



# The Cessationist Debate

Don Rumble

## —Introduction—

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The following booklet has been written in response to the view that apostles, prophets and prophecy all passed away with the arrival of the completed canon of Scripture. The cessationist perspective is that revelation has ceased because the full revealed will of God has been given to us in the Bible.

The cessationist strongly holds forth the understanding that God has given us His inerrant word as a standard by which we are to judge all of life. For this truth we are grateful. But the New Covenant brought to mankind more than simply a completed canon of Scripture (as precious as that is); it brought to us a ministry of God's Holy Spirit not seen in previous times. Pentecost (Acts 2) initiated the immersion of God's people into a new and eternal environment.

## Immersed Into A New Realm

### Prophets Are Prophets

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The cessationist is correct in maintaining that we do not have the right to redefine the word “prophet” without some warrant. “Prophet” must mean one anointed by God as a prophet. If the Lord wanted to reveal a ministry in the NT, different than the OT prophet, He would have used a different word than “prophet” in the NT. Prophets are prophets. *Yet it is clear that in the NT, the environment for their ministry has changed from that of the OT.*

For the NT believer, the Messiah has come; in some measure the kingdom has arrived. Now, the message has changed from simply anticipating the messianic kingdom, to looking forward to its *full realization*. Such an end shall be attained because of:

- 1) the *past* success of our King in laying the foundation for that ultimate triumph at Calvary and
- 2) His *present* success through the Holy Spirit’s ministry in the Church to demonstrate that victory in clear unmistakable terms before the eyes of even those who disbelieve.

While God does not change, it is clear that His interface with man has changed over human history (e.g., requiring animal sacrifices, other temple ceremonial rituals, etc. at one time and not another; flooding the world with water one time but never again, etc.).

Under the Mosaic covenant, God’s people were given an externalized law. In the NT, we have the Law progressively *internalized* in us. Indeed, this *is* the New Covenant (Heb. 8:8 - 12). God has come to conform men and women into the image of His Son. This is not to imply that He was not at work conforming OT believers as well (Ps. 51). But the goal of faith (i.e., the finished product to which God wanted to fashion men) was simply not as evident in those days.

### A New Clarity

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When Jesus came, He put into human terms Israel’s eternal God. No longer was there simply a shekinah cloud - as glorious as that was. Now Yahweh was interacting with human beings in a body of flesh. After His ascension, when He returned in the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2), He

brought to the hearts of men a clarity of the revelation of Himself not known in OT times.

Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that would come *to you*, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. To them it was revealed that, *not to themselves*, but *to us* they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things which angels desire to look into. (1Pet. 1:10 - 12)

Though the OT prophets had the Spirit of Christ within them, they did not have the clarity of His person and purpose that would be ultimately revealed through His incarnation and earthly ministry. But as they diligently sought the Lord and spoke His word, they prepared the ground for the gospel to come to later generations.

The last of those prophets was John the Baptist. God gave him an insight into the next phase of His redemptive plan for mankind when He showed him the Holy Spirit descending and remaining upon Jesus of Nazareth.

*And John bore witness saying, "I have beheld the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven, and He remained upon Him. And I did not recognize Him, but He who sent me to baptize in water said to me, 'He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the one who baptizes in the Holy Spirit.'"* (Jn. 1:32, 33)  
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God showed John the abiding nature of His Spirit and that the Messiah would immerse God's people into His Holy presence – into His Holy Spirit. Like a fish lives in water, so believers would live in God.

## A New Environment

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The same Spirit who came to abide upon the Son has now become the environment in which we live - a realm where Christ is the object of our attention and worship. In other words, the habitat for all spiritual activity has become *God Himself* (Heb. 1:1, Jn. 15). We are to live and abide *in Him*.

At issue is not whether NT prophets are something totally different from their OT counterparts. Prophets are still prophets. But now they operate from a new paradigm, from a new setting.

