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[This material is a slightly revised excerpt from a longer sermon I delivered in October of 2011 as part of a series of studies on 1 Corinthians 12-14. I've also included two articles I wrote on my blog, [www.samstorms.com](http://www.samstorms.com)]

### **Ministry and Miracles in Maisha 1 Corinthians 12:8-10**

***“Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption” (Eph. 4:30).*** The idea that we can grieve the Holy Spirit is nothing short of stunning. That by our actions and words and unrepentant sin we mere humans can cause pain or distress to the eternal and omnipotent third person of the Holy Trinity is simply breathtaking. It's scary too.

I won't enumerate the many ways in which we grieve the Spirit. That would be depressing! But let me mention only one. Surely the Spirit of God is grieved when the people of God bicker and gripe and argue and divide over the subject of the very gifts that the Spirit himself so graciously gives us. There's no better example of this than the controversy that continues to rage over what I am calling “revelatory” gifts of the Spirit. These are the spiritual gifts known as word of knowledge, word of wisdom, prophecy, and the discerning of spirits. I call them “revelatory” gifts because they are always grounded in or flow out of something that the Spirit of God spontaneously reveals or makes known to the human heart and mind. Today, we are going to look at the spiritual gift known as Word of Knowledge.

If you're wondering why so many evangelical Christians are opposed to the suggestion that God still speaks, let me explain. Whenever I speak about this subject in churches, some cringe in fear while others get angrily defensive. Having spoken with many of them about this, I've concluded that the primary reason for their reaction is their belief that if God were to speak outside the Scriptures or were to bestow these revelatory gifts to the church it would undermine both the finality and sufficiency of the Bible, God's written Word.

Cessationists insist that if such prophecy or words of knowledge were still being given, or if God were to speak to his people through other means, whether through dreams or visions or the like, on what grounds could one insist that the biblical canon is closed? Would we not be forced to open the canon and begin inserting new verses in new chapters in new books bearing the names of contemporary “prophets”?

Furthermore, cessationists believe that if people begin to act and believe in response to their claim of having “heard God” or having received a revelation, their reliance on the sufficiency of the Bible for all of life would be undermined. It would result in people living their lives and often justifying bizarre (or at least unwise) behavior based on subjective impressions rather than on the objective and infallible written Word of God. People will neglect or ignore the counsel of Scripture because of something “God told” them. Worse still, they'll be prone to control and manipulate others on the “authority” of some divinely revealed directive.

I understand their concerns. I can appreciate their fears. Like you, I've known quite a few people who claimed to have heard God or to have received some revelation from the Spirit who quite obviously did not. They can really cause problems. But the NT is not without a remedy. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 14 that we must “judge” any utterance or word that comes to us claiming to have been revealed by God. In 1 Thessalonians 5 he commands us to “weigh” or “assess” or “evaluate” those who prophesy. If what they've said passes the test, embrace it. If not, reject it. And in 1 John 4 the apostle again tells us to “test the spirits to see if they are from God.”

The last and least helpful thing that God wants in us as his church is a bunch of naïve, gullible airheads who swallow everything that anyone claims is a “word from the Lord.” But neither does God want us to be critical, skeptical cynics who refuse to acknowledge that the Lord may well be ministering through such gifts for the building up of the body of Christ. There has to be a solid, sane, biblical middle ground between gullibility on the one hand and cynicism on the other.

### *Word (Utterance) of Wisdom and Word (Utterance) of Knowledge*

These two gifts (1 Cor. 12:8), like all other spiritual gifts, says Paul in 1 Cor. 12:7, are given to the church for the “common good,” that is to say, so that you and I may be strengthened and nourished and encouraged and consoled and instructed and built up in our Christian faith. But what are these two gifts?

The problem we face is that the only place they are mentioned in the NT is in 1 Corinthians 12:8, where Paul provides us with neither a definition nor information about how they are to function in the body of Christ. Nothing in the terms *word*, *wisdom*, and *knowledge* themselves provide us with theological insight into how they are being used in this passage. For this, we must look elsewhere in the NT and in 1 Corinthians.

