

# VOICE

The background image is a photograph of a person seen from behind, walking up a long, dark, and narrow staircase. The walls of the staircase are covered in graffiti. At the top of the stairs is a large, arched opening that leads to a bright, sunny sky with white clouds. The person is wearing a dark jacket and pants. The overall mood is one of hope and emergence from a dark, confined space.

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## Emerging from Charismatic Error

When Truth is Silent • Cessation of Tongues • Dangers of the Middle Ground

# The Undermining of the Sufficient Word



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The Protestant Reformation that was launched in 1517 resulted in a monumental recovery of the true gospel of justification by faith alone in Christ alone by unearthing it from the empty ritualistic traditions that had buried it for centuries. Its effect was the rediscovery of how man could have his sins genuinely forgiven and be restored to a right relationship with God. But it was not the wit of Luther or the intelligence of Calvin that ultimately rescued the gospel from the sacramental scaffolding in which it was obscured. It was the restoration of the inerrant, authoritative, and infallible Scriptures to their rightful place in the life of the church. *Sola Scriptura* became the battle cry of the Reformers as they called the church to submit to the Word of God alone and to measure everything against it. This was the watershed issue of the Reformation – a return to the all-sufficient Word as the answer to the spiritual famine that had cast a great darkness in the Middle Ages. As a result, true spiritual light began breaking out, a wonder that the Reformers expressed in the Latin phrase *Post Tenebras Lux* meaning “After Darkness, Light.” This glorious light dawned in Europe and eventually illuminated the globe as God graciously restored the gospel to his church by reestablishing the Scriptures as the sole authority for faith and practice. Through the Reformation, God confirmed his Word as eternally true and, therefore, perfectly sufficient for all spiritual needs.

Unfortunately, despite this recovery of the sufficiency of Scripture over 500 years ago, numerous trends and movements have once again obscured the light that once shone so brilliantly, bringing a cloud of darkness over the principle of *sola Scriptura*. Sadly, in many cases, the phrase *Post Lux Tenebras*, “After Light, Darkness,” better characterizes the theological landscape of our day. Charismatic theology represents one of the more recent movements in church history that has contributed to this great reversal with its core doctrines that are

fundamentally incompatible with the sufficiency of Scripture. Although many within the charismatic movement would deny this charge, their theological platform betrays the reality that they don't really believe that the Word of God supplies everything necessary for life and godliness. A careful examination of Charismatic doctrine and practices proves that they don't truly hold to the fact that “*All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work*” (2Ti 3:16-17). To be fair, many of those within charismatic circles are fellow brothers and sisters in Christ who do know Him and do truly love the gospel. In many areas, they do truly believe the orthodox doctrines of historic Christianity and aim to honor Christ. However, this does not negate the fact that the overall Charismatic movement has undermined and eroded the believer's confidence in the sufficiency of Scripture.

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Three Charismatic errors prove this: the first is *An Improper Elevation of Experience Over Truth*. Amazing experiences are the order of the day as evidenced by the emphasis on signs and wonders, miracles and healings, tongues and revelations, and numerous other Charismatic encounters which they believe constitute the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Such displays of power, they argue, provide direct evidence of the work of God and are necessary in order for people to believe. Take for instance Cathy Coppola who claims that God floods her services with demonstrations of the power of the Holy Spirit in signs, wonders, healing, and deliverance

such that the sick are healed and those bound by demonic spirits are freed. She says, "During the prayer meetings and eventually when we planted the church, the anointing of God really started to flow. I would feel myself shaking, the power of God flowing. I knew I needed to lay my hands on these people. I just knew it. How did I know? It was just the power of God, the inner witness."<sup>1</sup> The effect of such an experience-dominated approach is the quest for one sensational experience after another, with the desire that each subsequent encounter eclipse the emotion of the previous one. This leads to the faulty belief that sanctification and progress in the Christian life are dependent on having more and better experiences. In all of this, personal experience rather than Scripture supplies the foundation of and becomes the driving factor in the Charismatic movement.