All of human history has been altered with the coming of Christ and the breaking in of His messianic reign. His kingdom is neither a religion nor a philosophy. *It is a realm into which one is immersed!* This new sphere of activity and life is none other than the Person of the Lord Himself.

Human history looks different when observed from within Him. Instead of simply declaring how men fall short and how God will someday judge their shortcomings, the message becomes the description of this glorious One in whom we now live! Certainly, judgment is one element of the gospel we preach. However, since we have become enthralled with the beauty, glory and mercy of this One, our emphasis now focuses on Him and His glory. Salvation is not simply *from* wrath but *into* the intimacy of relationship with the living God.

## An Unfolding Revelation of the Kingdom

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Something changed with the coming of the Messiah. The new creation has been inaugurated. NT believers are now new creatures - *a new creation* (2Co. 5:17). The new heavens and the new earth have been birthed in the souls of men. While it is true that God's new order is not yet fully revealed (unbelievers think of the Church as simply another religious organization), the transformation of all creation has begun.

Clearly, we must recognize a progressive revelation of God's kingdom on the earth. As His purpose extends and unfolds, more and more of Christ will be unveiled to us, in us and through us.

***We also have the prophetic word made more sure, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.*** (2 Pet. 1:19)

The fact that the day of the Lord will *dawn* on us means that we who know Him will see it coming in a gradual manner (1Thess. 5:4) as He arises progressively in His people preparatory to that day. The Church must progressively grow up into Him who is the head. Increased stature of the Church is a crucial part of God's timetable in sending Christ back from heaven (Eph. 4:13). The bride must make herself ready for His return (Rev. 19:7).

Clearly, God is not static and we must be careful in our seeking to know Him and His ways, that we do not settle for a theology based on accurate definitions of past revelations of God but which does not embrace His new activities (a failure in the Pharisees of Jesus' day).

Any new thing that God does will never contradict past revelation but will take us further in the unfolding revelation of His person and purpose.

## A Closed Canon

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So, what does this have to do with prophets? For one thing, there was a season when Scripture was not completed. However, when the canon was finally closed, it presented a significant change in human history and in our environment for knowing Him. As long as God was writing Scripture, there was a need for inerrancy at the specific times of hearing and writing out His word. Today with a closed canon, there is not a need for spiritually infallible hearing and communicating. Who would even dare to claim that they were in fact doing so? However, it is quite a jump to say that because there is no more need for perfectly hearing and disclosing the word of God, there is therefore now no more need for prophets and apostles. And yet functionally, this is precisely the conclusion to which the cessationist comes. But these ministries are clearly given in the NT era for a purpose yet to be fulfilled.

*And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets,...for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, **till we all come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ;** (Eph. 4:11-13)*

There is a corporate stature that belongs to the fullness of Messiah that we have not yet realized. Neither have we come to unity in the faith nor have we come to unity in our knowledge of God's Son. Therefore, we need prophets and apostles today as much as the early Church did.

In the next chapter we will consider the role that these two ministries play in unveiling to us the mystery of Christ. We simply must have a more complete revelation of Him than we have yet seen. The great goal before all of us is that we might more fully know Him. To help bring us to this level of relationship, God will send us men anointed to disclose his glorious beauty from both the Scriptures as well as their personal interactions with Him.

## Hearing Imperfectly

### The Mystery of Christ

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The following section is a quote from a more complete study on the ministries of apostles and prophets.

“Some have said that because the mystery (of Christ) was revealed to Paul and he wrote it out for us in the Scriptures, we have no need for apostles today. Notice, though, that Paul did not say he understood the whole mystery. He said he had an insight (Eph. 3:4). The mystery was revealed to apostles (plural) and prophets (plural).

Notice also Paul did not say that the mystery of Christ was only revealed to those apostles who wrote the inerrant Scripture. *Paul needed Apollos, Agabus, Silas and Barnabas and their insights concerning the mystery of Christ.* The early Church needed all these men and others as well for the revelation of Christ to be more fully made known in their midst.

