

Prophecy in the New Testament

We cannot properly understand the role of prophecy in the NT without looking at 1 Corinthians 12-14, where the apostle Paul deals repeatedly and extensively with “spiritual gifts” and their role in the churches.

1 Corinthians 12:27-28 (ESV):

“Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second **prophets**, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping administrating, and various kinds of tongues.”

1 Corinthians 13:2, 8-13 (LSB):

“And if I have *the gift of* **prophecy**, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing... Love never fails, but if *there are gifts of* **prophecy**, they will be done away; if *there are* tongues, they will cease; if *there is* knowledge, it will be done away. For we know in part and we **prophecy** in part, but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away. When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child. When I became a man, I did away with childish things. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known. But now abide faith, hope, love – these three; but the great of these is love.”

1 Corinthians 14:1-5 (RC):

“Keep pursuing this *kind of* love,¹ yet be earnestly desiring the spiritual *gifts*,² especially that you may **prophecy**. For the one who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but rather to God; for no one understands, but he utters mysteries in the Spirit.³ But the one who **prophesies** speaks to people for

¹ Literally, the Greeks says, “Keep pursuing the love.” The definite article (“the”) refers to the kind of love Paul has just written about in chapter 13.

² Literally, “the spirituals.” EVV = “spiritual gifts”; NLT = “the special abilities the Spirit gives.”

³ Most English versions translate *pneumati* as “in/by the Spirit.” Paul almost always uses this word this way, and thus “in *his* spirit” (LSB, NASB) is unlikely. See especially Gordon Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010). Reading the text this way in no way undermines a cessationist reading of the text, for the sign gifts – including speaking in tongues – have ceased with the close of the apostolic era.

their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation. The one who speaks in a tongue builds himself up, but the one who **prophesies** builds up the church. Now I desire you all to speak in tongues, but even more that you would **prophecy**. The one who **prophesies** is greater than the one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may be built up.”

1 Corinthians 14:21-33, 37-40 (LSB):

“In the Law it is written, “BY MEN OF STRANGE TONGUES AND BY THE LIPS OF STRANGERS I WILL SPEAK TO THIS PEOPLE, AND EVEN SO THEY WILL NOT LISTEN TO ME,” says the Lord. So then tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers; but **prophecy** *is for a sign* not to unbelievers but to those who believe. Therefore if the whole church assembles together and all speak in tongues, and uninformed men or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are out of your mind? But if all **prophecy**, and an unbeliever or an uninformed man enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all; the secrets of his heart are disclosed; and so he will fall on his face and worship God, declaring that SURELY GOD IS AMONG YOU. What is *the outcome* then, brothers? When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has a translation. Let all things be done for edification. If anyone speaks in a tongue, *it should be* by two or at the most three, and *each* in turn, and one must translate; but if there is no translator, he must keep silent in the church, and let him speak to himself and to God. And let two or three **prophets** speak, and let the others pass judgment. But if a revelation is made to another who is seated, the first one must keep silent. For you can all **prophecy** one by one, so that all may learn and all may be exhorted. 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...If anyone thinks he is a **prophet** or spiritual, let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord’s commandment. But if anyone remains ignorant about *this*, he is ignored *by God*. Therefore, my brothers, earnestly desire to **prophecy**, and do not forbid to speak in tongues. But all things must be done properly and in an orderly manner.”

At first glance, it seems incredibly clear that prophecy should not only be allowed in our churches; it should be expected, and even earnestly sought after, since it

was designed and employed by the triune God for the “building up” of the church.⁴

However, when we read our Bibles first theologically and redemptive-historically, we see something entirely different, and much more glorious and Christ-centered, and thus much more in line with biblical Pneumatology.⁵

- In familiar terms, we might say the events in 1 Corinthians 12-14 – like so many in the book of Acts – are not so much prescriptive as they are **descriptive**; they are more **narrative** (what happened in the church during the foundation laying era) than normative (what continues to happen in the church today during the building up era).