Although it would be misguided to speak of Jesus as possessing “spiritual gifts” in the same way that we do, nevertheless he certainly ministered in the same power of the Holy Spirit and on numerous occasions exercised what we might describe as precursors to the word of knowledge and word of wisdom. Some contend that Jesus “knew” the thoughts of others or certain facts about them because he was God and that he was simply drawing upon his divine omniscience. But I’m convinced that Jesus, when he became incarnate in human flesh, temporarily suspended the use of his divine attributes in order to live as a human being would live. Thus, these expressions of supernatural power and knowledge are the work of the Holy Spirit in and through Jesus. Some examples:

- (1) Matthew 9:1-8 - Here Jesus is described as "knowing" the "thoughts" of the scribes (v. 4), in response to which he speaks a powerful rebuke.
- (2) Matthew 12:22-37 - Again, Jesus, "knowing their thoughts" (v. 25), began to speak a word of rebuke and instruction.
- (3) Luke 6:6-11 – Here it is said of Jesus that "he knew their thoughts" (v. 8).
- (4) Luke 9:46-48 – Again, Jesus is described as "knowing the reasoning of their [his disciples] hearts" (v. 47).
- (5) John 1:43-51 - This is the story of the calling of Nathanael where Jesus, without having met the man, knew his moral character and describes having “seen” him sitting under a fig tree.
- (6) John 4 - Here is the most frequently cited example, where Jesus tells the Samaritan woman the secret sins of her life.
- (7) Acts 5:1-11 - It would appear that in some way, most likely by revelation, Peter gained knowledge about the secret and sinful activity of Ananias and Sapphira and spoke a word of judgment accordingly.
- (8) Acts 8:26-40 - Was Philip's experience in hearing the Spirit give him instructions concerning the Ethiopian an example of a word of wisdom?
- (9) Acts 9:10-19 - Ananias is given "knowledge" in a vision of a man named Saul and receives divine guidance and instruction on what to say.
- (10) Acts 10 - Were the revelatory experiences of Cornelius and Peter in Acts 10 examples of words of knowledge?
- (11) Acts 13:1-3 - Was the word that came to the church at Antioch concerning the mission of Paul and Barnabas an example of this gift? How did the Spirit “say” this? Audible voice? An inner impression that all experienced simultaneously? This might be an example of word wisdom in that it concerned a decision for future ministry and the practical steps needed to respond.
- (12) Acts 14:8-10 - Some have suggested that Paul's revelatory insight and word to the lame man was a word of knowledge. What did Paul “see” that led him to the conclusion that this man had the sort of faith that God was about to honor with healing? Did he literally “see” something, perhaps by way of a vision? Or did he “see” in the sense that he “perceived” or “understood” this to be true of him? If the latter, how might this revelation have come to Paul? A strong impression in his spirit? The internal audible voice of the Spirit? Did he have a vision of the man standing and walking and rejoicing?

Each of these instances is undoubtedly *revelatory* in nature, which is to say that God disclosed information otherwise unattainable. But should we call any of these incidents "word of wisdom" or "word of knowledge"? Yes, I think that would be entirely permissible and consistent with Scripture.

An interesting illustration of this comes from the ministry of Charles Spurgeon (1834-1892), who tells of an incident in the middle of his sermon where he paused and pointed at a man whom he accused of taking an unjust profit on Sunday, of all days! The culprit later described the event to a friend:

“Mr. Spurgeon looked at me as if he knew me, and in his sermon he pointed to me, and told the congregation that I was a shoemaker, and that I kept my shop open on Sundays; and I did, sir. I should not have minded that; but he also said that I took ninepence the Sunday before, and that there was fourpence profit out of it. I did take ninepence that day, and fourpence was just the profit; but how he should know that, I could not tell. Then it struck me that it was God who had spoken to my soul through him, so I shut up my shop the next Sunday. At first, I was afraid to go again to hear him, lest he should tell the people more about me; but afterwards I went, and the Lord met with me, and saved my soul” (*The Autobiography of Charles H. Spurgeon* [Curts & Jennings, 1899], II:226-27).

Spurgeon then adds this comment:

“I could tell as many as a *dozen* similar cases in which I pointed at somebody in the hall without having the slightest knowledge of the person, or any idea that what I said was right, except that I believed I was moved by the Spirit to say it; and so striking has been my description, that the persons have gone away, and said to their friends, ‘Come, see a man that told me all things that ever I did; beyond a doubt, he must have been sent of God to my soul, or else he could not have described me so exactly.’ And not only so, but I have known many instances in which the thoughts of men have been revealed from the pulpit. I have sometimes seen persons nudge their neighbours with their elbow, because they had got a smart hit, and they have been heard to say, when they were going out, ‘*The preacher told us just what we said to one another when we went in at the door*’” (ibid.).