Some would say that because the full revelation of Christ was given to those who wrote the Bible, no further revelation of the Son is available to the Church in our day. We can only gain *illumination* of the full revelation that they received. This thought is stated to undergird the truth that the canon of Scripture is now closed (i.e., no new books are to be added to the Bible).

While it is true that the canon is closed, the idea that God has nothing further to reveal concerning His Son than what is recorded in the Scripture is questionable. Simply stated, God is bigger than the book He wrote! The Bible itself states that it gives but a *partial* picture of Jesus’ earthly ministry.

*And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written. Amen. (Jn. 21:25)*

If the Bible contains only limited content concerning Jesus’ *earthly* life, how much more is it true that the Scriptures give only a partial (though inerrant) picture of God in His *eternal* habitation?! God has much to reveal about Himself through dreams, visions, prophetic insights, etc. All these further revelations must line up with Scripture (God will never contradict Himself); and they will be imperfect for we know and prophecy in part. Therefore, they are not on the same plane as the Bible. However, they are a

necessary part of our arsenal to help us grow up spiritually and overcome the enemy's attacks.

*This charge I commit to you, son Timothy, according to **the prophecies** previously made concerning you, that by **them** you may wage the good warfare. (1Tim. 1:18)*

Personal prophetic ministry is biblical, and it does bring further revelation concerning God and His purpose for our lives. *Jesus did not say that His leaving was to our advantage so that He could then send us the Bible, but so that He could send us the Holy Spirit (Jn. 16:7).* God has sent His Spirit for the express purpose of revealing His Son in the earth.

*However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you. (Jn. 16:13, 14)*

We must have the spoken prophetic word as well as the inerrant written word if we would know the Son as God intends.

Some people, out of fear of deception, have found safety solely in the Scriptures, to the neglect of an intimate relationship with Christ. The Bible has become their fortress of defense against the many confusing winds of doctrine blowing across the land. Yet the Bible itself tells us that God Himself is to be our refuge and stronghold (Ps. 46:1; 62:6 - 8). While the Bible is indeed an essential tool for knowing Him, yet it must not become a substitute for a living experiential relationship with the One who wrote it!

Suppose God spoke a clear prophetic word concerning what His intentions are for America over the next twenty years. Such a word would have to be evaluated through prayer, diligent study of the Scripture and confirmation through other prophets in the Church. But we must not close our minds to such an interaction with the Lord simply because of a fear that we might be led astray.

Our safety is not found solely in the fact that we have the Bible with which to appraise our subjective spiritual experiences. We also have the indwelling Holy Spirit who was given to lead us into all truth. Our confidence is not only in the Scriptures but in the One who wrote them and who now lives in our hearts.

Today, we must have restored to the Church foundational men who have anointed insight into the person of Christ. There are some today who insist that the foundation of apostles and prophets was laid through the

writing of both the Old and New Testaments. Since the Old Testament was written primarily by prophets and the New Testament by apostles, we now have no more need for these ministries. Again, notice that Paul said that God has now revealed the mystery of Christ to His holy apostles and prophets (Eph. 3:5). He is referring to New Testament prophets. Men like Agabus, Judas and Silas (Acts 15:32; 21:10) contributed in a foundational way as they unveiled insights into the person of Jesus in the midst of the congregations.

This type of activity must also occur in our day when believers gather together desiring to live in harmony with the biblical accounts of normal Christianity.”<sup>1</sup>

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## Hearing

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Part of the problem with the cessationist position is the notion that *hearing* revelation is always as clear as speaking it. The cessationist emphasizes that revelation is God’s infallible word and must be submitted to without examination or question. I agree. However, there are two sides to revelation: the One speaking and the one(s) hearing. While revelation is infallible as it comes from God, *our hearing is far from perfect*. The several times when hearing was inerrant is what gave us our Bible.

The miracle of the Bible’s authorship occurred in the several times that God made sure the authors He specifically chose for that honor heard Him inerrantly. He then ensured that those times were preserved for us as Scripture. However, it is doubtful that *whenever* one of these authors spoke prophetically, he spoke perfectly.