If we can prove that prophets have indeed ceased with the laying of the foundation of the church, then every single one of the passages dealing with prophets and prophecy is to be interpreted historically; that is, that though the office of prophet – and gift of prophecy – was operating in the early apostolic church, it is no longer in operation in today’s post-apostolic churches, and therefore we should not be expecting this to be normative in our churches today.

In the words of Richard Gaffin,

The cessation of these revelatory gifts...turns on the salvation-historical understanding of the church and its apostolicity expressed in Ephesians 2:11-21. There the church is pictured as the construction project of God, the master architect-builder, underway in the period between the ascension and

⁴ For e.g., with regards to 1 Cor. 14:12, Sam Storms writes, “Paul was not merely suggesting that prophecy is a good gift. He was commanding that we earnestly desire to exercise this gift in the local Body. This is not an option. Paul did not give us a choice. His words leave us little room for maneuvering. The point is this: If you are not earnestly desiring to prophesy, if you are not praying for opportunity and occasion to speak prophetically into the lives of the church and other believers, you are disobeying God! The pursuit of prophecy is a moral and spiritual obligation to which we **must** devote ourselves.” See Sam Storms, *The Beginner’s Guide to Spiritual Gifts* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2012), 111. (emphasis mine)

⁵ In his book on the Holy Spirit, Anthony Thistleton devotes a large section to what he calls “the need for hermeneutics” when trying to understand “the remaining gifts of the Spirit.” He writes, “Few would dispute that when we come to such issues as the work of the Holy Spirit in healing, miracles, prophecy, tongues-speech, and “baptism in the Spirit,” much depends on the lens through which we read the text.” See Anthony C. Thistleton, *The Holy Spirit – In Biblical Teaching, through the Centuries, and Today* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013), 95.

return of Christ (cf. 1:20-22; 4:8-10, 13). In this church-house the apostles and prophets are the foundation, with Christ as the “cornerstone” (v.20).⁶

Gaffin rightly argues that the laying of the apostolic witness – the “foundation” – is just as “once-for-all” for the church as was the Christ-event – the “cornerstone”.

- That is, just as we do not need Christ to re-lay Himself as cornerstone – “it is finished!” in every generation, we no longer need apostles and prophets to re-lay themselves as foundation, for we have it canonized in the New Testament – “it [too] is finished”.⁷
 - In the words of Gaffin, “to maintain the continuation of the prophetic gifts today stands in tension with the canonicity⁸ of the New Testament.”⁹

Why Equating “Prophesying” with Preaching Undermines Cessationism

This was the view held by many of the Puritans¹⁰ and is still maintained by many popular Reformed evangelicals today, such as John MacArthur.¹¹

Making “prophecy” mean “preaching” is eisogesis – reading a preconceived notion into the text – as both the Old and New Testaments have explicit signs and qualifications for prophets and their prophecies.

In fact, by saying the preachers are the modern-day manifestation of the first-century prophets opens the door for the erroneous idea of fallible New

⁶ Richard B. Gaffin, “A Cessationist View,” in *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today: Four Views* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 42-43.

⁷ That is, closed and completed, and therefore sufficient.

⁸ That is, in the words of Ephesians 2:20, “the foundation” of the apostolic witness of the apostles and prophets.

⁹ Gaffin, 44.

¹⁰ For example, see William Perkins, *The Art of Prophesying with The Calling of the Ministry*, ed. Sinclair B. Ferguson, rev. ed., Puritan Paperbacks (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1996).