One other occasion is worth noting, in which Spurgeon broke off his sermon and pointed at a young man, declaring: “Young man, those gloves you are wearing have not been paid for: you have stolen them from your employer” (*Autobiography: The Full Harvest*, 2:60). After the service the man brought the gloves to Spurgeon and asked that he not tell his mother, who would be heartbroken to discover that her son was a thief! This information could not be found by Spurgeon from reading the Bible. It was undeniably spontaneous, overtly supernatural, and revelatory.

#### *Practical Guidelines*

(1) Acknowledge and embrace from the outset that you can do nothing to force God’s hand. Whether or not he reveals something to you for the edification of another is entirely dependent on his will, not yours. If God chooses not to bless you with this gift, rest assured he has other, equally important, plans for you and how to use you in the life of the church.

(2) Make this a specific and consistent focus of your prayers. Cry out to God daily that he would bless you with this gifting (1 Cor. 14:1).

(3) Monitor your heart’s motivation: be certain that your longing for this sort of gifting is your love for the welfare of others and not the notoriety or attention that such a gift might bring to you.

(4) Learn from others who are already operating in revelatory gifts. Identify who they are, seek them out, ask them questions, listen to their story, learn from their mistakes, and be encouraged by their success. In a word, hang out with people of similar passion who have a track record of accuracy in this gifting.

(5) Learn the many ways in which God communicates: dreams, visions, impressions, internal audible voice, symbols, sympathetic pains, providential occurrences, etc. Don’t be surprised or put off if what you hear seems weird, but don’t be weird just for the sake of being weird!

(6) Immerse yourself in God’s Word. Meditate on who God is, what he’s like, and how he communicated to others in biblical history. This will help you discern whether or not it is God who is speaking. He will never reveal anything to anyone that is inconsistent with his character or his ways.

(7) Be attentive to the Spirit of God. Listen! Watch! Write down what you think may be the word of the Spirit. Be attentive to the revelatory language that God might choose to utilize for you. He doesn’t always make himself known to everyone in the same way.

(8) If you think God has revealed something to you for the edification of another, first share it in confidence with trusted and mature Christian friends who can help you process what has happened. There is wisdom in the counsel of community.

(9) Be willing to risk being wrong. Step out in faith and humility: "I may have entirely missed this, but I think God may have put something on my heart for you. If this doesn't make any sense, you won't hurt my feelings by telling me so." Resist the temptation to say: "Thus saith the Lord" or "This is the will of God for your life!"

(10) Certain things to avoid: a) be careful about sharing negative or critical words (1 Cor. 14:3); b) don't assume that every random thought that passes through your brain is from God; c) don't rely on revelatory gifts to make routine decisions in life.

(11) Never assume that if God is going to reveal something to you that you will experience some physiological or emotional manifestation. You may, but then again you may not. Some "see" things in their mind's eye. Others "hear" an internal audible voice. A few will feel something in their own body that corresponds to a need for healing in the body of another. But many times the revelation will come quite naturally, in the normal flow of life. You may discover that your mind is thinking along a certain track and then, without warning, you begin to focus on something altogether different. There is no warning, physiological or otherwise, before or during the time this happens. Your train of thought feels entirely normal to you. It may be that a biblical text comes to mind, or that your attention is directed to a person, or a memory of some past incident comes into conscious thought. When you finally speak to another what is on your heart you discover, quite to your surprise, that it is precisely what that person needed to hear. Perhaps they were thinking along the same lines. Perhaps the biblical text is one on which they were at that very moment meditating.

Melissa King word / biblical texts that I pray / etc.

### ***How can God, who is infallible, reveal something that is fallible?***

The answer is simple: He can't. He doesn't. The principle here is this: **every prophecy has three elements**, only one of which is assuredly of God. First, there is the *revelation* itself, the divine act of disclosure to a human recipient. The second element is the *interpretation* of what has been disclosed, or the attempt to ascertain its meaning. Third, there is the *application* of that interpretation. God is alone responsible for the revelation. Whatever he discloses to the human mind is wholly free from error. It is as infallible as God is. It is true in all its parts, completely devoid of falsehood. Indeed, the revelation, which is the root of every genuine prophetic utterance, is as inerrant and infallible as the written Word of God itself (the Bible). In terms of the *revelation* alone, the NT prophetic gift does not differ from the OT prophetic gift.

