

The Discerner

the voice of... Religion Analysis Service

A QUARTERLY EXPOSING
UNBIBLICAL TEACHING & MOVEMENTS

Volume 33, Number 2

April • May • June 2013

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*"Hereby know we the spirit of truth
and the spirit of error" 1 John 4:6*

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READERS' COMMENTS - THANK YOU!

“Amen ! To your ‘Dear Reader’ (about samesex marriage, editor) comments: Not really all that unbelievable though considering the decades of indoctrination that generations have been subjected to. Thank our God for your biblical stands, Maranatha...Maranatha!!”

K.S., Florida

“Steve, thank you for your excellent article on ‘The Sabbath and the Seventh-Day Adventists’, Part 2, in the Jan.-Mar. 2013 ed. of ‘The Discerner’. I don’t remember if previous articles on the SDA have presented their false doctrines. ...Somewhere I read that in heaven a SDA (member) would be hoping his/her character would be worthy of salvation. This is works. An old nature is never worthy, a new nature by the Spirit is necessary for both (heaven and earth).

...Your magazine is excellent!”

C.V., College Station, TX

DEAR READER

As I write these lines, the U.S. Supreme Court has just declared DOMA (the Defense of Marriage Act) enacted in 1996, as unconstitutional. This is a startling reversal of judgment within just a few years. This brings to my mind some statements in Hillman College's "Imprimus" (May 2013) written by Professor R.R. Reno, former professor at Creighton University and now editor of "First Things". In his assessment of the religious situation in America today he comes up with an intriguing caption: "The Rise of the Nones". He posits: "As the religious character of our society changes, so do our assumptions about religious freedom. The main change has been the rise of the Nones. In the 1950s, around three percent of Americans checked the "none" box when asked about their religious affiliation. That number has grown, especially in the last decade, to 20% of the population. And Nones are heavily represented in elite cultures".

Reno mentions another observation: "At the same time, the number of Americans who say that they go to church every week has remained strikingly constant over the last 50 years, at around 35 percent.... As the Nones have emerged as a significant cohort, the committed core of religious people has not declined and in fact has become unified and increasingly battle tested. Protestants and Catholics alike know that they're up against an often hostile secular cultureThese two trends- the rise of the Nones and the consolidation of the committed core of believers-have led to friction in public life. The Nones and religious Americans collide culturally and politically, not just theologically."

There is a "whale of a lot" of solid and stark realism in the professor's analyses. Cultures have been battered and have often succumbed to intellectualism and pernicious secularism (witness the 18th Enlightenment in Europe). What have the Nones done for the spiritual and moral vitality of America? It seems that the Nones seek to rid America of all religious shackles. While often they are preoccupied with justice and humanitarian issues on this earth, they ignore and reject Biblical values such as repentance toward God, judgment to come, and eternal separation or eternal bliss in the next world. We need strong, popular, prophetic voices that are willing to engage and rout the Nones and their elitist, godless, secular, laws and policies.

Laurence J. Sutherland

WITH THIS ISSUE

A short but pithy article by Katherine Kersten, columnist with the Minneapolis Star Tribune, sets a good tone for this edition. As we reported earlier, Minnesota has voted for same-sex marriage. Now what? Kersten, who is often maligned for her open stances against moral evil, details what lies ahead for a society that accepts unbiblical and unwholesome norms.

Our second article is a thoroughgoing analysis of spiritual gifts, especially that of prophetic utterance in the New Testament. Have these gifts ceased or do they continue on in the church? Gary Gilley, who is well known in conservative evangelical circles, cautiously delineates the viewpoints and then tersely and carefully clarifies his own. He realizes that this segment of Pauline theology has given rise to numerous exegetical differences and has even sprouted denominations and cultic groups.

Steve Lagoon, president of Religion Analysis Service, writes profusely for us. His range of themes is extensive. Aside from articles on various cultic groups and theological issues, he delves into biblical topics that puzzle many Bible teachers. In this issue he does a chronological harmony of the Jesus' resurrection accounts. His study is a work of art, a tapestry of details and thoughts that are woven from the various accounts.

George Welshons has served on our RAS board for a year or so now. Immediately we were impressed with his knowledge of the Jehovah's Witnesses. I asked him to relay some thoughts about his background with the JW'S. I believe that you will be enthralled by his testimony.

Finally, a test betimes on the Reformation is always in order. Please relay us your score of 80% or more for a modest reward. Thank you.

Laurence J. Sutherland

THE MARRIAGE EXPERIMENT

by Katherine Kersten

The Right Side of History surely can't be found on the Wrong Side of Reality.

One of the clearest things about Minnesota's new gay-marriage law is that it requires Minnesotans to "play pretend" — to embrace obvious fictions as reality.

For example, the law states that citizens must view the union of two people of the same sex — who can't produce a child — as identical to that of a man and woman, whose sexual complementarity is the only thing that can. The law also declares that, henceforth, "when necessary to implement the rights and responsibilities of spouses or parents in a civil marriage between persons of the same sex," words like "mother" and "father" "must be construed in a neutral manner to refer to a person of either gender" under Minnesota law. But a woman can't be a father, and a man can't be a mother. It's a biological fact Minnesota lawmakers can't repeal, no matter how much they wish to.

Our lawmakers seem utterly untroubled by their vote to impose a regime of "let's pretend." What explains this?

The legislators and their supporters who celebrated the bill's passage on the State Capitol lawn made clear that what they crave is to be in the vanguard of a brave new world. "By your political courage you join that pantheon of exceptional leaders who did something extraordinary," Gov. Mark Dayton proclaimed as he signed the law. "You changed the course of history for our state and our nation." President Obama received similar accolades when he announced his support for gay marriage. Apparently, for some folks, there's nothing headier than to be on the Right Side of History.

But here's a dirty little secret. No one has the remotest idea where our state officials' decision to turn our fundamental social institution upside down will take our society in coming decades. We know the experiment is starting out badly, because it's based on pretending that demonstrable falsehoods are true. We have no idea what ripple effects it will have, how its redefinition of parenthood will affect children, or whether we'll next see a push for marriage as the union of three or more loving people: the logical next step.

