, "**the testimony concerning Christ was confirmed in you, so that [ōste: "therefore"] you are not lacking in any gift, awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ (NASB).**" The real connection between the statements concerning the gifts and the return of Christ *is not* between one another, but that they are both results of "**the testimony concerning Christ (being) confirmed in (them), so that [you are (first of all) not lacking in any gift, (and secondly) awaiting eagerly the return of our Lord Jesus Christ.**" Paul's point is that both of these statements are the result of the Corinthians becoming Christians. Any other connection between these two statements is a false one.

The other misleading assumption that is made concerning this verse is that by "**gifts**" Paul is especially referring to *spiritual* gifts. Again, "spiritual" is not in the Greek but is inserted in the NIV, NLT, RSV, and JB. Paul simply uses the word *charismati* here which he uses elsewhere to describe other gifts rather than spiritual gifts.

In Romans 5:15-16 Paul uses *charisma* ("gift") to describe the grace of God. Notice in this very passage that Paul has already reminded the Corinthians of **"the grace (*chariti*) of God which was given (them) in Christ Jesus"**. Surely this grace of God is to be included in what Paul means by the abundance of gifts that have come to the Corinthians because of their faith in Christ.

In Romans 6:23 Paul uses *charisma* ("gift") to describe eternal life through Christ. In Romans 11:29 Paul uses the same word to describe the irrevocable election of Israel. These uses of *charismata* remind us of Paul's introductory statement to the Ephesians that because of our salvation, **"the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ . . . has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ"** (1:3). John says the same in his gospel: **"From the fullness of His grace (*charis*) we have all received one blessing after another"** (Jn 1:16).

Accordingly, the idea of these gifts simply referring to the abundant and varied blessings we have received in Christ is reflected in the TEV translation of *charismati* in 1 Corinthians 1:7: **"you have not failed to receive a single blessing"** and in the CEV which says, **"You are not missing out on any blessings as you wait for him to return."**

Specifically in the Corinthian letters the Apostle uses *charisma* ("gift") to describe the God given blessings of marriage and celibacy (1 Co 7:7) or simply to refer to the **"favor bestowed upon us through the prayers of many"** (2 Co 1:11). While spiritual gifts may be included in Paul's thought here, it certainly is not the only *charisma* that he has in mind and the insertion of "spiritual gifts" here is unwarranted.

Finally, when we think of the whole context of why the Apostle is writing to the Corinthians, we have another very good reason to believe that he is not specifically referring to the gifts of tongues or prophecy as *charismaticism* would have us believe. When the Apostle pens his introduction to this letter, he knows that the Corinthians are already overvaluing the miraculous spiritual gifts over the greatest grace gift of love. To think that the Apostle is primarily, or at all praising them for their abundant possession of miraculous gifts, is unlikely.

No doubt, the Apostle is including the miraculous gifts as part of the "grace gifts" the Corinthians had, and a way in which they had been **"enriched . . . in all speech and all knowledge"** (v. 5). But because these graces certainly included more than just miraculous gifts, the Apostle is not saying here that the miraculous gifts will continue until Christ returns. For example, surely the virtues of faith and hope would have been included in the types of grace that had enriched the speech and knowledge of the

Corinthians, and the Apostle will clearly state later in the letter that, not only are these graces more important than the miraculous gifts, but they last longer than the gifts.¹⁹

Accordingly, in the context of 1 Corinthians, Dr. Carson comments that, "it is very clear that the term [*charisma* "gifts"] is not a technical one for Paul that refers only to a select set of supranormal gifts like healing and tongues."²⁰

Essentially, the Pentecostal scholar Dr. Fee is in agreement when he writes specifically concerning 1 Corinthians 1:7:

In this case the noun has been formed from [*charis*] (grace), as a way of concretely expressing the abstract noun. [*Charis*] issues in a [*charismati*]; and that is what it means in its every instance in Paul—a concrete expression of grace, thus a "gracious bestowment." In nearly half of its uses, therefore, [*charismati*] lacks any reference at all to the Spirit [let alone miraculous spiritual gifts], but simply designates a variety of ways God's grace is evidenced in the midst of, or in the lives of, his people. It includes such diverse "gifts" as eternal life (Rom 6:23; cf. 5:15, 16), the many special privileges granted to Israel (Rom 11:29, referring to 9:4-5), celibacy and marriage (1 Cor 7:7), and deliverance from a deadly peril (2 Cor 1:10).²¹

However, Dr. Fee goes on to express why he feels Paul's use of *charismati* in 1 Corinthians 1:7 refers specifically to miraculous spiritual gifts:

On the other hand, the word frequently relates to special manifestations or activities of the Spirit, indicating "gracious gifts" of the Spirit, which is why it has come to be thought of as a Spirit activity as such. That its basic relationship is to "grace," while at the same time pointing toward the "gifting" that comes from the Spirit, surfaces in [1 Cor 1:4-7]. . . [I]n 1 Cor 1:4-7 God expresses his grace concretely in the rich number of [*charismati*] he bestows upon this community; it is in this way, especially as the word is picked up in chapter 12 [referring to miraculous spiritual gifts], that [*charismati*] comes to be understood as "gifts of the Spirit."²²

Given what Dr. Fee says earlier about Paul's varied use of *charismati*, it seems rather arbitrary to insist this is the Apostle's narrow meaning at 1 Corinthians 1:7, especially in light of the reasons given above.

Accordingly, we prefer the more traditional interpretation reflected by Albert Barnes (1798–1870): "The word used here *charisma*, does not refer necessarily to extraordinary and

miraculous endowments, but includes also all the kindnesses of God toward them in producing peace of mind, constancy, humility, etc.”
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B.5) Romans 11:29: *referring to Israel, not spiritual gifts in the Church*

In Romans 11:29 Paul says, “**the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.**” It is quite a remarkable thing that Jack Deere, formerly an Assistant Professor of Old Testament at Dallas Theological Seminary would suggest that this verse applies to the gift of healing.²⁴ In the context there is no doubt whatsoever that Paul is referring to the blessings (“**gifts**”) and election (“**calling**”) of *the nation of Israel* as he had enumerated in this very section in 9:4-12. It has nothing to do with spiritual gifts in the Church.²⁵

Paul was simply assuring the Roman Christians that God would fulfill all of His promises to Israel (cf. Rom. 11:26). The passage does not refer to the permanence of spiritual gifts. And it had better not do so, for even Mr. Deere would hopefully admit that the revelatory gifts of Apostles *have been* revoked.

B.6) Hebrews 13:8

The writer of Hebrews says, “**Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today, yes and forever**” (Heb 13:8). This verse is used by some to imply that because the Person of Jesus Christ is unchanging, His purposes and methods are unchanging as well. In other words, if Christ gave miraculous gifts to His disciples, He is surely giving them today.

We certainly affirm the fact that the *Person* of Jesus Christ and *His character* have remained the same since eternity past and will continue as such into eternity future. But Christ has changed both His *methods*, and even *attributes* at certain times. It was pointed out earlier (section B.1) that He once told his disciples not to preach to Gentiles (cf. Matt 10:5-6); later, He told them to preach to the Gentiles (cf. Matt 28:18-20). Jesus did not change; *His program* did.

We should also be reminded that Christ has existed in different forms also. Throughout the OT He appeared as the Angel of the Lord.²⁶ Then there was a period of almost thirty four years that He lived in a human body and walked and talked upon the Earth. He does so no longer.

Finally, we have thoroughly discussed elsewhere the biblical and historical fact that God has indeed repeatedly changed and discontinued methods of divine revelation.²⁷ It becomes obvious then that this passage cannot be used to support the position that the miraculous gifts were to continue throughout the Church Age. For one thing, they have not.

Publications & Particulars

¹ For further support of the discontinuity of the *Scripture* and *sign gifts* see section 10.7.C and the historical data in chapters 9.13; 11.7; and 12.13.

² We defend the purposes of these gifts in section 10.7.C.

³ For further on the cessation of the gift of Apostleship see chapter 8.5.

⁴ Robert Reymond, *What About Continuing Revelations And Miracles In The Presbyterian Church Today?: A Study Of The Doctrine Of The Sufficiency Of Scripture* (Presbyterian & Reformed, 1977), 40-41. See also MacArthur, quoted in section 8.8.C, and Albert Barnes, *Barnes' Notes on the New Testament*; online at www.ccel.org, *in loc*.

Other commentators are unfortunately slow to recognize that modern "prophecies" could be seen by the Lord as adding to His last prophecy. These include Leon Morris, *Revelation* (Eerdmans, 1996); William Barclay, *The Revelation of John* (Westminster John Knox, 1976); William Hendricksen, *More Than Conquerors* (Baker, 1995); and Michael Wilcox, *The Message of Revelation* (Intervarsity, 1975).

Both G. E. Ladd (*A Commentary on the Revelation* [Eerdmans, 1972]) and F. F. Bruce, *The Book of Revelation* [Eerdmans, 1998]), interpret the passage as merely warning of distorting the text of Revelation.