The problem is that you might misinterpret or misapply what God has disclosed. The fact that God has *spoken* perfectly doesn't mean that you have *heard* perfectly. A person *may* interpret and apply, without error, what God has revealed. But the mere existence of a divine revelation does not in itself guarantee that the interpretation or application of God's revealed truth will share in its perfection.

This is especially troubling to some and has led them to conclude that NT prophecy is of no benefit to the church. After all, how can a gift that is potentially fallible be a blessing to anyone? A comparison of prophecy with the gift of teaching should help us answer the question.

Most of you will occasionally disagree with me when it comes to the interpretation of a biblical text. Notwithstanding the presence of the objective, written *revelation* of God, you may walk away from a sermon or Bible study with conflicting views and differing applications of its relevance for your life. We might wish that God had promised to guarantee that our interpretation and subsequent communication of his revealed Word would always be accurate. But he hasn't.

What should you do? Should you denounce teaching and insist that a gift so obviously susceptible to error and abuse be banned from church life? Of course not. You realize that only the Bible has intrinsic divine authority. What I say when I teach has authority only in a secondary, derivative sense. Simply because someone may have come up short in his interpretive skills is no reason to repudiate the spiritual gift of teaching.

Like teaching, prophecy is also based on a revelation from God. In some way beyond ordinary sense perception, God *reveals* something to the mind of the prophet not found in Scripture (but never contrary to it). The revelation, having come from God, is true. It is error free. Like the Bible, it alone has intrinsic divine authority. But the gift of prophecy does not guarantee the infallible *transmission* of that revelation. The believer may *perceive or understand* the revelation imperfectly, and consequently she may *communicate* it imperfectly.

The gift of prophecy may result in *fallible* prophecy just like the gift of teaching may result in *fallible* teaching. Therefore, if teaching (a gift prone to fallibility) can edify and build up the church, why can't prophecy be good for edification as well (see 1 Cor. 14:3,12,26), even though both gifts suffer from human imperfection and stand in need of testing?

***Why NT Prophecy does NOT result in “Scripture-quality” revelatory words (a response to the most frequently cited cessationist argument against the contemporary validity of spiritual gifts)***

The single most oft-heard argument by cessationists in defense of their view that revelatory spiritual gifts such as prophecy and word of knowledge are no longer given by God to the church is that this would pose a threat to the finality and sufficiency of Scripture. How can we argue that the canon of Scripture is closed, asks the cessationist, if we believe that God is still “revealing” inspired truths to contemporary Christians?

This is a critically important question that we who are continuationists must answer. So, what reason is there to believe that NT prophecy does not result in “Scripture-quality” revelatory words? In other words, why do continuationists believe that the authority of NT prophecy is of a lesser order than that of OT prophecy?

Undoubtedly the most oft-heard objection of cessationists to the validity of prophecy today is their belief that any prophetic utterance that is decidedly from God must be infallible and equal in authority with canonical Scripture. To embrace contemporary prophecy is therefore a fundamental denial of the finality and sufficiency of canonical Scripture. Referring to the NT gift of prophecy, Doug Wilson insists that “we must treat such words as the Word of God, which means that we must treat them as Scripture” ([www.dougwils.com](http://www.dougwils.com), August 11, 2011). Why do I believe Wilson and like-minded cessationists are wrong on this point? Here are ten reasons.

**First**, this view fails to reckon with what would undoubtedly have been thousands of prophetic words circulating in the first century, none of which are part of canonical Scripture and thus none of which are binding on the conscience of Christians throughout history.

According to Acts 2, revelatory gifts like prophecy, together with revelatory dreams and visions, are said by Peter to be characteristic of the New Covenant during these last days, spanning the time between the two comings of Christ. In Acts 19 we read of disciples of John the Baptist who prophesied, yet Paul and Luke show no concern for the need to preserve their words. In 1 Corinthians 14 Paul exhorts the church to desire spiritual gifts, especially that we might prophesy. Assuming that the Corinthians, and all other churches to which Paul ministered, obeyed this command, there had to have been countless thousands of prophetic words forthcoming in the first century (prophecy is found in the churches in Jerusalem, Antioch, Ephesus, Caesarea, Rome, Corinth, and Thessalonica; no doubt it was also present in Colossae, Philippi, and other cities as well).