¹¹ For example, see John MacArthur, *Strange Fire* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2013), 121, where he says, “Prophecy [in Romans 12:6] does not necessarily refer to future predictions or new revelation. The word simply means “to speak forth,” and it applies to any authoritative proclamation of God’s Word where the person gifted to declare God’s truth “speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men” (1 Cor. 14:3). So a fitting paraphrase would be: “If your gift is proclaiming God’s Word, do it according to the faith.” Similarly, Graham Cole, writing on 1 Thes. 5:15, says, “In my view there is an argument then that even regular preaching might become prophetic when used of the Spirit to so expose the hearts of the hearers.” In his *Engaging With the Holy Spirit* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 74. As we will see, sentiments such as these sound good and preach well, but they are simply not what Paul is teaching here, nor teaches elsewhere concerning the “Spiritual gift” of prophecy.

Testament prophets and prophecies – the very thing continuationists (i.e., “non-cessationists”) champion.¹²

Schreiner is helpful here:

The feature that separates prophecy from teaching is that those who prophesy communicate revelations from God (1 Cor. 14:6).¹³ The “revelation” given here is spontaneous in that it isn’t derived through studying the biblical text. God communicates His word directly to the mind of the prophets... Those who prophesy don’t proclaim God’s word from a written text but convey what God has revealed to them. Prophecy, then, isn’t the same thing as preaching, though it can overlap in some respects with the function of preaching.¹⁴

Like OT Prophets, NT Prophets are Infallible

To make passages like 1 Cor. 12-14 applicable to our day and age, many argue that there are two kinds of prophets in the Bible: one that was infallible and authoritative, and a second kind that was not.

As MacArthur notes,

The first category includes Old Testament prophets, New Testament apostles, and the authors of Scripture. Their prophecies consisted of perfect transmission of God’s words to people. As a result, their prophetic proclamations were both error-free and immediately binding on the lives of others.

¹² For e.g., Terry Virgo, a ‘Reformed Continuationist,’ says, “Some have tried to dismiss the prophetic gift by arguing that a prophet is simply a preacher or teacher, but the lists of gifts in Ephesians 4:11, 1 Corinthians 12:28 and Romans 12:6-7 are consistent in differentiating between them. Why does the Holy Spirit record them as different if they are simply the same gift, and what are we missing in the church without their ministry?” In Terry Virgo, *The Spirit-Filled Church: Finding Your Place in God’s Purpose* (Grand Rapids, MI: Monarch Books, 2011), 121.

¹³ Ridderbos writes, “Prophecy is a special form of the Spirit given to and working in the church. For this reason the speaking of the prophets can also be call revelation (1 Cor. 14:30; cf. v.26; v.6; cf. Eph. 3:15), and they are mentioned together with the apostles (Eph. 3:5; Cf. Eph. 2:20). The prophet receives an insight into the mysteries of God (1 Cor. 13:2); he explains the meaning and progress of the divine redemptive activity (Eph. 3:5)...Prophets are the Spirit-impelled proclaimers of the Word of God to the church, who unfold God’s plan of redemption...in Christ.” In Hermon Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1975), 451.

¹⁴ Thomas Schreiner, *Spiritual Gifts* (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group, 2018), 96-97. (emphasis mine)

In addition to this is a second tier of prophets in the New Testament church: congregational prophets who spoke a form of prophecy that was *fallible* and *nonauthoritative*, and that came into existence in New Testament times. [These] prophets...sometimes made mistakes in their report of divine revelation; thus, they were not required to meet the same perfect standard of the Old Testament prophets and biblical authors.¹⁵ [That is, such] modern prophecies don't have to be held to a standard of 100 percent accuracy.

The notion of fallible New Testament prophets...may fit [our] contemporary scene. But it has a fatal flaw: it is not biblical. In fact, the Bible only and always condemns erroneous prophets as dangerous and deceptive.¹⁶

This is seen clearly in perhaps the most important OT passage regarding true, versus false, prophets:

- **Deuteronomy 18:20-22** (LSB) – “But the prophet who speaks a word presumptuously in My name which I have not commanded him to speak, or which he speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die. Now you may say in your heart, ‘How will we know the word which Yahweh has not spoken?’ **When a prophet speaks in the name of Yahweh, if the thing does not come about or come true, that is the thing which Yahweh has not spoken.** The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.”

