



“Until the ‘Perfect’ Comes”

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"Explaining spiritual realities with Spirit-taught words."

1 Corinthians 2:13

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WD Furioso, Writer ~ Frances Furioso, Editor

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Unless otherwise noted, all scripture quotations are from the *New American Standard Bible*.

¹¹ “And He gave some *as*¹ apostles, some *as* prophets, some *as* evangelists, some *as* shepherds², and teachers, ¹² for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ; ¹³ 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 fullness of Christ. ¹⁴ As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of people, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; ¹⁵ but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all *aspects* into Him who is the head, *that is*, Christ, ¹⁶ from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.” Ephesians 4:11-16

Are the ministry gifts of apostles and prophets mentioned in this passage still operative in the Church today? Admittedly, there is much abuse and controversy in connection with these ministries. However, as the Latin phrase states: “*Abusus non tollit usum*. Abuse does not cancel use. Misuse of something is no argument against its proper use.” (Merriam Webster) To reject the ministries of apostles and prophets is a personal preference in practice – most likely to avoid abuse and controversy. But there is nothing in the Scriptures to validate this choice.

¹ “as” is in italics, because it does not appear in the Greek text.

² “shepherds” instead of “pastors” because every other place the Greek word *poimen* (Strong’s # 4166) appears in scripture, it is translated “shepherd”, not “pastor”.

It is the conventional Dispensational / Cessationist doctrine which asserts that the ministries of apostles and prophets – as well as certain other spiritual gifts³ – have “passed away”. This view is most often based on a poor exegesis of one verse of scripture, 1 Corinthians 13:10, which states: “But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away.” The “perfect” is *arbitrarily interpreted as the Canon of Scripture*. Without a doubt, the canonization of scripture is an essential of our faith, but at the time of the writing of this epistle, the Church had no concept of a “canon” or that the establishing of a Canon would become necessary 1500-1600 years into the future. It seems to me a much more rational interpretation of “the perfect” in the context of Paul’s epistle would be what he refers to a few chapters later in 1 Corinthians – *the second coming of Christ and the resurrection of the Church* - “Then comes **the end**, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father.”⁴

To get a sense of how confused the modern Church is on this subject, consider this: Most in the Church know that the Greek word, *apostolos*, can be translated as “a sent one”. Their understanding is that this refers to “a missionary”. They accept

³ Usually the gifts of tongues, prophecy, healing, and miracles are singled out from the other spiritual gifts.

⁴ 1 Corinthians 15:24 (Context: vv. 20-28)

the ministry of missionaries but may have a problem recognizing the need of the local church to have *input from extra-local or itinerant ministries*. Their perspective is: “Missionaries are for all those poor people overseas – not for us here in the local church.” These same people see Peter, James, John, and Jude as apostles, yet these men were not “missionaries” as they understand the term. If we “amplify” the translation of *apostolos* to include “one commissioned with a purpose” – “an accredited messenger”, “a representative”, “an ambassador”⁵ – we get somewhat beyond the presupposed “job description” to the actual character, characteristics, and attributes of a servant called and sent by his Lord.

Actually, in the New Testament scriptures there are two categories of apostles:

- 1) “The 12” who walked with Jesus⁶ and established the norm for the doctrine and practice of the early Church.⁷
- 2) At least 7 more apostles are mentioned in the New Testament⁸ after the first 12. And there are also all the other apostles

⁵ *New Bible Dictionary; Dictionary of New Testament Theology*. Cf. 2 Corinthians 5:20; Galatians 4:14.

⁶ Matthew 10:2-4

⁷ Jude 3

⁸ Paul (Romans 11:13; Galatians 2:8); Barnabas (Acts 14:14); Apollos (1 Corinthians 4:9); Timothy and Silas (1 Thessalonians 1:1, 2:6); Andronicus and Junia (Romans 16:7)

throughout Church history to the present who have emerged from the Body of Christ and followed the apostolic tradition.⁹

Nowhere in the whole of the Scriptures is there any indication that any spiritual gifts would pass away during this age. Throughout all Church history to the present time the evidence of spiritual gifts is documented. As previously stated, of a certainty, there have and are atrocious abuses; but, again, the answer to abuse is not disuse. Neither the Scriptures, nor the Holy Spirit, give the Church permission to ignore or disregard any of the spiritual gifts.