You would expect our legislators to wrestle with weighty questions like these before deciding to end marriage as we — and all other people on Earth — have always known it. They did not. That's because they

(at least the true believers among them) were motivated by a quasi-religious faith that “marriage equality” will inevitably lead our state to the secular equivalent of the Promised Land.

Gay marriage is a crusade, and the driving force behind it is the secular religion of progressivism. This faith’s adherents put their hope, not in salvation after death, but in a hazy and glorious future here on Earth.

The journalist Christopher Caldwell has put it succinctly: “The argument for gay marriage is always made in the name of history — not the history we have lived, but the history we are yet to live.” Will that future turn out as planned? Progressive dogma leaves no doubt that it must.

Social commentator George Weigel sees the roots of the progressive faith in an “intense revival” of an ancient religious movement called Gnosticism. This movement has taken many forms throughout history. But it is always an elite phenomenon, and always holds that the key to human flourishing is possession of a special knowledge that allows man to transcend the material world, so he can build paradise for himself on his own terms.

Modern man — at least many intellectuals — chafes under the constraints of reality. He longs to be “as a god,” to pretend that there are no givens, that “everything in the human condition is plastic and malleable.” In short, says Weigel, he craves to believe that “everything can ... be bent to human willfulness, which is to say, human desire.”

Today, Gnosticism is most “powerfully embodied” in the Sexual Revolution and its ideology of gender, writes Weigel. That ideology holds that maleness and femaleness — two elements of the human condition that have always been understood as the essence of “givenness” — are now to be viewed as mere cultural constructs.

Weigel points to Spain’s Zapatero government, which passed a law in 2007 permitting men to change themselves into women, and vice versa, by a declaration at a government office — absent any surgery — after which a new national identity card, with the new gender, is issued. “It is hard to imagine a more explicit expression of personal willfulness overpowering natural givenness,” he concludes.

The gay marriage crusade is just the latest manifestation of the secular religion of America’s intellectual elites. Who knows what new game of “let’s pretend” our chattering classes will impose on us next?

Katherine Kersten is a frequent contributor to Opinion Exchange in the Minneapolis Star Tribune. Used by permission.

CESSATIONISM, REVELATION & PROPHECY

Gary Gilley

Despite the fact that the majority of conservative evangelical Christians since the Reformation have held to a cessationist position with regard to divine revelation, true cessationists are rapidly disappearing. In the articles and books I have written nothing has evoked as much criticism and anger as my position that God is speaking to His people today exclusively through Scripture. Due to the influence of a multitude of popular authors, theologians and conference speakers, cessationism is barely treading water, even within the most biblically solid churches and organizations.

As a matter of fact, among those who claim to be evangelicals there are five identifiable views prevalent today on the matter of revelation:

Pentecostal/Charismatic/Thirdwave

All miraculous gifts exist today, including the gift of prophecy. God speaks through prophets and to His people both audibly (through dreams, visions, words of knowledge), and inwardly (inaudibly in the mind or heart). Representatives of this position are Jack Deere, John Wimber, the Kansas City Prophets, the Assemblies of God and the Word of Faith movement. Charismatic author Tommy Tenney, in his popular book *The God Chasers*, writes,

“God chasers...are not interested in camping out on some dusty truth known to everyone. They are after the fresh presence of the Almighty... A true God chaser is not happy with just past truth; he must have present truth. God chasers don't want to just study the moldy pages of what God has done; they are anxious to see what God is doing.”¹

Classical Mysticism/Spiritual Formation

Through the use of various disciplines and spiritual exercises, God will speak to us both audibly and inaudibly. Dallas Willard and Richard Foster are two such examples. Willard, a leader within the Spiritual Formation Movement, recently updated a previous book renaming it *Hearing God, Developing a Conversational Relationship with God*. The thrust of his book is that we can live “the kind of life where hearing God is not an uncommon occurrence, [for] hearing God is but one dimension of a richly interactive relationship and

¹ Tommy Tenney, *The God Chasers* (Shippensburg, Pa: Destiny Image, 2000), unnumbered pages in introduction (emphasis his).

obtaining guidance is but one facet of hearing God.”² In other words, the maturing Christian should expect to hear the voice of God on a regular basis, independent from Scripture, and that voice will reveal God’s individual, specific will for his life. Such personal communication from the Lord, we are told, is absolutely essential because without it there can be no intimate walk with God.³ And it is those who are hearing from God today, in this way, who will redefine “Christian spirituality for our time.”⁴

Evangelical Mysticism

God is speaking to Christians regularly, mostly inaudibly through inner voices, hunches, promptings, feelings and circumstances (examples: Henry Blackaby and Beth Moore). Southern Baptists ministers Henry and Richard Blackaby wrote *Hearing God’s Voice* to “teach God’s people not only to recognize his voice but also immediately to obey his voice when they heard it.”⁵ They promise that “as you spend time with Jesus, you will gradually come to recognize his voice more readily than you did at first...You won’t be fooled by other voices because you know your Lord’s voice so well.”⁶ And, once you have figured out when God is speaking to you, “write it down in a journal so you can refer back to it as you follow him.”⁷

In this category could be placed the New Calvinists or Calvinistic Charismatics such as John Piper, Wayne Grudem, Mark Driscoll and C. J. Mahaney. Their followers are sometimes called the young, restless, and Reformed.

Mark Driscoll, who often claims extra-biblical revelation, dreams, and visions from the Lord, documented four such events in his recent book *Real Marriage*. He writes, “...when God spoke to me, I had never experienced anything like that moment. God told me to devote my life to four things. He told me to marry Grace, preach the Bible, train men, and plant churches. Since that day in 1990, that’s what I have been pursuing by God’s grace.”⁸

2 Dallas Willard, *Hearing God, Developing a Conversational Relationship With God*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), pp. 12,13.

3 *Ibid.*, pp. 26, 31, 67.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 15.