Beale rightly refers to texts in Deuteronomy as parallels, but then limits the "adding and taking away" of John's prophecy to "adherence to false teaching about the inscripturated word," (Gregory Beale, *The Book of Revelation* [Eerdmans, 1999], 1151) particularly idolatry. This interpretation is controlled by Dr. Beale's spiritualized approach to the Revelation as an allegory against idolatry. Nevertheless, added prophecies are certainly in mind, and even Beale recognizes that the warnings in Deuteronomy are in the context of warnings against false prophets.

⁵ For further historical demonstration of the cessation of the gift of Apostleship see chapter 8.5. For prophecy see chapter 9.14. For miracle working see chapter 11.7. For the historical cessation of tongues see chapter 12.13.

⁶ For a definition of *charismaticism* see endnote in chapter 8.2.

⁷ D. A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit: A Theological Exposition of 1 Corinthians 12-14* (Baker Book, 1987), 150. Carson is referring to Dr.

Fee's article, "Hermeneutics and Historical Precedent—a Major Problem in Pentecostal Hermeneutics," in Russell P. Spittler, ed., *Perspectives on the New Pentecostalism* (Baker, 1976), 119-122.

- ⁸ Although casting lots was a common practice in those days among the Jews, it became unnecessary and extinct as a means of communication from God when the Church received the Holy Spirit just a few days after this incident. However, one wonders in light of the contemporary frenzy to restore first century gifts and means of revelation, why the casting of lots isn't included in the mix. The practice was, of course, used by John Wesley with regrettable results. See Arnold Dallimore, *George Whitefield*, 2 Vols. (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1970), I:150, 309; 2:553.
- ⁹ On the day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit manifested Himself as "**a sound like the blowing of a violent wind**" that was "**heard**" not only by the disciples, but by "**Jews**" who "**were staying in Jerusalem**" (Acts 2:2,5). We know that the sound was loud enough that "**when they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment**" (2:6). We know too that at least 3000 people had heard the sound and gathered (2:41), and undoubtedly there were many thousands more.
- ¹⁰ Regarding the discontinuity of extraordinary means of revelation see section 10.7.C.
- ¹¹ For further discussion of the interpretation of biblical prophecy see section ?
- ¹² R. N. Longenecker, *Acts*, in the *Expositors Bible Commentary*, Frank E. Gaebelin ed. CD-ROM (Zondervan).
- ¹³ Douglas Oss in *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today?*, Wayne Grudem, ed. (Zondervan, 1996), 19.
- ¹⁴ For further discussion of the biblical attributes of tongues see chapters 12.2-5. For prophecy see chapters 9.1-8. For miracle-working see chapters 11.1-2.
- ¹⁵ For the inadequate and even arrogant explanations that *super-supernaturalism* offers for why the *Scripture* and *sign gifts* ended in the 3rd century Church and returned to them in the 20th, see section 11.7.C.
- ¹⁶ For further biblical critiques of *charismaticism* see esp. chapters 10.13-16.
- ¹⁷ Excerpt from section 9.6.C. For further arguments that Paul is speaking of NT Prophets who possessed the NT gift of prophecy see this section.
- ¹⁸ Mr. Deere also uses the verse to argue that the Corinthian Christians possessed all the spiritual gifts. See, *Surprised by the Power of the Spirit* (Zondervan, 1993), 65.
- ¹⁹ For further support that the virtues of faith and hope were to outlast the gifts of divine knowledge, prophecy, and tongues, see section 8.6.J.
- ²⁰ D. A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit: A Theological Exposition of 1*

Corinthians 12-14 (Baker, 1987), 20.

- ²¹ Gordon Fee, *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Hendrickson, 1994), 33.
- ²² Ibid.
- ²³ Barnes, *in loc.*; online at www.ccel.org. This was the view of John Calvin (*Calvin's Bible Commentaries*; online at www.ccel.org). Leon Morris agrees with our interpretation of 1 Corinthians 1:4-7, stating that the gifts here refer to "God's good gifts in general (Rom 11:29)" (*1 Corinthians* [Eerdmans, 1999], 37-8). Anthony Thiselton takes the same view (*The First Epistle to the Corinthians* [Eerdmans, 2000], 98). On the other hand, C. K. Barrett (*The First Epistle to the Corinthians* [Hendrickson, 1968], 38), and John MacArthur (*MacArthur's New Testament Commentary*, Electronic Edition STEP Files CD-ROM [Parsons Technology, 1997]) confine the term here to spiritual gifts.
- ²⁴ Deere, 289, n. 27.
- ²⁵ See Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans (NICNT)* (Eerdmans, 1996), 732.
- ²⁶ For further discussion on the Angel of the Lord and His identification with the pre-incarnate Christ, see section 10.9.C.
- ²⁷ Finally, we have thoroughly discussed elsewhere the biblical and historical fact that God has indeed repeatedly changed and discontinued methods of divine revelation. See 10.7.C.