

***ARGUMENT FOR CONTINUATIONISM
CONCERNING SPIRITUAL GIFTS AND BIBLICAL
INERRANCY***

By

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The belief that spiritual gifts such as speaking in tongues or prophesy remain active in the church today is a view that aligns with biblical scripture. This view, known as Continuationism, contends that spiritual gifts like those spoken of in 1 Corinth. 13,14 have not and will not cease until they are succeeded by perfection. The apostle Paul speaks of this in verse 10 when he says “But when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears.”

In 1 Corinth. 14:1 Paul also says “Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophesy.” This verse makes clear of Paul’s admonishing of the early church to pursue the charismatic gift of prophesy. This is likely due to the benefit of prophesy over other gifts such as speaking in tongues as explained by Paul, (1 Corinth. 14:18-19). Paul instructs the church to go after the gift of prophesy showing its value and benefit to the church. From this scripture, it is clear that not all believers are endowed with the charismatic gift of prophesy (1 Corinth. 12:7-10), and therefore Paul greatly encourages their development in this area so that the church would be built up in every spiritual way. A question must be asked “Why does Paul encourage the church to eagerly desire spiritual gifts (all of them), and especially that of prophesy if at some point they would cease?” Cessationism believes that the charismatic gifts stopped with the end of the apostolic age (1st century, 1 AD – 100 AD). Concerning Paul’s admonishment to desire spiritual gifts, the Cessationist contends that Paul was speaking to the current church which was still very much in formation, and that his instruction was not meant for Christian audiences post Apostolic age. Boyd and Eddy state “At the time Paul was writing to the Corinthians, the foundation was still in the process of being laid. This is why the Corinthians needed the charismatic gifts.”¹ However, I find a major flaw in this Cessationist thought, that

¹ Gregory A. Boyd and Paul R. Reddy, *Across the Spectrum Understanding Issues in Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2002, 2009), 245

being it assumes that Paul when the apostolic age would end, how long it might continue. If Paul meant his instruction only for the first century church, it would entail some foreknowledge on his part concerning “when perfect comes, the imperfect disappears.”

This leads to another question. “What or who is Paul referring to in relationship to the “perfect” and “imperfect”? Hermeneutically speaking, I believe Paul’s meaning of the perfect in this scripture refers to Jesus Christ – the one whom all prophesy points to, Rev. 19:10. Christ is the perfection that will one day appear, canceling the need for prophesy, though it be useful, beneficial and spiritual, yet imperfect in comparison to a present and perfect Christ. It seems that Paul has in mind a period of time between the imperfect and the perfect. Cullmann said “The gifts of the Spirit, and prophesy in particular, are seen by the apostles as characterizing the entire era between the Pentecost and the Parousia, the coming of the Spirit and the return of Christ. So as long as we still live between the inauguration and the consummation of the kingdom – between D-day and VE-day, in Cullmann’s analogy – we should continue to expect, and pursue, all the spiritual gifts.”² Acts 2:17 says “In these last days I will pour out my spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men shall see visions, and your old men will dream dreams.” I do not believe much exegesis is needed to understand this verse. For we know that it must be God who will do the pouring out as no man has ability commence or sustain such a move among all people. To infer that spiritual gifts are no longer active as Cessationists do is to infer that the “last days” have already occurred. And if this is true, then what days are we, the

² Oscar Cullmann, *Christ and Time: The Primitive Christian Conception of Time and History*, trans. Floyd V. Filson, rev. ed. (London: SCM, 1962).

church in now? Furthermore, I do not subscribe to the Cessationist view because I find no evidence of the sunset of the charismata in relationship with the end of the apostolic age.

It is important to note that Continuationists do not refute cessation of charismatic gifts, but that they assert as I do that spiritual gifts will cease, rather than believing they already have. The apostle Paul himself shares such a view when he says “Where there is prophecy they will cease; where there are tongues they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away.” Clearly the apostle believes a time of ceasing concerning spiritual gifts will come, but that will happen only at the appearance of Jesus Christ regarded as “perfection”, vs. 10. Because Christ has not appeared yet, and because no one knows the precise time when he shall appear, it seems logical that Paul had an eschatological view in mind when writing these verses – looking to the day when perfection cancels imperfection, 1 Jn. 3:2. Paul believes in the cessation of the gifts, but he believes it will happen ‘when the perfect comes) and expresses the contrast in four ways: the partial versus the perfect, childhood versus maturity, dimness of sight versus clarity, and partial knowledge versus fullness.³

Another reason for siding with Continuationism, is due to its support by the early church fathers. Just as we look at the Christian creeds, many of which were written by the church fathers, we ought to also consider the historical position of these fathers in relation to the continuation of spiritual gifts. Wilson quotes Justin Martyr saying “The prophetic gifts remain with us, even to the present time”⁴, and Irenaeus who said “Those who in truth are his disciples performed miracles according to the gift given them, including driving out demons, seeing