God’s call was for prophets to be *faithful*, not necessarily inerrant. The word “inerrancy” implies having every single “i” dotted perfectly and every “t” crossed correctly with no “ums” or “ahems” etc. “Wait a minute, did God clear *His* throat when He gave that to you?” I am being facetious to make a point. The cessationist’s perception of how God speaks in the prophetic realm is, I believe, lacking due to inexperience in that very realm.

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## Doctrines And Realms

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Biblical doctrines generally open up realms of truth greater than the actual words being taught. In fact, the Holy Spirit was sent for this very purpose - that He might take us into the realms about which the truth testifies.



*However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, **He will guide you into all truth...** (Jn. 16:13)*

For example, the doctrine of salvation means less to an unbeliever than to one who has actually experienced Christ's cleansing blood for himself. The doctrine of the body of Christ functioning in a local church will mean one thing to a traditional denominational believer and something a little different to one of charismatic persuasion. All theology will be greatly affected by the experiences of the one presenting it. Any attempt to deny this is to not honestly evaluate our theology in the light of our own experiences. It is doubtful that the average cessationist has ever moved in a prophetic manner. Or if he did, he explained it away based on what his theology allowed him to believe. It can take a long time for our theology to adjust to our experience of God.

## The Basis Of Hearing

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All hearing of God is by grace. Unless He gives us an ear to hear, we will not be able to.

*Yet the Lord has not **given** you a heart to perceive and eyes to see and ears to hear, to this very day. (Deut. 29:4)*

Also, personal sins affect our ability to hear.

*And they made their hearts like flint so that they **could not hear** the law and the words which the Lord of hosts had sent by His Spirit through the former prophets; therefore great wrath came from the Lord of hosts. (Zech. 7:12) NAS*

The miracle in writing Scripture is not found in the greatness of the call to be apostles or prophets. Certainly, those are glorious callings. Yet every one of the prophets in Scripture had sin in their lives; they were errant people. No one, no matter how long they had walked with God, ever became holy enough or mature enough to hear Him inerrantly. Paul didn't, David didn't, Peter didn't, etc. The basis for hearing was not their call to a specific ministry; it was only His grace - because of men's unworthiness.

The cessationist might respond that the grace to be a prophet or an apostle included the grace to hear inerrantly. But where exactly does the Bible say that? And since Barnabas was an apostle (Acts 14:14), where are his inerrant contributions to Scripture?

Also, do we not spiritually grow in our ability to hear the Lord? Did apostles hear nothing one day and then hear God inerrantly the next? Does that not seem strange? Was Peter the apostle hearing God perfectly when

he fell into hypocrisy due to the fear of man in his life causing God to send a corrective rebuke through Paul (Gal. 2:11 - 14)?

Sin affects our ability to hear God's voice. Were prophets without sin? Of course not; only Christ lived a sinless life.

In fact, the Bible nowhere says that all apostles and prophets heard God inerrantly whenever they ministered. They were to have the word of the Lord in their mouths and they were to be *faithful* to communicate what God gave them. But the idea that they did so infallibly every time they spoke is questionable.

One example of prophetic failure occurred when Moses struck the rock instead of speaking to it as God had commanded him (Num. 20:8 - 12). God had given him the prophetic task of demonstrating His power to bring water from the rock. Moses, the prophet was certainly not inerrant in his action.

In our next section we will consider the greater responsibility that NT believers bear in evaluating those who claim to speak as the representatives of the Lord.

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## A Greater Responsibility

### Thanks, But We'll Stand At a Distance

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Moses had this to say to the children of Israel in the wilderness.