This is the exact opposite of the way it should be. Rather than experience being the determiner of truth, all experiences must be tested by the all-sufficient Word of God and be brought in submission to it. This is exactly what Peter came to learn so clearly in his encounter with Christ on the Mount of Transfiguration. There he came face to face with Christ in all His glory and he became an "eyewitness of His majesty" (2Pe 1:16). Speaking of this incredible experience, he says, "For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, 'This is My beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased' – and we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain" (2Pe 1:17-18). That event left Peter stunned and overwhelmed as he witnessed a vivid manifestation of Christ's second-coming glory. However, Peter's ultimate confidence was not in his sensational experience but rather in the more trustworthy Word of God: "So we have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts. But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved

by the Holy Spirit spoke from God" (2Pe 1:19-21). As great as his experience was on the Mount of Transfiguration, Peter understood that the Word of God was "more sure" in that it provided a more solid foundation for what he believed. Contrary to the Charismatic movement, he was certain that the Scriptures are more trustworthy than our experience. "There is no more authoritative declaration than what we find in the word of God, no firmer ground to stand on, no 'more final' argument that can be spoken after Scripture has spoken."<sup>2</sup>

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The second evidence that charismatic theology undermines the sufficiency of Scripture is *An Insatiable Quest for Extrabiblical Revelation*. Rather than pointing people toward the Word of God, the Charismatic movement has fostered a voracious appetite for receiving direct revelation from God, convincing many that God speaks to people personally. "The Lord told me" has become the mantra of the day within Charismatic circles. Claims of extrabiblical messages either through an audible voice or through a vision, a voice in the head, a dream, or some internal impressions are rampant. Such private prophecies and fresh revelations are the norm, according to Charismatics and most continuationists, because God aims to speak directly and regularly to those believers who are willing to listen to Him in faith. Notable charismatic figures like Oral Roberts, Benny Hinn, Rick Joyner, Todd White, Mike Bickle, Kenneth Copeland, and many others frequently claim to receive direct messages from God and then allege to speak for God, making prophetic utterances about the future, most of which are patently false. Even well-known and respected theologian Wayne Grudem assumes that God speaks directly to His people outside of Scripture: "I

do not think there is any passage of Scripture, or any combination of passages, that should lead us to think that God does not communicate directly with his people throughout all of history in individual, personal ways that occur in addition to his communication in and through the written words of Scripture."<sup>3</sup> In almost all cases, Charismatic leaders claim that modern prophets are not infallible and often make predictions which are in error. In other words, they argue for an inferior form of prophecy which is fallible and often inaccurate. Grudem explains, "I am asking those in the cessationist camp to give serious thought to the possibility that prophecy in ordinary New Testament churches was not equal to Scripture in authority, but was simply a very human – and sometimes partially mistaken – report of something the Holy Spirit brought to someone's mind."<sup>4</sup>

A careful examination of Scripture reveals that the concept of fallible prophecy is completely foreign to the Word of God. True Old Testament and New Testament prophets fit the two-fold criteria given in Deuteronomy for the regulation of prophecy. First, they must promote doctrinal fidelity. Deuteronomy 13:1-5 makes it clear that when they speak on behalf of God prophets must ensure that they do not lead people away from the truth of what God had already revealed. In other words, their prophecy must teach people to follow the one true and living God in a way that is consistent with previous revelation. Second, they must demonstrate prophetic accuracy. This is clear from Deuteronomy 18:15-22 which states that true prophets are those whose predictions always come true without fail. To put it negatively, "one definitive mark of a false prophet is that something he speaks in the name of the Lord does not come true...One mistaken prophecy was sufficient to reveal that a professed prophet was a false prophet."<sup>5</sup> Putting these two passages together, we can conclude that genuine prophets were those who always confirmed what is stated in Scripture and always demonstrated complete infallibility in their predictions. Such is not the case with the Charismatic movement's infatuation with extra-biblical revelation. Such an approach represents a departure from the

Reformer's conviction that the Bible is our supreme and sufficient authority for all of life. Furthermore, it demonstrates a wholesale abandonment of the fact that the canon is closed (Jude 3) and contains all the revelation we will ever need.