5 Henry and Richard Blackaby, *Hearing God’s Voice* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers), 2002, p. 234.

6 *Ibid.*, p. 235.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 236.

8 Mark and Grace Driscoll, *Real Marriage, the Truth about Sex, Friendship and Life Together* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2012), p. 8. For more of Mark Driscoll’s claims of extra-biblical revelations see his book *Confessions of a Reformation Rev, Hard Lesson from an Emerging Missional Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), pp. 39, 74-75, 97, 99,128, 130.

Cessationist

All miraculous gifts, including prophecy, have ceased (examples: the IFCA International, John MacArthur and Charles Ryrie). The Westminster Confession states well the historic cessationist position,

“The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man’s salvation, faith and life is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men.”⁹

Cautious, but Open

Those holding this position are skeptical of prophetic claims and the majority of inaudible experiences. But they do not want to “put God in a box” and therefore are cautiously open to the possibility of additional revelation from the Lord today, although they are not certain how this works or how to identify God’s voice. Nevertheless, they are afraid to limit the power of God and fear that they might be missing out on a close personal relationship with the Lord if they do not allow for the possibility of God speaking today apart from Scripture (examples: most Christians).

Modern Revelations

Continuationists, those who believe that the miraculous sign gifts, including prophecy, are still available to believers today, define their supposed revelations in different ways. There are two broad categories that could be acknowledged, the first of which claims prophetic messages from the Lord. Such messages would be direct, clear words from God or angels, perhaps in dreams or visions or through audible voices. Such claims have long been common in Pentecostal and charismatic circles and are increasing among non-charismatic evangelicals. Extremely popular conference speaker and author Beth Moore is well known for her claims of hearing from God. In a DVD she states, “Boy, this is the heart of our study. This is the heart of our study. Listen carefully. What God began to say to me about five years ago, and I’m telling you it sent me on such a trek with Him, that my head is still whirling over it. He began to say to me, ‘I’m going to tell you something right now, Beth, and boy you write this one down and you say it as often as I give you utterance to say it.’”¹⁰ Such statements coming from evangelicals are far too common to need much documentation. Moore is claiming a direct word from the Lord that sets the future agenda for her ministry. The source of authority is her own experience.

⁹ The Westminster Confession, chapter 1, section 6.

¹⁰ Quoted from Beth Moore’s DVD “Believing God.”

From a more doctrinal base we turn to theologian Wayne Grudem, who has had a massive impact on the evangelical world concerning modern prophecies. Grudem has written the definitive book on the subject, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today*, in which he claims that church age prophecy is different than Old Testament prophecy. While the Old Testament prophet was held to the standard of infallibility when speaking a word from the Lord (Deut 18:20-24), prophecies beginning with Pentecost are fallible and imperfect. He writes, “Prophecy in ordinary New Testament churches was not equal to Scripture in authority, but simply a very human—and sometimes partially mistaken—report of something the Holy Spirit brought to someone’s mind.”¹¹ Modern prophecy then is impure and imperfect. By way of example and documentation Grudem quotes the Anglican charismatic leaders Dennis and Rita Bennet who claim,

“We are not expected to accept every word spoken through the gifts of utterance...but we are only to accept what is quickened to us by the Holy Spirit and is in agreement with the Bible...one manifestation may be 75% God, but 25% the person’s own thoughts. We must discern between the two.”¹²

One of the most disconcerting aspects of Grudem’s position is his uncertainty as to how we can distinguish between our own thoughts and those supposedly from God. This is such an important and disturbing feature of the conservative continuationist’s system that I will quote Grudem at length.

“But how would a person know if what came to mind was a ‘revelation’ from the Holy Spirit? Paul did not write specific instructions; nonetheless, we may suppose that in practice such a decision would include both an objective and subjective element. Objectively, did the revelation conform with what the prophet knew of the Old Testament Scriptures and with apostolic teaching?”¹³

With this quote cessationists partially agree. The Holy Spirit cannot contradict Himself and anything allegedly spoken by the Holy Spirit which is in disagreement with Scripture is naturally spurious. The continuationists, however, are rarely claiming new doctrines that supplement Scripture; they are claiming specific, personal words that guide them in decision making or knowledge of the future. It should be mentioned in passing that contrary to what is often stated

11 Wayne Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today*, (Wheaton: Crossway,1988), p.14.

12 *Ibid.*, p.110.

13 *Ibid.*, p.120.

by continuationists, many espousing modern prophecies do in fact add numerous doctrines not found or taught in the Bible such as specific demonic warfare techniques, insights on heaven or hell, “word of faith” authority that releases the power of God, dominion theology, novel views on the atonement, inspiration and ecclesiology. While more conservative continuationists such as Grudem, Piper, and Mahaney would not be guilty of such theological additions, many others are.

Turning back to Grudem we read of his subjective element of prophecy,

“But there was no doubt also a subjective element of personal judgement: did the revelation ‘seem like’ something from the Holy Spirit; did it seem to be similar to other experiences of the Holy Spirit which he had known previously in worship...Beyond this it is difficult to specify much further, except to say that over time a congregation would probably become more adept at making evaluations of prophecies, and individual prophets would also benefit from those evaluations and become more adept at recognizing a genuine revelation from the Holy Spirit and distinguishing it from their own thoughts.”¹⁴

When we contrast Grudem’s view of prophecy with Scripture we find nothing remotely resembling what Grudem teaches. Nowhere in the Bible is one receiving a message from God left to wonder if God is speaking to him (with the temporary exception of the young boy Samuel). No one had to ask if what they were hearing “seemed like” the Holy Spirit or matched previous subjective experiences that also “seemed like” the Holy Spirit. They knew without question when God was speaking to them. This is essentially the same teaching that Dallas Willard exerts in *Hearing God*: “How can you be sure God is speaking to you? The answer is that we learn by experience.”¹⁵ Therefore subjective experience becomes the test of authority concerning revelation from God. This is a far cry from what we find in Scripture.