My question is this: If such words, each and every one of them, were the very “Word of God” and thus equal to Scripture in authority, *what happened to them?* Why were the NT authors so lacking in concern for whether or not other Christians heard them and obeyed them? Why were they not preserved for subsequent generations of the church? I’m *not* suggesting this *proves* that these “revelatory gifts” operated at a lower level of authority, but it certainly strikes me as odd that the NT would portray the operation of the gift of prophecy in this manner if in fact all such “words” were Scripture quality and essential to building the foundation for the universal body of Christ. In an unpublished paper Wayne Grudem similarly asks:

“Were thousands of ‘prophets’ actually speaking the very words of God? Were God’s people to be expected to go around to the many hundreds or even thousands of churches in the first century world and collect the prophecies given week after week, and write them down, and produce hundreds of volumes of ‘words of the

Lord' which they were to obey as they obeyed Scripture? In fact, we have no record of anything like this happening, nor do we have any record anywhere in the New Testament of churches recording or preserving these prophecies as if they were 'words of the Lord.' Rather they preserve and obey the writings and teachings of the apostles, not of the prophets."

In his book *Strange Fire*, John MacArthur takes up the cessationist argument in this regard. In one place he asks: "***If the Spirit were still giving divine revelation, why wouldn't we collect and add those words to our Bibles?***" [emphasis mine] But this is a sword on which MacArthur himself (as well as Doug Wilson) must fall. After all, he himself believes that the Spirit was giving divine revelation to the men and women, young and old, on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:17-18). MacArthur believes that the Spirit was giving divine revelation to the four daughters of Philip, all of whom prophesied (Acts 21:8-9). MacArthur believes that the Spirit was giving divine revelation to the disciples of John the Baptist who prophesied (Acts 19:1-7). And MacArthur believes the Spirit was giving divine revelation to Christians in the churches in Rome (Rom. 12), Corinth (1 Cor. 12-14), Ephesus (Eph. 4:11ff.; 1 Tim. 1:18), and Thessalonica (1 Thess. 5:19-22), and undoubtedly in every other church throughout the ancient world. So why, may I ask, didn't Paul and Luke and John and others "collect and add those words" to canonical Scripture? Why is it that, aside from the two recorded prophecies of Agabus (Acts 11:27-30 and 21:10-12; have I overlooked any others?) we do not possess so much as a single, solitary syllable from all those alleged "Scripture-quality" and divinely inspired words?

If such prophetic words were, as MacArthur and Wilson contend, equal in authority to the Bible and thus ought to be included in and regarded as inerrant Scripture, where are they? Again, don't miss the point: typical cessationists such as MacArthur and Wilson believe that each time the Spirit imparted divine revelation, which in turn was communicated through a prophetic gift, inerrant, Scripture-quality words were spoken. If they believe this requires that such words be treated like Scripture and thus added to the Bible (and they do; see their statements above), then why wasn't this done in the first century when the gift of prophecy was, according to both men (and all other cessationists), still very much in operation? The simple fact is that cessationists like MacArthur and Wilson have created a concept of what NT prophecy entailed that simply does not correspond to how prophetic words were delivered and treated in the NT itself.

**Second**, a related point is found in Paul's exhortation to the Thessalonians that they not "quench the Spirit" by "despising prophecies" (1 Thess. 5:19-20). Rather, they are to "test everything," i.e., they are to weigh, judge, evaluate, or assess what purports to be a prophetic word and then "hold fast what is good" and "abstain from every form of evil" (vv. 21-22).

The Thessalonians held in high regard the Word of God, for Paul said of them, "when you received the word which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers" (1 Thess. 2:13). If these Christians believed (as cessationists tell us they should have) that prophetic words in their church were equal to Scripture, they would have esteemed them highly and would never have "despised" them. If Paul had taught them (as cessationists tell us he did) that such "words" were revelation on a par with and possessing equal authority to the very Scripture that he is writing to communicate this concept (namely, the letter of 1 Thessalonians itself), would the Thessalonian Christians have been guilty of despising them?

Is it not more likely that these believers were tempted to "despise" prophetic utterances because they knew that such "words" were a mixture of divine revelation and fallible human interpretation and application and that, for whatever reason, people in their midst had in some way abused the gift or had used such words to manipulate others or promote themselves or had predicted some event(s) that had not come to pass?