On the contrary, genuine prophets – whether in the OT or NT – always speak the truth, and what they say, comes to pass.

- **Jeremiah 28:9** (LSB)¹⁷ – “The **prophet** who **prophesies** of peace, when the word of the prophet comes to pass, then that **prophet** will be known *as* one whom Yahweh has truly¹⁸ sent.”¹⁹
 - See also 1 Kings 22:13-28 (Micaiah)

¹⁵ Most popular among Reformed evangelicals who hold to this view is Wayne Grudem, who argues exhaustingly [and seemingly exhaustively] in his 400 page book, *The Gift of Prophecy*.

¹⁶ MacArthur, *Strange Fire*, 118-119. (emphasis mine)

¹⁷ NLT = “So a prophet who predicts peace must show he is right. Only when his predictions come true can we know that he is really from the LORD.”

¹⁸ Lit. “which YHWH has sent in truth” (אֲשֶׁר־שָׁלַחַו יְהוָה בְּאֵמֶת:)

¹⁹ Emphasis mine

Therefore, when a so-called prophet contradicted the message of a genuine (and divinely verified) prophet, this 'message' of the so-called prophet was to be disregarded.

- For example, there were many false prophets who tickled the ears of the residents of Jerusalem, prophesying "peace, peace" when there was in fact no peace (6:14; 8:11), in direct contradiction of Yahweh's message through Jeremiah.
 - **Jeremiah 23:32** (LSB) – "Behold, I am against those who have prophesied lying dreams," declares Yahweh, "and who recounted them and led My people astray by their lying and reckless boasting; **yet I did not send them**, and I did not command them, and they do not furnish this people the slightest benefit," declares Yahweh."
 - See also Jeremiah 20:6; 23:16, 25-26; 27:10, 15

But aren't there 'Prophecies' in the NT that were Fallible?

Many continuationists generally agree with the OT texts noted above; however, they use certain NT Scriptures that seem to teach that there is some 'wiggle room' for error for prophets in the NT:

- **1 Thessalonians 5:19-21** (LSB) – "Do not quench the Spirit; do not despise **prophecies**, but examine all things; hold fast to that which is good."
- Agabus in **Acts 21:11**
 - This is perhaps the most-appealed to proof-text for fallible NT prophets, where Agabus prophesies that the Jews would bind Paul and deliver him over to the Romans.
 - If we read the story of what happened to Paul in Acts 21, we see that the Jews didn't actually bind Paul and hand him over to the Romans. Instead, they seized Paul in the temple, carried him outside the temple gates, started beating him, and attempted to kill him. The Roman tribune, Claudius Lysias, alerted to what was happening, sent troops to break up the disturbance, rescuing Paul from the hands of the Jews.

- As Schreiner notes, “The Jews didn’t hand Paul over to the Romans; the Romans rescued Paul from the Jews!”²⁰
- At first glance, then, it appears that Agabus got the details of his “prophecy” wrong; his “prophecy” was a mixture of truth and error.
- What many miss is that in **28:17**, we see that Paul, by using the exact same words as Agabus, regarded the prophecy of Agabus was indeed fulfilled:
 - “I was delivered (παρεδόθην) as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands (εἰς τὰς χεῖρας) of the Romans.”
- Schreiner also notes that two other arguments point to Agabus’s accuracy:
 1. Agabus uses prophetic symbolism like the OT prophets²¹ in taking Paul’s belt and tying his hands and feet.²²
 2. Agabus’s use of the formula, “Thus says²³ the Holy Spirit.”
 - A similar formula is used hundreds of times in the OT for the authoritative words of Yahweh conveyed by the prophets. As Schreiner notes, “Luke gives us every indication, then, that he believed Agabus spoke just like the Old Testament prophets and like Jesus Christ Himself in the book of Revelation. We have not hint that Luke thought Agabus was mistaken, and actually just the opposite is communicated. Agabus speaks the word of the Lord.”²⁴

- **Acts 21:4, 12-13**

²⁰ Schreiner, *Spiritual Gifts*, 104.