The second half of Grudem’s quote moves into the realm of the incredible. After two thousand years of church history, the best this world-class theologian can offer is that “over time a congregation would probably become more adept at making evaluations of prophecies...” This is a statement of speculation and hope that at some point the church will begin to figure out when a word of

¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 120, 121 (emphasis mine).

¹⁵ Dallas Willard, p. 9 (emphasis mine).

revelation is actually coming from the Holy Spirit and when it is the imagination of the speaker.

Let's put Grudem's hypothesis to a test. Sister Sally stands up in church and says the Holy Spirit has just revealed to her that an earthquake will flatten much of the city sometime within the next eight weeks. The congregation needs to add earthquake insurance to their properties, pack all their belongings, leave their jobs behind and head to the countryside. What is to be done? Given Grudem's theory, the congregation knows that at best this prophecy is impure and most likely contains elements that are not from God. The people are then left to evaluate the validity of the revelation just received based on their own experience or other purely subjective means. In the Bible, if a true prophet of God warned of an impending earthquake there would be no doubt as to what to do, but Grudem's New Testament prophet is unreliable. I have to ask, of what value is such a prophecy? It has no authority or certainty, and may actually lead to bad and even disastrous decisions. These modern prophecies do not have the ring of "thus says the Lord."

When the different views on modern revelation and prophecies collide, continuationists attempt to pacify cessationists by assuring them that their messages from the Lord are not on par with Scripture. Grudem quotes George Mallone saying:

"Prophecy today, although it may be helpful and on occasion overwhelmingly specific, is not in the category of the revelation given to us in the Holy Scripture.... A person may hear the voice of the Lord and be compelled to speak, but there is no assurance that it is pollutant-free. There will be a mixture of flesh and spirit."¹⁶

Since almost no one within Christianity (save the cults) is claiming revelation that is equivalent to the Bible, we are left with a dilemma. Is it possible for God to speak in a non-authoritative way? Is it possible for Him to speak something less than His inspired word? The continuationists seem to have invented a novel type of divine revelation, one that contradicts Scripture and defies reason. In the Bible, and logically, either God is speaking or He is not. There is no such thing as partially inspired revelation or the true words from the Lord polluted by the misunderstanding or imagination of the prophet. This is not to say that all of God's divine words are found in Scripture. John is careful to inform us that Jesus did many things, and certainly said many things, that are not recorded in his Gospel (John 20:30), or the other New Testament books for that matter. Yet all that

¹⁶ Wayne Grudem., p. 111.

Jesus said were the words of God. He never expressed an impure or untruthful thought. He spoke with authority. Undoubtedly the Spirit also spoke through various men and women in biblical times whose words were not recorded in the Bible. The point, however, is that, while the Holy Spirit has not included every prophecy that He spoke through humans in Scripture, everything that He inspired people to say carries with it the infallible authority of the Word of God. Nothing that He said through people is less than God's word. A polluted or partial revelation from the Holy Spirit has never been uttered.

This means that modern prophecies, words of knowledge, and other claims to hearing the voice of the Lord, if they are truly from the Holy Spirit, must be equal to the Scriptures in both inspiration and authority. God cannot speak with other than purity and inerrancy. Modern claims of the Lord speaking but with a "mixture of flesh and spirit" simply are not possible and are never attested to in Scripture. Those who are claiming divine revelation today must wrestle with the fact that what they are supposedly hearing must carry the same authority of the divinely inspired authors of Scripture.

A Case for Cessationism

With all of this as a backdrop (see part 1 in this series), the question is reduced to this: Is God giving authoritative revelation on par with that which He has given in the past, much of which has been inscripturated, or is He not? If He is, then the church of Christ needs to take note and come into compliance with the modern prophecy movement, following its revelations as it would Scripture. But if the Lord is not revealing His inspired word today, then we need to reject the claims of the modern prophets and expose these supposed revelations for what they are. This means the position taken by most on prophecy—cautious but open—is untenable. The cautious but open crowd is skeptical of the claims coming from the prophetic movement and they are suspicious of the many "words from God" that so many evangelicals are claiming. Still they hesitate to embrace cessationism. They are concerned about limiting God or, as it was mentioned above, "putting God in a box." To this let me make two replies:

- It is okay to put God in a box if God, in fact, is the One who put Himself in that box. In other words, God can do anything He wants to do, but we expect God to do what He says He will do. If God has put Himself in the cessationist box we can embrace and proclaim it.
- Taking the open but cautious view really does not hold up. Either God is speaking today apart from His Word or He is not. If He is speaking, how do we determine which of the multitude of messages people claim are from Him and which are bogus? If, with Grudem, we have eliminated the tests of Deuteronomy 13 and 18, how are we to

evaluate all these revelations? How do we know to whom we should listen and whom we should ignore?

On such an important area as divine revelation it is indefensible to believe that God's people cannot know with certainty whether such is taking place. Surely we should expect that the Scriptures themselves would lay out the guidelines for us to determine if divine, authoritative, inspired revelation is being given today. I believe it does and that we can be confident, from the witness of Scripture itself, that God has ceased speaking to mankind during this age apart from the Bible. Let's take a quick look at what the Word has to say.

A cessationist view begins with a careful look at what God actually did in Scripture. We find, when we search carefully, that God was not speaking to everyone all the time. His revelation, even in biblical times, was rare and when He did speak it was always supernaturally with an audible voice, never through inner voices or impressions. The assumption held by many that God spoke to most of his children in biblical times is simply not true. The average believer in either Testament never received a personal word from God and even the majority of key players never heard the voice of God personally. When God did speak in Scripture it almost always dealt with the big picture of what He was doing in the outworking of His redemptive program or the life of His people in general. You will search in vain to find God instructing someone to take a job, purchase a number of donkeys, or buy a house—except as it related to the bigger issue of God's dealings with His people. Beyond a few individuals, finding a non-prophetic person in Scripture who heard directly from God becomes a difficult task. The contention that God spoke to almost everyone all the time, leading, guiding and directing, simply does not stand the test of careful examination of the Scriptures. Even those to whom God spoke in the Old Testament, to only Noah, Abraham, Moses (considered to be a prophet), Jacob, Aaron, Joshua, David and Solomon, did He speak more than twice in their lifetimes?