³ Andrew Wilson, *The Continuation of the Charismata*, <http://themelios.thegospelcoalition.org/> (accessed December 15, 2019)

⁴ Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 82.

visions, uttering prophetic expressions, healing the sick, raising the dead, speaking in other languages, and declaring the mysteries of God.”⁵ Wilson says:

From a purely historical perspective, then, the idea that the miraculous gifts suddenly stopped when the last apostle died is simply untenable. There are of course Cessationists (like Tom) who grant this point, and see the cessation of prophecy and the other miraculous gifts as happening gradually across the first four centuries. But this concession is crucial, because it shows that there is no necessary conflict between foundational, infallible, apostolic teaching, and ongoing prophetic insight. That is the point that charismatics have been making for decades.⁶

For these reasons given I side with Continuationism. I see no reason to believe that the charismata have ceased. To reiterate, I believe spiritual gifts will cease, but only when our perfect Lord and Savior Jesus Christ appears in all his glory and splendor.

⁵ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 2.32.4; 5.6.1.

⁶ Andrew Wilson, *The Continuation of the Charismata*, <http://themelios.thegospelcoalition.org/> (accessed December 15, 2019)

ARGUMENT FOR BIBLICAL INERRANCY

I side with biblical inerrancy meaning that is the bible in its original form and content, given directly to man from God, is without error, based upon the perfect nature of God. My view of inerrancy applies only to the original scriptures expressly inspired of God. I am of the view that any and all manuscript copies having the highest degree of accuracy and doctrinal consistency are not inerrant.

Holding such a view, I contend that inerrancy is a bi-product of inspiration. All scripture being God-breathed (2 Tim. 3:16) means that God who is perfect, superimposed his will and wisdom upon man. Because God is perfect, without error, so must anything he does be flawless. This includes inspiration, when God breathed (spoke his word to man) making the original scriptures inerrant. Manuscript copies of the bible are not inerrant because they are outside of inspiration. In no way am I suggesting that the bibles we have today are false in what they teach. In fact, I believe that every Christian has excellent reasons to believe the bible is true. However, our bibles today are not inerrant because inerrancy stems from inspiration of the original, not the copy. Reasoner says “The doctrine of inspiration means that the Spirit so superintended the process of revelation that humanity was temporarily elevated beyond error. Logically, the original autographs had to be perfect and without error if they came from an infallible God and were inspired by the Holy Spirit.”⁷

The Inerrantist view does not dismiss biblical inconsistencies, but accepts them as a matter of human involvement. Under the inerrant view, the portions of scripture that differ fail to impact, negate or change any doctrinal meaning. Neither do they remove God as the original oracle of biblical content. According to 2 Pet. 1:20-21, the bible is the product of God’s divine

⁷ Vic Reasoner, *The Importance of Inerrancy* (Evansville, IN: Fundamental Wesleyan Publishers, 2013), 14

enablement and men who were carried along by God's Spirit. The moment man is involved in anything, the possibility of error becomes a reality. Reasoner says "They did not write under their own impulse, but were impelled by the Holy Spirit."⁸ However, I find the essential component in arguing for biblical inerrancy is that imperfect vessel (man) was driven by a perfect God. Again, this view should only be extended to the initial act of inspiration, rather than the continuous and necessary production of biblical manuscripts. In consideration of Jesus' hypostatic nature, both divine and human, I find the assertion of the bible's dual nature coincides with that of Christ's. The voice of the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy says "We affirm that as Christ is God and Man in one Person, so scripture is, indivisibly, God's word in human language."⁹ Arguing for the Inerrantist view of scripture, one must also be knowledgeable of objections to this position. Boyd and Eddy states:

Whether we can adequately explain any particular alleged error in the bible is actually of little consequence. Given the limitations of human rationality, knowledge, and experience, we should expect anomalies, regardless of what we believe. Indeed, every well-established scientific theory conflicts with the relevant data at points. Scientists do not thereby reject these theories. Rather, they patiently wait for the data to be explained. This is precisely the Inerrantist posture toward the alleged errors in the bible.¹⁰

This I find extremely helpful in defense of biblical inerrancy. It is not an attempt to abandon alleged biblical errors, but rather the realization that apparent errors in the bible have little if any impact on the message and teaching of the biblical. If indeed differences do exist within the bible, the focus must be on their quality rather than their quantity. This fosters the question "What is the impact of these alleged errors? While I have not done extensive textual criticism, to date, I find there are no differences or errors in the bible that changes its overarching message.