If the prophetic utterances in Thessalonica were equal in authority to Scripture and altogether infallible, would not Paul have harshly rebuked the Thessalonians for *not* receiving them as such but for treating them as dispensable and unimportant? If such "words" were perfectly infallible revelation on a par with Scripture would he not have simply said, "Submit to them without hesitation and obey them" rather than "test" them to see what is in them that is good and what is in them that is bad?

**Third**, although I realize that cessationists have a different understanding of 1 Corinthians 14:29, I believe Paul is saying here much the same thing as he said in 1 Thessalonians 5:19-22. "Weigh" (*diakrino*) what is said by the prophets. That is to say, sift the word and identify what is of God and what is the human and thus fallible admixture.

I find it difficult to believe that Paul would have commanded this sort of assessment if all prophetic words were by definition inerrant Scripture quality revelation from God.

**Fourth**, in 1 Corinthians 14:30-31 Paul writes: “If a revelation is made to another sitting there, let the first be silent. For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged.” Paul appears to be indifferent toward the possibility that the first prophecy might be lost and never heard by the church.

Some object and say that the first prophetic word wouldn’t necessarily be lost. The person could simply remain silent until the second had finished and then resume his speech. But as Wayne Grudem has pointed out, “if the first prophet was *expected* to resume speaking, why then would Paul command this *first* prophet to be silent at all? If the first prophet could retain his revelation and speak later, then so could the second prophet. And in that case it would make much more sense for the second prophet to wait, instead of rudely interrupting the first prophet and making him give his speech in two parts” (*The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today*, 63). Again, Paul’s apparent lack of concern for the loss of such prophetic words seems incompatible with a belief that they were equal in authority with Scripture itself.

**Fifth**, yet another statement in 1 Corinthians 14 confirms this understanding of NT prophecy. In v. 36 Paul asks, “Or was it from you that the word of God came?” He doesn’t say, “Did the word of God originate with (or “first go forth from”) you,” as some have suggested. Let’s not forget that the “word of God” didn’t originate with Paul either!

Rather, Paul’s statement is designed to prevent them from making up guidelines for public worship, based on an alleged prophetic word, contrary to what he has just stated. His point is that a Scripture quality, authoritative “word of God” has not, in fact, been forthcoming from the Corinthian prophets. Paul does not deny that they have truly prophesied, but he denies that their “words” were equal in authority to his own. Such “words” were in fact of a lesser authority.

**Sixth**, related to the above is 1 Cor. 14:37-38, where Paul writes: “If anyone thinks that he is a prophet or spiritual, he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord. If anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized.” Paul is clearly claiming a divine authority for his words that he is just as obviously denying to the Corinthians. “According to Paul, the words of the prophets at Corinth were not and could not have been sufficiently authoritative to show Paul to be wrong” (Grudem, 68).

And yet Paul believed the prophecy at Corinth to be a good and helpful gift of God, for he immediately thereafter exhorts the Corinthians once again to “earnestly desire to prophesy” (v. 39)! Paul obviously believed that the spiritual gift of congregational prophecy that operated at a lower level of authority than did the apostolic, canonical, expression of it was still extremely valuable to the church.

**Seventh**, although I don’t have space to provide an extensive exegetical explanation of Acts 21, I believe we see in this narrative a perfect example of how people (the disciples at Tyre) could prophesy by the Spirit and yet not do so infallibly or at a level equal to Scripture. Their misguided, but sincere, *application* of this revelation was to tell Paul (“through the Spirit,” v. 4) not to go to Jerusalem, counsel which he directly disobeyed (cf. Acts 20:22).

Now, if Paul believed that NT prophetic “words” were always inerrant and equal in authority to Scripture, why did he disobey this prophetic exhortation? Paul clearly resisted their “word” and went to Jerusalem in spite of the fact that following the word from Tyre and following the word from Agabus and following the “urging” of all concerned, including Luke, he was persuaded that they had not spoken the infallible “word of God” to him (see Acts 20:22-23).

Grudem correctly points out that “the expression ‘through the Spirit’ (in Greek, *dia tou pneumatos*) modifies the verb ‘they were telling’ in the Greek text (it modifies the imperfect verb, *elegon*). That is why the verse is translated, ‘And through the Spirit they were telling Paul not to go on to Jerusalem’ . . . . So here is speech given ‘through the Spirit’ that Paul disobeys! This fits well with a view of prophecy that includes revelation given by the Holy Spirit and an interpretation and report of that revelation that is given in merely human words, words that the Holy Spirit does not superintend or claim as his own, words that can have a mixture of truth and error in them. This is why the prophecies have to be tested, and this is why Paul feels free to disobey in this case” (unpublished paper).