But what about the New Testament? We find that most records of God speaking to individuals after Pentecost are found in the book of Acts. But even here we find only thirteen distinct times in which God spoke directly to individuals (two of these through angels): Acts 8:26-29; 9:4, 10; 10:3, 11-16; 12:7-8; 13:2-4; 16:6,9-10; 18:9; 21:4, 11; 22:17-21; 23:11. Eight of these occasions were to Paul or Peter, leaving a total of five other individuals or groups to whom God spoke directly in the first 30 years of church history.

The positive evidence

So far, we have examined what might be called negative evidence.

That is, if we are looking for a pattern of how God spoke to individuals in scriptural times, that pattern reveals a scarcity of individual revelations. The Lord chose to speak primarily through His prophets and the apostles. Following that pattern we should expect the same today. Let's now move to more positive evidence that the Lord has ceased speaking today apart from Scripture.

Beginning with Ephesians 2:20, we find that the church is "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets." Since Christ is the cornerstone of the church, this verse has to be speaking of the witness concerning Christ that the apostles and prophets provided to the church. It is only to be expected that this witness would be passed along to the future generations of believers via the instrument of Scriptures that those men were inspired to write. As Ephesians 3:5 tells us, the "mystery of Christ" has been "made known to the sons of men through the revelation given to Christ's holy apostles and prophets." In the next chapter, Paul teaches that the Lord has provided gifted men to the church for its perfection or maturity. The apostles' and prophets' role in that process was laying the foundation of the church, as we have seen (Eph 2:20; 3:5). How? Through the teaching of New Testament truth, the apostles' doctrine. The early church gathered together to devote "themselves to the apostles' teaching" (Acts 2:42), for it was the apostles who would provide New Testament revelation.

The book of Hebrews enhances our understanding by detailing two periods in human history in which the Lord has spoken to mankind. Hebrews 1:1 proclaims that the first period was "long ago to the fathers and prophets in many portions and in many ways." This is an obvious reference to the revelations given during the times of the Old Testament. In verse two the author of Hebrews cites the second period of divine revelation by simply saying that "in these last days [God] has spoken through His Son." But as we know Jesus Himself did not write down anything that He said. That was left to His followers and so, the author of Hebrews adds: "After it was first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard" (Heb 2:3) i.e. the apostles. This however raises a practical problem. How did the people know that the communication they were receiving from the apostles was true? After all, many individuals made claim to being an apostle during the first century. The Lord would authenticate His true apostles by giving them the ability to perform "signs and wonders, and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit" (Heb 2:4). When the Corinthians challenged Paul's apostleship and authority, he pointed them to the "signs of a true apostle... [which were] signs and wonders and miracles" (2 Cor 12:12), just as the author of Hebrews confirmed. The book of Acts verifies repeatedly that miraculous gifts were taking place through the apostles for this very reason (Acts 2:43; 5:12, 13; 9:38-41; 14:3, 8-9; 15:12; 19:11; 20:10; 28:8, 9). The only exceptions

were Stephen (6:8), Philip (8:6-7) and possibly Barnabas (15:12), all very closely associated with the apostles. We find no examples of the average Christian in the New Testament either performing miracles or receiving authoritative revelation. Miracles were for the purpose of authenticating the office of the men who would lay the foundation of the church. Once the foundation of the church was in place, the role of the apostles was no longer needed. With the death of John, the last of the apostles, gifts authenticating the apostles were no longer necessary and they ceased.

But did that necessarily mean revelation ceased as well? I believe the evidence of Scripture would indicate that it did. We start with 1 Corinthians 13:8-10, which clearly tells us that the day comes when prophecy and supernatural knowledge will be done away, and tongues will cease. Specifically Paul writes that “when the perfect comes the partial will be done away.” All Bible believers are ultimately cessationists, for this passage is clear that revelatory knowledge will cease at some point (that point being when the perfect comes). Many believe that the “perfect” refers to the coming of Christ or the eternal kingdom. That is a possible interpretation but the context is contrasting partial knowledge and revelatory gifts with that which is perfect. The best explanation in such a context would be that the perfect (or complete) would be the completion of Scripture.

In other words, when the revelation for this dispensation as recorded in the New Testament is completed the need for partial words of knowledge and prophecies would cease. That is, because the final, full revelation of the Lord for this dispensation has arrived, there is no need for additional messages from God. This seems reasonable, but did it happen?

This understanding of the perfect in 1 Corinthians 13 is reinforced later in the New Testament by Peter, Jude, Paul and John. When the apostle Peter pens the inspired epistle we call Second Peter, he is desirous of reminding them of many things, especially that they “remember the words spoken beforehand by the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior spoken by your apostles” (3:2). Peter did not point his readers to new or fresh revelation but to the words spoken previously by the prophets and apostles. Jude offers similar understanding when in verse three he urges his readers to “contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints.” A message had been given, a foundation laid once for all that had to be defended. How did they know what that message was? In verse 17 Jude answers, “But you, beloved, ought to remember the words that were spoken beforehand by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ.” The faith in verse three that was handed down to them, the faith that was to be defended and proclaimed, had been given to them by none other than the apostles.

As the apostle Paul writes virtually his last inspired words to his friend Timothy he points him to the Scriptures that are able to make the people of God “adequate, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim 3:16-17). In light of this lofty claim for the God-breathed Scriptures, Paul gives Timothy a final charge “to preach the word...” (4:1-5). There is no hint in Paul’s charge that Timothy is to seek additional revelation, listen to the prophecies or words of knowledge of fellow believers or preach his own dreams or visions. He is to preach the Word handed down to the saints through the apostles. As the New Testament canon nears its close the divinely inspired authors unite in pointing their readers to the apostles as the inspired human source of New Testament truth.