⁸ Vic Reasoner, *The Importance of Inerrancy* (Evansville, IN: Fundamental Wesleyan Publishers, 2013), 16

⁹ Pope, *Compendium*, 1:184-185

¹⁰ Gregory A. Boyd and Paul R. Eddy, *Across the Spectrum Understanding Issues in Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2002, 2009), 23

Regardless the number of errors, not one, or a collective bunch are capable of changing what the bible teaches concerning soteriology, the Trinity or the biblical claim of Christ's resurrection from the dead.

The Inerrantist view of scripture must be properly understood before it can be asserted. That scripture is inerrant does not mean that everything stated in the bible is true. A prime example is found in Gen. 3:4 "You will not surely die", a false statement made by Satan directed at man. While this statement is a lie (from the moment man disobeyed (sinned) against God he began to spiritually and physically die), its occurrence is true as is the biblical intent to show Satan as a liar, Jn. 8:44. Potter says "However, inerrancy does not imply that everything recorded in the Bible is true or even right. There are lies in the Bible (Genesis 3:4) and evil acts (Genesis 4:8), not everything recorded is approved. What is true is that someone lied or did evil as recorded in the Bible, not that the lie is true, or the act is right."¹¹ Additionally, it must be understood that the bible is not to be taken literally always. The bible, in places, uses anthropomorphic language in referring to God by using human traits. For this reason, the bible simply cannot be literal all times, and yet such anthropomorphism does not change the inerrancy of scripture. In the bible, God is said to have a face, hands and ears (Num. 6:25, Ex. 7:5, Is. 23:11), and yet in the literal sense this is not true. However, this truth does not make the bible untrue or errant. It is simply how the writer chose to record such passages of scripture in order to make clear his point. Therefore, in such cases, inerrancy remains intact, as that which was God breathed, and its intent are without error. Moreover, I find that society uses language that is not precise to describe events, and yet these descriptions are not considered untruthful. Instead they

¹¹ Doug Potter, "Reasoning Rightly About Biblical Inerrancy: Five Questions You Need to Know", <https://ses.edu/reasoning-rightly-about-biblical-inerrancy-five-questions-you-need-to-know/> (accessed December 15, 2019).

are deemed inerrant. For example, I can give a description about myself, that fails to mention my wearing eyeglasses. Whether this omission is accidental or deliberate, I submit that it does not make the description a falsehood. Even though the description was not exact, there existed truth in what was provided. This is no more untrue, than a mother saying “Today I baked six apple pies”, however, when I arrive at her home I see the pies mentioned, but other kinds of baked pies as well. This type of imprecision is common in language. A husband calls his wife to say “I’m leaving work and driving home now”, yet on the way home he stops by the grocery and hardware store. Was his statement to his wife errant? I do not believe it was. Grudem states:

We should also note that language can make vague or imprecise statements without being untrue. “I live a little over a mile from my office” is a vague and imprecise statement, but it is also inerrant: there is nothing untrue about it. It does not affirm anything that is contrary to fact. In a similar way, biblical statements can be imprecise and still be totally true. Inerrancy has to do with *truthfulness* not with the degree of precision with which events are reported.¹²

Finally, I point out the danger in denying biblical inerrancy. If any part of the bible is inerrant than the whole must be also, and therefore, one loses all certainty of the truthfulness of God’s word. Geisler states “It is an aspersion on the nature of God to say that the Bible is not inerrant, because the Bible says that every word of Scripture is breathed out of God. If the Bible is an utterance of God, and God cannot lie, Heb. 6:18, Titus 1:2 then for us to say that the Bible could have errors is to say God could err.”¹³ Should the scriptures be errant, then there exists no basis to trust the word of God. It would not matter if the scriptures were God breathed or not. The inerrancy of scripture (in addition to faith) provides reason to trust God and take him at his word. I close with a very strong argument of biblical inerrancy which says:

¹² Wayne Grudem, “Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine” (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994), 68.

¹³ Norman Geisler, “The Collected Essays of Norman L. Geisler” (Independently Published, 2019), 422.

1. God cannot err
2. The bible is the word of God
3. Therefore, the bible cannot err

The above argument is more suited for evangelicals, as one must believe in the existence of God (atheists do not believe God exists). Nonetheless, the argument is sound and a perfect God can inspire perfection. Since the word of God was breathed out from perfection (God), it too must also be perfect. It therefore follows that the third premise, the conclusion, is true; i.e., the bible cannot err and is therefore inerrant.

Bibliography

¹ Gregory A. Boyd and Paul R. Eddy, *Across the Spectrum Understanding Issues in Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2002, 2009), 245

² Oscar Cullmann, *Christ and Time: The Primitive Christian Conception of Time and History*, trans. Floyd V. Filson, rev. ed. (London: SCM, 1962).

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⁴ Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 82.

⁵ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 2.32.4; 5.6.1.

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¹⁰ Gregory A. Boyd and Paul R. Reddy, *Across the Spectrum Understanding Issues in Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2002, 2009), 23

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