A third evidence for Charismatic theology's undermining of the sufficiency of Scripture is *A Significant Disregard for the Spirit of the Word*. One of the hallmarks of the Charismatic movement is its assertion that it better represents the Holy Spirit than non-charismatics. Often it is claimed that the Holy Spirit's power is most manifest in mystical encounters, supernatural signs and wonders, emotional ecstasies, unintelligible gibberish, and a host of other strange physical manifestations. While some of these maybe not the norm in more conservative Charismatic circles, the typical Charismatic Christian today believes that these events are a necessary mark of Holy Spirit baptism and the absence of them indicates a person isn't truly baptized by the Spirit. For example, leaders in the New Apostolic Reformation like C. Peter Wagner and

Bill Johnson claim to be restoring apostles and prophets to the church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. They contend that new prophecies, ongoing miracles, and the sign gifts all provide evidence that the Spirit is at work in this new breed of apostles and prophets. Rather than relying on the work of the Spirit to use the Word of God to draw sinners to salvation, they emphasize that such displays are necessary to persuade unbelievers to come to Christ.

All of this constitutes a misrepresentation of the Holy Spirit and a disregard for the work He wants to accomplish through the Scriptures since He always works in concert with the Word of God, never outside of it. When the Holy Spirit is working, the Word of God will always be His primary instrument since the Bible is His book. In other words, to truly honor the Spirit is to honor God's Word for several reasons. First, it is the Spirit who inspired the Scriptures by moving the human authors to write what they did (2Pe 1:21; cf. Ac 1:16). The Holy Spirit wrote through the biblical writers using

their own languages, culture, and individual personalities, resulting in God's Word without error in the original writings. Thus, the Spirit was intimately involved in the transmission of God's truth through human agents, resulting in a God-inspired, supernatural book. Second, the Scriptures are the means by which the Spirit convicts the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment (Jn 16:8). As a result, it is the Word of God in the hands of the Spirit of God, which pierces the heart of those who are spiritually dead, resulting in regeneration and the granting of spiritual life (1Pe 1:23; Jas 1:18). Third, the Spirit illuminates the mind of believers to the true meaning and implications of the Word. It is through the illuminating power of the Spirit that believers are given the ability to know the mind of the Lord and to grow in spiritual understanding (1Co 2:14-16). Thus, the Spirit's ministry of illumination is what inscribes divine truth on the heart of believers and instructs them to properly apply it. To fail to recognize, or to even minimize, these ministries of the Spirit which all point to the sufficient Word of God, as so often happens in charismatic circles, is to reject the Reformer's conviction of *sola Scriptura*, and even worse, it leads to the rejection of the sufficiency of Scripture for the Church today.



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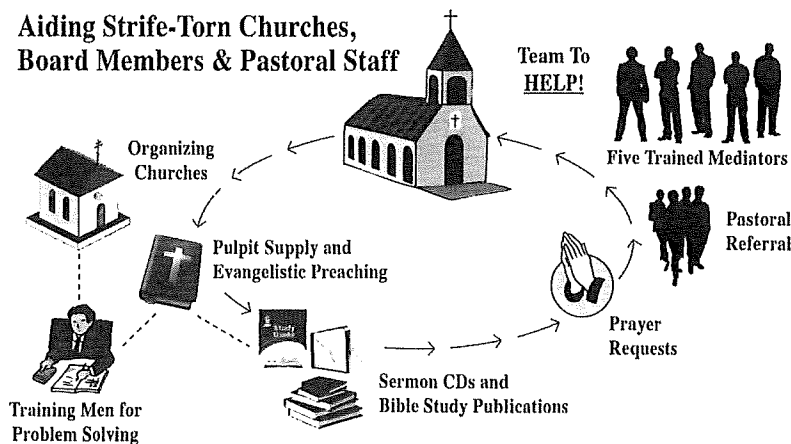
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### END NOTES:

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