The apostle John joins the chorus as he closes down the New Testament with a solemn warning against adding to or subtracting from this final revelation from God. He writes, “I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book” (Rev 22:18-19). Since this is the last chapter in the last book of the last Testament it is only reasonable to deduce that from that point on any addition of any prophecy would be adding to Scripture. With the death of John shortly thereafter, the last of the apostles had faded from the scene and with him the final word of revelation for this age. In addition there is no indication either the twelve apostles or the New Testament prophets were ever replaced (Rev 21:14).

Conclusion

The witness emerging from the Scriptures themselves is that God has chosen to communicate with mankind throughout history in specific and unique ways. He has chosen certain men at certain times to be prophets and apostles to speak and record divine revelation (Heb 1:1-2; 2:3-4). When God’s revelation was complete for this age, the ministry of the prophets and apostles was finished and we would expect no further communication at this time. This expectation is verified through the statements found in the Bible itself. What we are seeing today is not new revelation from God but subjective experiences and, at times, deception.

Let us cling tenaciously to “the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints” (Jude 3) rather than chasing the inferior, inadequate imaginations of those who claim a new word from the Lord today.

Gary Gilley. Used by permission of Voice magazine, November / December 2012 issue.

A Harmony of the Gospel Accounts of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ in Answer to Skeptics

by Steve Lagoon

This article is about one of the central doctrines of the Christian faith; the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Though it is a doctrinal truth that is essential to orthodox Christianity, it is not merely a construct devised by theologians, but a fact of history. The apostle Paul emphasizes the importance of the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15.

He begins the chapter by noting the resurrection's central place in the gospel of salvation:

“Now, Brothers, I want to remind you of the Gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved... For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for your sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day, according to the Scriptures...” (1 Corinthians 15:1-4).

A little later Paul says: “And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins” (1 Corinthians 15:17). It is little wonder then, that this central doctrine of the faith has been so vigorously attacked by the forces of evil.

Skeptics frequently level attacks at the veracity of the resurrection by alleging contradictions in the Scriptures themselves, particularly in the gospel accounts. However, the Scriptures have stood the test of two thousand years of criticism, and have proven themselves to be what they claim to be; the very word of God (2 Timothy 3:16).

The genesis of this article was a challenge to the author by a friend that was struggling with trying to harmonize the gospel accounts of the resurrection of Jesus. After a very tortuous and sincere effort, my friend became convinced that such a harmony was not possible, and hence, the Scriptures do contain errors.

As I dug into the work, I examined scores of published harmonies, and I agreed with my friend that most of them contain errors and contradictions. After much effort, therefore, I humbly offer the following harmony. After reviewing much of the work of skeptics and critics, I believe that this chronology answers most of the common criticisms one is likely to encounter concerning alleged contradictions in the gospel accounts of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Order of Events Related to Jesus' Resurrection

1. Women leave homes early (before sunrise) (John 20:1).
2. Resurrection occurs as dawn is breaking (Mark 16:9).
3. Earthquake occurs (Matthew 28:2).
4. Guards at tomb flee (Matthew 28:4, 11).
5. Women on way to tomb wonder who will move the stone (unaware that guards had been placed at tomb the day before) (Mark 16:3).
6. Women arrive at the tomb, finding the stone rolled away and an empty tomb (Luke 24:2-3).
7. Mary Magdalene leaves other women at the tomb (at the moment when they are all perplexed by the absence of Jesus' body, but before the angelic appearance (Luke 24:3), and goes to tell the disciples (Peter and John) about the absence of Jesus' body from the grave (she has not been told of His resurrection) (John 20:1-2).
8. While Mary Magdalene heads back to tell the disciples about the empty tomb, the angels (only Luke mentions the second angel) appear to the other women (Mary, the mother of James and Joses, Joanna, and Salome), and announces the resurrection of Jesus (Matthew 28:5-6, Mark 16:5, Luke 24:4-8).
9. Following this angelic appearance, these women also head back into town (Matthew 28 has a gap that does not include this detail, and this visit should not be confused with a later similar visit of the same women in which Jesus appears to them) to tell the disciples about the angelic announcement of the resurrection of Jesus Christ (again Mary Magdalene was not aware of this having departed from the tomb before the other women) (Mark 16:9, Luke 24:9).
10. Mary Magdalene finds Peter and John and tells them Jesus' body is not in the tomb (John 20:2).
11. Mary Magdalene leaves to return to the tomb (inferred from John 20:10-11).

12. Very shortly after Mary Magdalene leaves for the tomb, the other women arrive and tell the disciples of the angelic announcement of Jesus' resurrection (Mary Magdalene, having just departed before the arrival of other women, does not hear about the angelic announcement of Jesus' Resurrection) Mary Magdalene leaves before the other women).
13. Peter and John, having been told by Mary Magdalene first, quickly depart for the tomb (John 20:3). Luke's account (Luke 24:12) only mentions Peter by name, not mentioning that John was with him. However, Luke gives the account of the two on the road to Emmaus who remembering the events of the day say, "Then some of our companions (plural) went to the tomb" (Luke 24:24) no doubt reflecting Luke's knowledge that John was with Peter investigating the empty tomb.
14. After looking into the tomb, Peter and John leave the tomb and go to their homes (John 20:10).
15. Mary Magdalene returns to the tomb (her second visit of the morning), and Jesus appears to her (this is Jesus' first appearance). (John 20:14-17) Following Jesus' appearance to her, Mary Magdalene returns to tell the disciples of Jesus' appearance (John 20:18).
16. Not long after, the other women (Mary, the mother of James and Joses, Joanna, and Salome), return to the tomb (their second visit of the morning as well). Jesus appears to them as well (this is his second appearance of the morning) (Matthew 28:9-10) (Mary Magdalene MAY have been with the women by this time. If she was, it is the second time she sees Jesus that morning).
17. The Lord appears to Peter (Luke 24:34).
18. Jesus appears to two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-32).
19. Appearance of Jesus to the 10 disciples (Thomas absent) (Luke 24:36-43, John 20:19-25).
20. Appearance of Jesus to the disciples (including Thomas) a week later (John 20:26-31).
21. Appearance of Jesus to seven disciples in Galilee (John 21:1-25).
22. Jesus appears and gives the great commission to the eleven disciples (Matthew 28:16-20).