²¹ See, for e.g., Isa. 20:1-6; Jer. 13:1-11; Eze. 4.

²² Schreiner, in quoting the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy, warns against a hyper-literal hermeneutic, which [wrongly] imposes a kind of “computer accuracy” upon the Scriptures which they themselves do not demand. “Modern Western conceptions of ‘accuracy’ must not be applied to the Scriptures.” See Schreiner, *Spiritual Gifts*, 114-15.

²³ The Greek word is *tade*, which is used of Christ Himself in Rev. 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 116.

- Schreiner's words are helpful: "In Acts 21:4 the prophecy is correct (Paul would suffer), but the inference drawn from the prophecy (Paul shouldn't go to Jerusalem) is mistaken. I would suggest that the inference drawn from the prophecy was not part of the prophecy itself. Thus, the prophecy that Paul would face suffering in Jerusalem was accurate and Spirit-inspired; the *conclusion* that people drew from the prophecy was mistaken. It did not derive from the Spirit."²⁵

What About Impressions?²⁶

What most call prophecy in churches today isn't the NT gift of prophecy, for NT prophesy is inerrant. It is better to characterize what is happening today as the sharing of *impressions* rather than prophecy. God may impress something on a person's heart and mind, and He may use such impressions to help others in their spiritual walk.

The word *impression* is a better description than the word *prophecy* because impressions may be a mixture of truth and error. Sometimes, in a most remarkable way they might be completely right! God may lay something on someone's heart, and it may be exactly right and exactly what a person needs to hear. Sometimes the impression may be quite astonishing and clearly miraculous, though this is quite rare. On the other hand, sometimes impressions are totally wrong, and it is evident that the words shared are neither helpful nor true. And some impressions may be a mixture of truth and error. Thus, those whose impressions are wrong aren't [necessarily] false prophets.

As Schreiner notes, God can use impressions for our good, but they aren't the same thing as prophecy and need to be distinguished from prophecy. They can't be of great importance because Scripture doesn't address them, and thus we must be careful that we do not overestimate impressions, especially over the inerrant Scriptures.

Conclusion:

The warning of Jonathan Edwards is a fitting place to conclude our study:

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 118.

²⁶ The following is from Schreiner's *Spiritual Gifts*, 118-120.

I would therefore entreat the people of God to be very cautious how they give heed to such things. I have seen 'em fail in very many instances; and know by experience that impressions being made with great power, and upon the minds of true saints, yea, eminent saints...are no sure signs of their being revelations from heaven: for I have known such impressions [to] fail, and prove vain by the event. I know that they who leave the sure word of prophecy (the Bible), that God has given us to be a light shining in a dark place, to follow such impressions and impulses, leave the guidance of the pole star to follow a Jack-with-a-lantern. And no wonder therefore that sometimes they are led to a dreadful dance, and into woeful extravagancies.²⁷

2 Timothy 3:16 (ESV) – “All Scripture is breathed out by God and is 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.”

Sola Scriptura!

Soli Deo Gloria!

²⁷ Jonathan Edwards, “Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God” in *The Great Awakening*, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 4, C.C. Goen, ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1972), 282.