*The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear, according to all you desired of the Lord your God in Horeb in the day of the assembly, saying, "Let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God, nor let me see this great fire anymore, lest I die." And the Lord said to me: "What they have spoken is good. I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him. And it shall be that whoever will not hear My words, which He speaks in My name, I will require it of him. (Deut. 18:15 - 19)*

Jesus is the prophet like Moses that God sent to Israel (Acts 3:22 - 26). Because the Israelites in Moses' day asked to stand at a distance from God for fear of dying, He devised a way to mask His awesome glory while dwelling among them - He had them construct the tabernacle (Ex. 25:8). But this was only an imperfect prelude to His more excellent way of reveal-

ing Himself. His ultimate choice was to dwell among them in a body of flesh. The incarnation of Christ brought to mankind the perfect revelation of God

Who knows what the OT experience of God's people might have developed into if they had sought to approach the Lord like Moses did? But because they would be standing at a distance without the same level of discernment as Moses, God put a fearful judgment on all prophets in order to protect His people. If a prophet misrepresented Him, he would die.

*But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in My name, which I have not commanded him to speak...that prophet shall die. (Deut. 18:20)*

Old Testament prophets were sent to a nation that had expressed its desire to remain at a distance from the Lord. Of course, there arose over the years many who, like Moses, chose to walk in intimacy with the Lord (e.g., David, Daniel, etc.). Such people stood out in contrast to much of the nation. Yet God wanted more and He would not be put off forever. His ultimate solution for intimacy with His people was Calvary (Heb. 10:19 - 22). The New Testament reveals that His desire to bring His children closer to Himself succeeded in a way better than anyone could foresee. He has now welcomed us into Himself!

*for in Him we live and move and have our being... (Acts 17:28)*

He is now intimately accessible. No longer do we have to stand at a distance, but we can now draw near (this speaks of an increasing intimacy of relationship) with sincere hearts in full assurance of faith.

However, with a greater relationship comes a greater responsibility to discern the accuracy of those who speak in God's name. The blood of Christ has established a new environment where the accountability for knowing the voice of God rests upon those who hear as well as those who speak. *All* are to draw near, to hear and know His voice (Jn. 10:27). All are required to evaluate the fruit of those who claim to be prophets (Mt. 7:15 - 20).

Because of the indwelling and abiding presence of the Holy Spirit in all believers, God requires us to carefully discern when one is or is not speaking accurately in His name. The safety of God's children in such instances is not found in the death of those who prophesy falsely but in the Holy Spirit's ministry within us to guide us into all truth. As a result, the New Testament nowhere instructs us that one who brings an errant word must die.

In the next chapter we will consider the call for all believers to prophesy and the need to judge what is prophesied.

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## Seek To Prophecy

### Prophets And Prophecy

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The cessationist often fails to differentiate between the ministry of the prophet and the gift of prophecy (cf. Eph. 4:11, 12 and 1Co. 12:10). While all are not prophets (1Co. 12:29) and all do not prophesy (implied from 1Co. 12:30), yet all *are to pursue* prophecy (1Co. 14:1, 5). The fact that all do not speak in tongues, does not infer that all should not seek to do so. In fact, we should earnestly desire God's gifts, especially that we might prophesy (1Co. 14:1). Cessationist teaching certainly does not inspire believers to pursue prophecy.

*Pursue love, and desire spiritual gifts, but **especially** that you may prophesy. (1 Co. 14:1)*

Why would Paul instruct *ordinary* believers to especially pursue prophecy when there were all these apostles and prophets available who supposedly moved constantly in inerrant speaking and writing? Obviously, all believers were not called to write Scripture. The reason is given.

*But he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men. (1 Co. 14:3)*

If a prophet had to be inerrant, then what about the average believer? Did they have to speak without imperfection as well? Nothing is said in the OT about this because it was usually only the prophets who prophesied (King Saul being one exception). But in the NT, all of God's people are challenged to function prophetically. In fact, the prophetic functioning of believers is one mark of the last days.