23. Appearance of Jesus to “more than five hundred of the brothers” (1 Corinthians 15:6).
24. Appearance of Jesus to James (1 Corinthians 15:7).
25. Jesus appears to the disciples, repeats the great commission, and ascends to Heaven (Acts 1:4-9).

Notes on Resurrection Chronology.

Matthew’s account has significant gaps. The first is between 28:4 and 5 (leaving out Mary Magdalene’s departure ahead of the other women). The second gap is between 28:8 and 28:9 (leaving out women’s going into Jerusalem to report to the disciples). Further, Luke’s account shows that there must be a gap in Matthew’s account between 28:8 and 28:9.

This is because (as Luke records in 24:22-24), the women only report the angelic announcement of Jesus’ resurrection to the disciples, but not Jesus’ actual appearance to them. It would make no sense for the women to report only the angelic announcement of the resurrection, but not Jesus’ actual appearances, unless there is in fact a gap in Matthew’s account, and that Jesus’ appearance to the women was later in the morning.

Mark 16:9 is part of the disputed ending of Mark’s gospel. Nonetheless, it (Mark’s account) is probably correct in reporting that Jesus appeared first to Mary Magdalene.

Mark has a gap between 16:4-5, leaving out the first look into the tomb and Mary Magdalene’s departure.

Luke 24:22-24 is important in that it shows that the women’s first report only involved an angelic announcement of Jesus’ resurrection, and not Jesus’ appearance which followed later, after the women’s second visit to the tomb, of which the two on the road to Emmaus had not yet heard. So there were two visits by the women to the tomb. Matthew places this gap between first and second visit to the tomb.

Mark 16:10-11 fits after her (Mary Magdalene’s) second visit (not implausible that the disciples still doubted women until Jesus appeared to them personally).

Mark 16:9 affirms that Jesus appeared first to Mary Magdalene, which supports the idea that Mary Magdalene had separated from the other women, otherwise they would have been together for the first appearance.

Some see a discrepancy as to the time of the women's visit to the tomb and try to pit John 20:1 "Early in the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb. . ." against Mark 16:2 "Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they [the women] were on their way to the tomb." There is absolutely no contradiction. When the women were getting ready and leaving their homes it was still dark, just before dawn. By the time they all meet and head to the tomb, dawn is breaking and the sun is rising.

Some allege a discrepancy as to who went to the tomb. They pit John 20:1 ". . . Mary Magdalene went to the tomb" against Matthew 28:1 ". . . Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to the tomb." and Mark 16:1 ". . . Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Salome brought spices. . ." and Luke 24:10 "It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them." The solution is utterly obvious. All the accounts are true and complimentary. All the women were there, but each writer didn't feel the need to mention each of the women in his accounts.

Some allege a discrepancy as to how many angels were at the resurrection scene (the tomb). Matthew 28:2-5 (see also Mark 16:5) records the announcement of Jesus' resurrection by an angel, whereas, Luke 24:4 records "two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning." Again, the solution is obvious. As has often been pointed out, anywhere you have two angels, you have one. Each writer does not feel the need to mention each of the angels in his account.

Some allege a discrepancy between Mark's account of an angel (young man) "dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side" and Luke's account of "two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them." Critics claim a contradiction in that Mark has at least one of the "angels" sitting whereas Luke has them both standing. It is not at all difficult to imagine that the angel was sitting until he stands to make the announcement of the resurrection of Christ.

Some allege a discrepancy between Mark 16:8 which reports that after the angelic announcement the women "said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid" and Luke's reports that following the angelic announcement of Christ's resurrection, the women "told all these things to the eleven and to all the others" (Luke 24:9). This is only an apparent contradiction. Both statements are true, the women said nothing to anyone on the way back into town; they didn't stop and tell anyone; they went directly to the disciples and told them. This agrees perfectly with Matthew's account in that the angel commanded the women to "go quickly and tell his disciples: He has risen" (Matthew 28:7).

Some allege that Luke 24:9-10 contradicts the given chronology because it suggests that Mary Magdalene was with the other women when they reported the angelic announcement of Christ's resurrection "to the eleven," whereas the present chronology has Mary Magdalene arriving before, and separate from the other women, and also leaving before the other women arrive to share the angelic announcement with the "eleven and to all the others." However, Luke seems to be summarizing the events at this point. It is true that all the women (including Mary Magdalene) did report what they knew, to the eleven and others, though not necessarily at the same time. Otherwise, Mary Magdalene's behavior at the tomb a little later is incoherent in that she seems to have no idea of the resurrection (John 20:11-18).

Also, Mary Magdalene was probably passed (not necessarily on the same path) by Peter and John as they ran to the tomb, and by the time she arrives, Peter and John appear to have already left.

Some allege a contradiction in the gospel accounts that record Jesus' (or the angels') promise that they (the disciples) were to go to Galilee and He (Jesus) would appear to them there (Matthew 28:7, 10, Mark 16:7), whereas in fact He appeared to them first in Judea, and only later in Galilee. It should be noted that Jesus did not say that He would appear to them first in Galilee, or only in Galilee. Jesus did exactly as He promised in that He did appear to them in Galilee and there is no conflict or contradiction. Also, it should be pointed out that the disciples stayed in Jerusalem through the end of the Passover celebration which accounts for the delay in their departure for Galilee of at least a week following resurrection Sunday (John 20:26).

Some allege a contradiction between the apostle Paul's account of the order of Christ's post-resurrection appearances with that found in the Gospels. Critics will say that Paul was wrong in saying that Christ first appeared to the Peter, whereas the gospel say he appeared first to Mary Magdalene. It is true that Mark 16: 9 affirms that Jesus appeared first to Mary Magdalene, but it is absolutely false that Paul taught that Jesus appeared first to Peter. Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 15:5-8 is chronologically accurate but not exhaustive. In other words, the order is right, but not complete. Paul simply leaves out Jesus' appearance to Mary Magdalene (as he also leaves out Jesus' appearance to the other women (Matthew 28:9) and to the two on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-32). Paul merely selected those appearances he wanted to emphasize.