Thistleton

We must be aware of how easily “prophecy” can be *manipulated as a power tool*.²⁸

Prophecy is the only work of the Holy Spirit listed in 1 Cor. 12:8-10, 28-30; Rom. 12:6-8; and Eph. 4:11, all of which enumerate gifts not for a domestic few, but for the common good of all. The context of prophecy is the *whole worshipping community*.²⁹

The verb *propheteuo* especially relates to proclaiming the revealed word and, sometimes, to predict. The noun *prophetes* means one who proclaims inspired revelation.³⁰

Cole

In my view one’s eschatology is crucial with regard to the question of the charismata, including the gift of prophecy, and their validity today. (75)

Any claimed experience of the Spirit that detracts from the dignity of Christ as truly Gd and truly human, and from the integrity of His saving work, is not of the Spirit (1 John 4:1-3). (77)

Schreiner (Paul)

Prophecy is better defined as communicating revelations from God in a spontaneous utterance.³¹ First Corinthians 13:2 suggests that prophets through revelation, have access to mysteries and knowledge that are otherwise unknown.³² To up, New Testament prophets received immediate revelations from God and shared such revelations with their hearers.³³

²⁸ Anthony C. Thistleton, *The Holy Spirit – In Biblical Teaching, through the Centuries, and Today* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013), 113.

²⁹ Anthony C. Thistleton, *The Holy Spirit – In Biblical Teaching, through the Centuries, and Today* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013), 112.

³⁰ Anthony C. Thistleton, *The Holy Spirit – In Biblical Teaching, through the Centuries, and Today* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013), 108.

³¹ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Paul: Apostle of God’s Glory in Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 360.

³² *Ibid.*, 361.

³³ *Ibid.*

Some scholars, most notably perhaps Wayne Grudem, have argued that New Testament prophecy is to be distinguished from inscripturated Old Testament prophecy. Old Testament prophecy is without error and flawless, but New Testament prophecy is mixed with error and thus must be discerned and evaluated.³⁴ Grudem thinks the apostles are the successors of Old Testament prophets, while New Testament prophets are in a distinct category from the apostles since their teaching is not infallible but contains a combination of truth and error. New Testament prophets may be from God and yet still have errors in their prophecies because (1) their prophecies are judged (1 Cor. 14:29; 1 Thes. 5:19-22); (2) some prophecies are disobeyed (Acts 21:4); and (3) Agabus's prophecy was in error.³⁵

Grudem's interpretation [of Eph. 2:20, namely that the apostles are these prophets, and thus the apostles alone in the NT are infallible prophets] is certainly possible, but it should be rejected as unlikely. Ephesians 2:20 more plausibly refers to two different groups, apostles *and* prophets, instead of to apostles who are prophets. That the apostles and prophets are distinct groups is suggested by Ephesians 4:11, where the two are clearly distinguished: God "gave some as apostles and some as prophets." Apostles and prophets are two distinct categories in 1 Cor. 12:28 as well. If Grudem is correct on this point, it casts doubt on the notion that though the apostles are infallible, the New Testament prophets are fallible. It is quite unlikely that Paul suggests in Eph. 2:20 that the church is built on the foundation of infallible apostles and fallible prophets.³⁶

Grudem rightly notes that the prophecies of the New Testament prophets were evaluated (1 Cor. 14:29; 1 Thes. 5:19-22). This is no different from the Old Testament standard because the legitimacy of the prophet was discerned by the accuracy of the prophecies (Deut. 18:20-22).

[Regarding Acts 21:4] the prophets prophesied that Paul would face trouble in Jerusalem, and they concluded from such prophecies that he should not go. The conclusion was not part of the prophecy proper but was an inference drawn from

³⁴ Grudem, *Gift of Prophecy*, pp. 54-74, esp. pp. 58-67.

³⁵ Schreiner, *Paul*, 361-62.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 362.

it. Paul believes the prophecy is true (Acts 21:13), but he rejects the inference drawn from it.³⁷

Once the foundation has been laid (Eph. 2:20), such authoritative apostles and prophets are superfluous. Indeed, God's revelation as to the nature of the church (3:5) has been uniquely revealed to the apostles and prophets.³⁸

[In 1 Cor. 13:10], to see "the perfect" as referring to the New Testament canon is an example of anachronism. Instead of referring to spiritual maturity or to the canon of the New Testament, "the perfect" most likely refers to the second coming of Christ, the end of the age, when we will see God "face to face" (13:12). If the "perfect" refers to the New Testament canon or spiritual maturity, we no longer have partial knowledge [something even Paul says is not presently true].³⁹