This is what the scripture says: “And He gave some *as* apostles, and some *as* prophets, and some *as* evangelists, and some *as* shepherds and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; **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 fullness of Christ.” (Ephesians 4:11-13) It should be perfectly obvious that the Church has not yet attained these things, so **until** it does, we need **all** the equipping ministries. If we want to say that apostles and prophets have passed away, then we must also say that evangelists, shepherds, and teachers have also passed away. But, in fact, none of the equipping ministries have passed away.

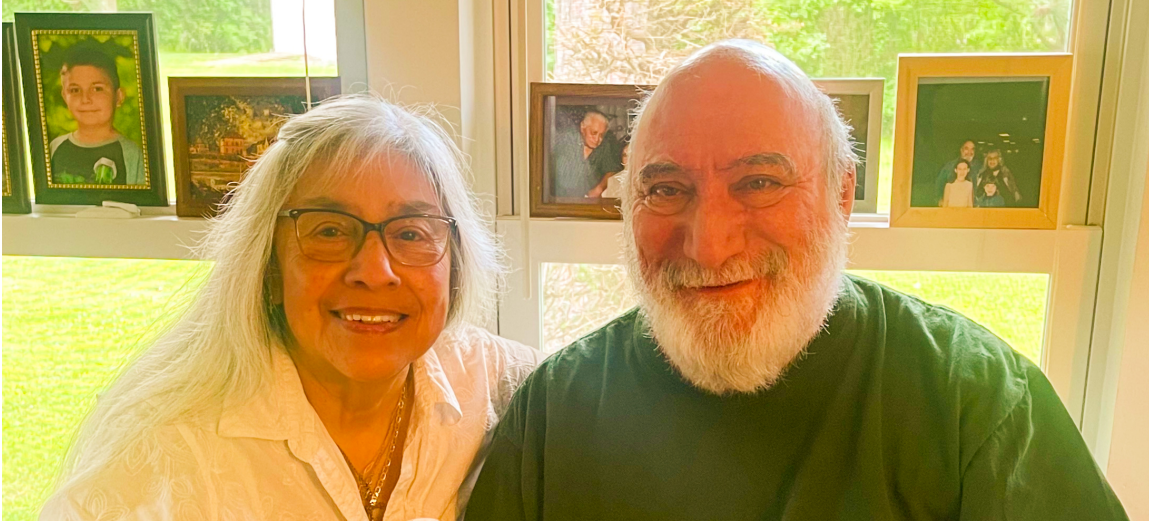
⁹ 1 Corinthians 15:3-8; 1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2:6; Romans 16:7; Acts 14:14; Galatians 1:18-19; 2:9

Christ gave the Great Commission to His apostles. When those 12 passed away, did the Great Commission pass away? Of course, not. I see some significance in the fact that Jesus gave the Great Commission to apostles, as opposed to “pastors” (as we know them today). I believe that to preach the gospel and make disciples – to plant the gospel and lay the Foundation of Christ - in an authentic way requires an **apostolicity**. Specifically, **there needs to be a Christ-centered apostolicity in order for the life of Christ to be shared¹⁰ in ministry relationships between disciples and equipping ministers** - be they an apostle, prophet, evangelist, shepherd, or teacher.¹¹

¹⁰ Colossians 3:16

¹¹ I have discussed this at length in other articles: [The Apostles' Teaching](#), [Apostolic Discipleship](#), [The Foundation of the Apostles & Prophets](#), [Christ-centered Discipleship & Equipping Ministries](#), [From Children to a Mature Man](#), [The Vineyard of the Lord](#).

Bill & Frances Furioso
~ At Christ's Table ~



Bill Furioso and his wife, Frances, have been married for more than 40 years, and have two children, four grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren.

Bill and Frances served as missionaries in South Africa for thirteen years making disciples, establishing churches, and training church leaders. Over a span of 40 years, they also traveled extensively in an itinerant Bible teaching ministry which took them to hundreds of gatherings on four continents ministering in churches, conferences, spiritual formation seminars, and home gatherings. They have shepherded several churches, discipled many to Christ, and mentored church leaders in the USA and abroad.

Being an avid student by nature, Bill has done both formal and informal study in various fields including Education, Music, Philosophy and Theology. As a writer, he has authored many publications which are distributed worldwide. Because of Bill's disabilities resulting from a spinal cord injury, he can no longer travel, so their ministries of writing, recording, distributing, mentoring, and correspondence are now shared primarily via the Internet... www.AtChristsTable.org

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