*But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: "And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, that I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh; **your sons and your daughters shall prophesy**, your young men shall see visions, your old men shall dream dreams. And on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days; and **they shall prophesy**." (Acts 2:16 - 18)*

## Why Prophecy?

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The reason for prophecy? To edify, comfort and encourage fellow believers. Also, the prophetic Spirit operating through the local church testifies to the continuing presence of the risen Lord among them.

*...the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy. (Rev. 19:10)*

We can look at someone speaking and think, “Well that’s just Joe, not the Lord speaking.” I think that is why Paul said,

*Do not quench the Spirit. **Do not despise prophecies. Test all things; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil. (1 Thess. 5:19 - 22)***

The cessationist says we do not have to evaluate true prophecy because a real word from God would be inerrant. Yet, this is not consistent with the above Scripture. Paul said to examine what is being said and *receive what is good*. The implication is that there would be some element of imperfection in what was prophesied. Not only should we not quench the Spirit by despising His gifts among us, we should abstain from every form of evil. The implication here is that quenching the Spirit is but one form of evil.

Why is quenching the prophetic spirit harmful? It is one of God’s tools for building His Church.

*He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies (Grk., OIKODOMEO “to build a house”) the church. I wish you all spoke with tongues, but **even more that you prophesied**; for he who prophesies is greater than he who speaks with tongues, unless indeed he interprets, **that the church may receive edification.** (1 Co. 14:4 - 5)*

The question before us is this: Does the Church still need edifying? I think the answer to that is obvious. Also, Paul says nothing in this passage about the need to function inerrantly or that when believers prophesy they are laying the foundation of the Church (that is a prophet’s function). They are simply bringing words from the Lord’s heart to build up His house.

## Judging Prophets

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Not only did Paul teach the early Church to evaluate prophecy (i.e., from average believers), but he called them to evaluate prophets too.

*Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge. But if anything is revealed to another who sits by, let the first keep silent. For you can all prophesy one by one, that all may learn and all may be encouraged. And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. For God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints. (1 Co. 14:29 - 33)*

One relevant question is that if a prophet was functioning inerrantly, speaking exactly what God was giving him at that very moment, then how could the Lord also be leading another to speak at the same time? The picture here is of a man prophesying and communicating from his heart what He is hearing from the Lord. But in his grappling to find the finite words to communicate the spiritual perception in his spirit (by the way, this is how prophecy functions), he is taking too much time, perhaps using too many words and causing too much attention to be focused on himself when the Lord wants to move through others in the group. So right in the middle of his speaking, the Lord drops a revelation into the heart of another prophet. The first speaker must stop; his spirit (where the prophetic dynamic is occurring within him) is to be subject to the prophets around him. The point is that his perspective is finite and fallible. What God wants to say is greater than what he alone is perceiving. He is obviously not functioning in a flawless manner.

By the way if Paul was talking about false prophets here (i.e., they are the only ones that should be evaluated because true prophets speak inerrantly), then why did not Paul simply say, “If a false prophet begins to speak, stop him.”? Paul was addressing how *prophets* (true yet fallible prophets) function in the local church; nothing is said here about false prophets.

## Has the Perfect Come?

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This brings us to a prominent text in the cessationist debate. Was Paul referring to the Bible as that which is perfect in the following passage? The cessationist says that now that the canon of Scripture is closed, we have no more need of prophecy, tongues, etc.

*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 prophesy in part; **but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away.** When I was a child, I used to speak as a child, think as a child, reason as 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 shall know fully just as I also have been fully known.  
(1 Co. 13:8 - 12) NAS*

The point is made that seeing face to face is not referring to seeing the Lord face to face, but to Paul's clearly seeing his own face in the mirror that had at one time only given a dim reflection because the Bible was still incomplete (Mirrors were quite imperfect in those days and gave a rather crude reflection to the one gazing into it). But once the full revelation of God was given in the writing of Scripture, then a clear image could be seen.