**Eighth**, in conjunction with the previous point, I should also mention that the prophetic warning of Agabus, though correct in speaking of the persecution Paul would endure should he go to Jerusalem, was wrong on two points: (a) it was the Romans who bound Paul, not the Jews (Acts 21:33; 22:29); and (b) far from the Jews delivering Paul into the hands of the Gentiles, he had to be forcibly rescued from them (Acts 21:31-36). Those who insist that the NT gift is no less infallible than its OT counterpart are faced with accounting for this mixture of truth and error. To this point I have only heard that we continuationists are being "overly pedantic" or are guilty of "precisionism." Yet it appears that the strict standards applied under the OT are now conveniently stretched in the NT under the pressure of a passage that doesn't fit the cessationist theory. Might it not rather be that NT prophecy is occasionally fallible, and therefore to be carefully judged (1 Cor. 14:29; 1 Thess. 5:19-22)?

Some have objected to this reading and insist that Paul's report in Acts 28:17 of what took place in Acts 21 is essentially the same as prophesied by Agabus. But Paul's point in Acts 28:17 is simply that he was transferred from Roman custody in Jerusalem into Roman custody in Caesarea. In other words, Acts 28:17 is his description of his transfer "out of" Jerusalem into the Roman judicial system at Caesarea (as found in Acts 23:12-35), and is *not* a description of the events associated with the mob scene in Acts 21:27-36. Agabus cannot so easily be let off the hook.

**Ninth**, yet another reason why I believe the cessationist is wrong on this point is the failure to recognize different ways or senses in which God might "reveal" something to us. In Philippians 3:15 he tells the church that "if in anything you think otherwise, God will *reveal* that also to you." And in Ephesians 1:17 Paul prays that a "spirit of wisdom and *revelation*" would be granted to believers. "Once more," notes Grudem, "it would not be possible to think that every time a believer gained new insight into his privileges as a Christian and reported it to a friend, the actual words of that speech would have been thought to be God's very words. It would be the *report* of something God had 'revealed' to the Christian, but the report would only come in merely human words" (Grudem, 65). We see two other similar uses of the verb or noun form of "reveal/revelation" in Matthew 11:27 and Romans 1:18.

The point is simply that not all "revelatory" activity of God comes to us as Scripture quality, divinely authoritative, canonical truth. Thus, as D. A. Carson points out, "when Paul presupposes in 1 Corinthians 14:30 that the gift of prophecy depends on a revelation, we are not limited to a form of authoritative revelation that threatens the finality of the canon. To argue in such a way is to confuse the terminology of Protestant systematic theology with the terminology of the Scripture writers" (*Showing the Spirit*, 163).

My **tenth** and final argument comes from an implication regarding Paul's permission that women can prophesy but his prohibition of them from teaching men or participating in the public evaluation of prophetic utterances.

Clearly women can prophesy (see Acts 2:17-18; 21:9; 1 Cor. 11:5). But if that is true, what does he mean in 1 Cor. 14:34 when he says, "Let the women keep silent in the church; for they are not permitted to speak"? The likely answer is that Paul is prohibiting women from participating in the passing of judgment upon or the public evaluation of the prophets (14:29). Evidently he believed that this entailed an exercise of authority restricted to men only (see 1 Tim. 2:12:15).

If one should ask why Paul would allow women to prophesy but not evaluate the prophecies of others, the answer is in the nature of prophecy itself. Prophecy, unlike teaching, does not entail the exercise of an authoritative position within the local church. The prophet was but an instrument through whom revelation is reported to the congregation. "Those who prophesied did not tell the church how to interpret and apply Scripture to life. They did not proclaim the doctrinal and ethical standards by which the church was guided, nor did they exercise governing authority in the church" (Grudem, 121-22).

But to publicly evaluate or criticize or judge prophetic utterances is another matter. In this activity one could hardly avoid explicit theological and ethical instruction of other believers. If we assume that in 1 Timothy 2 Paul prohibits women from teaching or exercising authority over men, it's understandable why he would allow women to prophesy in 1 Cor. 11:5 but forbid them from judging the prophetic utterances of others (especially men) in 14:34.