TESTIMONY - MY STRUGGLE WITH “ORCHESTRATED MANIPULATION”

by George Welshons, Religious Analysis Board Member

I now have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, but for many years I struggled with the “orchestrated manipulation” from the Jehovah’s Witnesses. I’ll begin with a little family history.

I was born the eldest of seven children. I have the fondest memories of growing up in rural Iowa. My parents would take all of us to church every Sunday, dressed up in our best clothes. We attended a Roman Catholic Church that was filled with young families. Once a month our father would read the Bible verses that the priest would talk about. It made me very proud of my father for doing this. In my opinion he was the best reader in our church.

I attended the Sunday School. Later on I became an altar boy and helped with the church service. During these years I remember that a young nun brought Bibles to the Sunday School for which she paid with her own money and sneaked them to us as if they were poison to read. This made a favorable impression on us and we even read out of the Bible during the Vacation Church School. But not for long! I went to a Roman Catholic high school where we never read from the Bible even though I got straight A’s in religion.

I was married in a Catholic church to Peggy, who added so much to the quality of my life. We were so happy. We went to church, took marriage classes, and were hungry for God. I remember lying in bed and praying that I would know God better and what I could do to make God proud of me. I longed for a personal relationship with God. I desired to do His will, not mine. Just a few days later the “orchestrated manipulation” stepped into my life.

They came wearing skirts, carrying book bags, and handing out pamphlets about their Watchtower teachings. They handed me a Bible and told me to open to Mark’s Gospel. I asked if the Bible had an index. I just did not know how to find it for I was totally ignorant of the Bible and ripe for manipulation. Peggy’s intuition told her that something was wrong. I told her that if she would just read their material it would make sense. After two 1/2 years of manipulation I was a mess. It just about destroyed our marriage, and my relationship with God was at risk. No matter how hard I tried

I was afraid of what God would do to me if I didn't do what this religious organization demanded. This weighed on me and depressed me. I went through hard times in relationships with Peggy, family, and friends. None of them knew how to reach me.

When you deal with “orchestrated manipulation”, conventional logic, normal reasoning, and common sense understanding are not effective. It is like trying to reason with someone on drugs or alcohol. What normally is unacceptable behavior becomes acceptable and vice versa.

I was convinced by the Jehovah's Witnesses that my wife Peggy was a goat and not going to be accepted into God's kingdom. So I started to distance myself from her as a way to protect myself from the pain of separation that was to come. Peggy, on the other hand, found an exit counselor for cults like the kind you see on TV for drug addiction. With his help I discovered salvation to be through Jesus Christ alone, without a works-based organization and how I had been tricked into a false religion. With this knowledge I was supremely happy and rejuvenated, the Holy Spirit filled me with great joy – I experienced a huge rush in my spirit and soul. You can't fully appreciate God's grace until you have struggled in a religious organization without it. I also have a greater appreciation now for my wife's intuition. My relationship with God became wonderfully personal from that point on. I'm so relieved I don't have to work for my salvation, that it is simply a gift, and all I need to do is to accept that Jesus paid the price and died for my sins. Works that I do now are not for my salvation, they are done because I want to please my Heavenly Father. It is like a kid playing in a ball game and wanting to do well while his parents are watching. And the best part is that if you mess up you can confess your sin and be forgiven and be restored. Unconditional love is priceless.

More than anything else, I have been drawn to God by His unconditional love, the basis of the personal relationship that I now have with God. I could never have had this intimate relationship with Him when I was with the Witnesses. I love Jesus Christ who love and died for sinners. Those who believe in Him can receive eternal life. Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, no man comes to the Father except through Him (John 14:6).

QUIZ:

REFORMATION TIMES AND LEADERS

1. Great Christian educator and leader in Czechoslovakia
 - a. Johann Gutenberg
 - b. John Comenius
 - c. Ignatius Loyola
 - d. Ulrich Zwingli

2. Early Reformer in the Netherlands
 - a. Ludwig van Beethoven
 - b. Philip Spener
 - c. John Calvin
 - d. Desiderius Erasmus

3. Attempted to quash the Reformation
 - a. Council of Trent
 - b. Council of Dordt
 - c. Charlemagne
 - d. King Henry the VIII

4. Protected Protestantism in Scandinavia
 - a. Attila the Hun
 - b. Napoleon Bonaparte
 - c. Gustavus Adolphus
 - d. Joan of Arc

5. The Roman Catholic Church attempted to stop Martin Luther
 - a. at the trial at the Diet of Worms
 - b. by incarcerating him at the Wartburg castle
 - c. by allowing him to marry Catherine von Bora
 - d. by accepting his 95 theses on the church door in Wittenberg

6. A forerunner of the Reformation who was burned at the stake
 - a. Leonardo da Vinci
 - b. Girolamo Savonarola
 - c. Peter the Hermit
 - d. Charles Martel

7. The great song of the Reformation
 ___ a. "Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee"
 ___ b. "We're Marching to Zion"
 ___ c. "Great God, We Praise Thee"
 ___ d. A Mighty Fortress in our God"
8. Which of the following nations did not experience the Reformation?
 ___ a. Poland
 ___ b. Denmark
 ___ c. England
 ___ d. Czechoslovakia
9. A leader of the missions-minded Moravians
 ___ a. Menno Simons
 ___ b. John Wesley
 ___ c. Count Nicolaus von Zinzendorf
 ___ d. Baron von Muenchhausen
10. Which term is not a typical Reformation theological expression?
 ___ a. "sola biblia"
 ___ b. "o sole meo"
 ___ c. "sole fide"
 ___ d. "sola gratia"

Answers:

1. (b); 2. (d); 3. (a); 4. (c); 5. (a); 6. (b); 7. (d); 8. (a); 9. (c); 10. (b)

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