The primary problem with this approach is that if Paul (and all the other prophets and apostles in the early Church) was hearing inerrantly from God, then in what way was he experiencing a crude and dim reflection in his contemplation of God's truth? It would seem that his experience was clearer and more *precise* than anything realized today. The cessationist would have us believe that Paul's experience of the truth was both dim and crude and yet always inerrant whenever God spoke to him. But you cannot have it both ways.

The truth is that Paul did *not* hear inerrantly every time he heard from the Lord. It was in those specific times of writing Scripture that he had the miraculous experience of hearing the Lord without error. Therefore, he saw dimly like the rest of us do (except for those few times of apostolic writing of Scripture). When his contributions to Scripture were complete, he continued to see and hear in an "in part" capacity.

## On A Journey Into Truth

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It is difficult to accept the concept that with the completed Bible we now know truth fully just as we have been fully known. Apart from seeing Jesus face to face, we will never attain such a level of awareness. Until He returns, we must press on in the journey to know more truth. In fact, this excursion into all truth is why the Holy Spirit was given to us.

*However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, **He will guide you into all truth**; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come.  
(John 16:13)*

Some would say that Jesus was only referring to the first apostles in these words. The Holy Spirit was given to these men that they might pen the Scriptures for the rest of us. However, if the inerrant functioning of men in the NT was for the express purpose of laying the foundation of the Church by writing the Scriptures, where are Nathaniel's contributions? or Philip's? or Bartholomew's? Also, if the foundation was laid in the first

century as men heard inerrantly and wrote the Scriptures, then the inescapable conclusion is that now that the Bible is here, it is our foundation. But the Bible's own testimony is that *Jesus Christ Himself* is the one and only foundation of the Church.

*For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. (1 Co. 3:11)*

The foundation of the Church has been and will always be Jesus Christ Himself. God has sent the Holy Spirit to reveal *a living Person* to us. It is in knowing *Him*, not just the inerrant Scripture that we are established firmly on the foundation.

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### What Is The Perfect?

#### Teleios

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Is Paul referring to the return of Christ in the following verse?

*...we know in part, and we prophesy in part; **but when the perfect** (Grk., TELEIOS) **comes, the partial will be done away.** (1Co.13:9 - 10) NAS*

If this passage refers to the second coming of Christ, then why is Paul not more plain about it? Whenever he taught about Jesus' return, he did so clearly and directly.

Consider how the word TELEIOS is used in the verses below.

*However, we speak wisdom among those who are **mature**, yet not the wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. (1 Co. 2:6)*

*Brethren, do not be children in understanding; however, in malice be babes, but in understanding be **mature**. (1 Co. 14:20)*

*until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a **mature** man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fulness of Christ. (Eph. 4:13) NAS*

*And we proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, that we may present every man **complete** in Christ. (Col. 1:28) NAS*



*But solid food belongs to those who are **of full age**, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil. (Heb. 5:14)*

TELEIOS refers to something attaining its full complete end. A good example of this would be when a little acorn grows and reaches the total height of the oak tree. The context of Paul's statement about the coming of the perfect in 1 Co. 13 clearly addresses the idea of growth and maturity.

When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known. (1 Co. 13:11 - 12)

## An Attainable Hope

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What is it in our spiritual growth that will enable us to know fully just as we have been fully known? The answer should be obvious. Our problem is that we have focused on only the last few verses of the chapter. The message of 1 Co. 13 is *the love* (Grk., AGAPE) *of God*. Reread the chapter in its entirety. The section about the coming of that which is perfect is a digression. Paul's concluding thought takes us back again to the AGAPE of God.

*And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love. (1 Co. 13:13)*

God will settle for nothing less than the *full revelation of His own nature on the earth*. Jesus revealed the Father perfectly as one man. Now He intends to bring forth the full revelation of His love through a people. Of course, such a level of maturity will never be realized apart from the physical return of Christ. A body without a visible Head will always reveal an incomplete testimony to God. We must set our sights on growing into the full stature of God's goal for us!

*Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect. (Matt. 5:48)*

The above verse is not simply a command; it is a promise! We will never achieve the full individual and corporate maturity of God's design for us through our own self effort. The perfect must *come*! Whatever is from the effort of man is destined for collapse. Whatever is from heaven will constitute God's holy city. The Lord's bride is a city *coming* from heaven. Her origin is not what men contrive but what God births. Her des-

tiny will be found in what He originates, nurtures and brings to full development. The coming of the perfect has been occurring for two thousand years. While the fullness has not yet been achieved, the power to do so has been poured out into our hearts.

*Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, **and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.** And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. **Now hope does not disappoint, because the love (Grk., AGAPE) of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.** (Ro. 5:1 - 5)*

The hope before us is attainable - not because of our efforts or worthiness, but because of the One who resides within us.

## —Conclusion—

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In conclusion, we must recognize that through Calvary, God has established a relational environment in His Son for His people to come to know Him. There in obedience and intimacy, we experience a gradual dawning of the coming day of the Lord as the morning star arises within us. The kingdom of God is slowly emerging upon the world stage into greater clarity before both the eyes of the nations as well as the Church. It is in knowing the King that His kingdom becomes more evident to us, in us and through us.

As awesome as is His gift of the inerrant Scriptures to us, *His even greater gift is Himself.* He now resides and abides within us through the Holy Spirit who was *given* to us. The Bible was written that we might stay on course on our journey into the knowledge of Him and His ways. As important as the Bible is, it must not take the place of its Author. He has more to say than what is revealed in the Scripture. Simply stated, He is bigger than the book He wrote. What He speaks will not contradict His written word but will harmonize with it. The Bible was not written to limit the activity of God (although this is precisely the conclusion to which the cessationist comes), but it was written to keep us from going off the path.

In fact, the God of the cessationist looks quite different from the God of the Bible. In the Scriptures, the Lord consistently interacted with men and women. He revealed Himself in visions and dreams. On occasion He spoke audibly. Believers stood in His presence and came out with words that changed the course of history and nations. If we would see God's

world-altering kingdom come into greater clarity in our generation, our theology must recover the God of the Bible.

The cessationist errs by not differentiating between the One speaking and the one(s) hearing when receiving revelation. While truth from God is infallible, our hearing of it is partial and imperfect. The several times in history when men heard inerrantly is what gave us the Bible. And what a precious gift it is. How foolish if we do not read, meditate and fervently study its pages.

It is clear that in our day, we desperately need the ministries of apostles and prophets for the Church to attain corporate maturity (Eph. 4). We also need the gift of prophecy to edify and build God's spiritual temple as one would build a house (1Co. 14). We need personal prophecy to wage spiritual warfare (1Tim. 1:18).

A day of greater revelation has brought a greater responsibility to all God's children. Because of greater light, we all must hear His voice and evaluate prophetic ministries by their fruits.

Concerning the ministries of apostles and prophets, as well as the gifts of prophecy, tongues, etc., we are not to be contentious. Our heart must be to bring greater clarity to each other in the love of Christ. If we cannot agree on certain doctrinal beliefs, we can certainly agree to walk together in humility until the Lord harmonizes us through His wisdom.

The days ahead for the Church will be days of intensifying spiritual warfare. While God has purposed to fill the earth with the knowledge of His glory, the devil has determined to not yield territory quickly or easily. We need all the weaponry that the Lord has given us for the war. One of these weapons is prophecy. Let us not pull back from learning the proper use of this precious gift from God. Let not the fear of misuse cause us to fall into the trap of disuse. Above all, let us keep fervent in our love for our Lord Jesus. He is our foundation of stability for the days ahead, our wisdom as we learn together His ways, our fortress in the times of upheaval and our righteousness that we may have access to the God who fills the heavens with His awesome presence. May He bless all who love and pursue Him and His ways.

All Scripture quotes are from the NKJV unless otherwise noted.

1. Donald Rumble, *Apostolic and Prophetic Foundations* (Clinton Corners, NY: The Attic Studio Press, 1996), pp. 97 - 100

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