No more authoritative apostles of the like of Paul or the Twelve are to be expected. Paul is the last of the apostles (1 Cor. 15:8). The foundation of the church has been laid, and the distinctive revelation relative to the Christ has been transmitted. Nor is there any room for prophets, if they were infallible, since the church was built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets. The prophetic gift continued in the church for some time, but it slowly disappeared. We should not expect such prophets today, since prophets spoke the word of God infallibly.⁴⁰

Ferguson (The Holy Spirit)

The continuationist 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 (as Eph. 2:20 implies). It should not surprise us that phenomena occur in the former period which are not designed to continue beyond it, any more than the miracles of Moses, Elijah, or Elisha continued to be performed by their gifted successors.⁴¹

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 363.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 369.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 370.

⁴¹ Sinclair Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 229.

One of the most stringent criticisms of the Protestant Reformation movement by the Roman Catholic Church was that it had no miraculous attestation! Part of Rome's argument for the authenticity of its doctrine lay in an appeal to the attestation of it by the miraculous. Calvin's response to this, in his famous Letter to Francis I which prefaces his *Institutes*, was essentially redemptive-historical in nature: the new covenant was attested by the outpourings of the miraculous. That is adequate testimony. We have no novel message; we need no novel outpouring of the miraculous.⁴²

Regarding 1 Corinthians 13, this passage states no more than the general point that these gifts will cease at some future point; exactly when is not in view. D.A. Carson, a moderate continuationist, notes that these words would not 'necessarily mean that a charismatic gift could not have been withdrawn earlier than the parousia.'

It is particularly noteworthy that the Pastoral Letters do not anticipate the necessity of regulating the exercise of such gifts as prophecy and speaking in tongues.⁴³

Christian theology has generally differentiated between revelation and illumination...A categorical distinction exists between the lasting authority which attaches to apostolic revelation and the subjective 'revelation' or illumination which comes to all God's people through the Spirit.⁴⁴⁴⁵

Despite disclaimers, the issue at stake here is the sufficiency of Scripture for the directing of the church and the individual. God's revelation has always been sufficient for each stage of redemptive history...The logical implication of the sufficiency of Scripture is that no additional revelation is needed by the church or the individual. What is needed is illumination.

Gaffin (Perspectives on Pentecost)

[In 1 Cor. 13, Paul] has in view the entire period until Christ's return, without regard to whether or not discontinuities may intervene during the course of this

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 230.

⁴⁴⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 231.

period, in the interests of emphasizing the enduring quality of faith, hope, and especially love (vv. 8, 13). If the New Testament does not make a specific pronouncement, the function of these gifts will determine their longevity.⁴⁶

Schreiner (Spiritual Gifts)

What most call prophecy in churches today, in my judgment, isn't the New Testament gift of prophecy, for New Testament prophecy is inerrant. It is better to characterize what is happening in charismatic churches today as the sharing of *impressions* rather than prophecy. God may impress something on a person's heart and mind, and He may use such impressions to help others in their spiritual walk. The word *impression* is a better description than the word *prophecy* here because impressions may be a mixture of error and truth. Sometimes, in a most remarkable way they might be completely right! God may lay something on someone's heart, and it may be exactly right and exactly what a person needs to hear. Sometimes the impression may be quite astonishing and clearly miraculous, though this is quite rare. On the other hand, sometimes impressions are totally wrong, and it is evident that the words shared are neither helpful nor true. And some impressions may be a mixture of truth and error. Those whose impressions are wrong aren't false prophets, since impressions are not prophecies. (118-119)

God can use impressions for our good, but they aren't the same thing as prophecy and need to be distinguished from prophecy.

⁴⁶ Richard B. Gaffin, *Perspectives on Pentecost* (Phillipsburgh, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1979), 109-110