

Does God still speak today through Prophets and Miraculous Signs?

The Claim of the Charismatic Movement and the Teaching of the Bible

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Introduction

The theme of this paper is very important in our present time. Today many Christians are convinced that there are still both genuine prophetic uttering of God and divine miraculous signs on a large scale. This applies specifically to the followers of the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements, but even beyond these groups we often hear of others sharing this opinion.

This question is becoming topical in particular due to the fact that again and again there certain people arising within the Pentecostal and Charismatic movement who claim to be prophets and miracle workers anointed by God, and thereby they are making many other people insecure or even bind them to such a person.

Herewith we want to examine in a sober manner what the Bible teaches us about prophetic messages and miraculous signs in the church. Every Christian ought to regard the Word of the Holy Scriptures, which is inspired by God, as for the highest authority for discerning every question. We are determined to keep to this Word and not rely on dubious reports of experiences or religious feelings.

In our examination we will deal with the Pentecostal and the Charismatic Movement as a related unit, even though we are aware that there are certain differences between both of sub movements among them in some secondary details. In the question we dealing with here both branches agree in general.

The author writes this paper as a former Charismatic, who in the course of several years experienced for himself the teachings and practises of this movement in various groups of this movement. By God's grace he was able to perceive the deceptive character of these phenomena, having been fascinated and carried along by these for a long time. A more profound study and understanding of the sound Biblical doctrine helped him to separate fully from these deceptive influences.

May the Lord Jesus Himself testify His Word and His Truth to every soul who is seeking the truth!

1. The Claim of the Charismatic Movement to Possess the Apostolic Gifts of Prophecy and Miraculous Signs

Nowadays, the conception about the continuation (or the end-times' renewal) of the Apostolic gifts of revelation and miraculous signs is most expressively held by the Pentecostal and Charismatic movement. They claim to be vanguard of a great revival movement of the end-time, and within its sphere new prophets and workers of miracles have allegedly been awakened who claim to have received the same spiritual revelations and miraculous signs as the apostles and the early believers did, but now in a larger measure.

First of all, we want to show what kind of concept is predominant in these groups about prophecy and miraculous signs; in the later sections we will try to examine and evaluate these concepts in the light of the Bible.

a) The “Gift of Prophecy” in the Pentecostal and Charismatic Movement

The Pentecostal and Charismatic movement claims to be a prophetic movement in which the New Testament charisma of prophecy (cf. 1Co 12:10) is still at work. In the end time God has allegedly awakened new prophets (and even new apostles, both of whom are usually combined), and that He would use them to give a new orientation to His people and direct Christianity into the greatest revival of the world history.

The coming of this “latter rain” of the Holy Spirit is said to depend largely on the readiness of Christians to obey the instructions of the “anointed prophets and apostles”, who more or less resolutely claim to be inspired in the same way or similar as did the Apostles and prophets of the first century. The Charismatics are convinced that this gift of prophecy is indispensable and of crucial importance in order to prepare the church for the “great revival”.

With this the speakers of this movement are teaching that apart of the Holy Scriptures (its authority is usually recognized by them verbally) there is supposed to be a second source of divine revelation, which is virtually the inspired word of their apostles and prophets, through which God still speaks with authority today. Although they often do not express themselves in this way, yet in practice most of the “prophets” of this movement claim to have received a vision, a dream, or a verbal message directly “from God”. And very many followers of this movement are convinced that their own visions and impressions or that of their prophets are divine revelations.

Because of such “prophetic” impressions and messages year by year reams of decisions are made by Pentecostals and Charismatics - professional decisions, marriages, use of donations, accepting ministries even so far as to go abroad as a missionary. And we hear them say invariably, “The Lord has spoken to me”; “The Lord has shown me”.

Many Charismatics reckon the so called “Word of Knowledge” to be one of the most impressive occurrences of the prophetic gift, which is understood to be the supernatural insight into personal details of the life of totally strange persons. Many “prophets” fascinate their followers with this kind of supernaturally received knowledge about past events and hidden things. For their followers this is regarded as an obvious proof that the “prophet” must have come “from God” - yet for critical observers this is a case of occult clairvoyance.

Apart from accepting a special gift of prophecy in the church of the end-time there is also the expectation, that with the “baptism of the Spirit” every Charismatic might thus attain the ability of receiving “direct guidance from God” through “impressions”, visions, dreams or audible voices (this they do by being misled in appealing to Joel 2:28.29 and Acts 2:17). The quasi oracular

“reception” of guiding words from the Bible by an “inner enlightenment” has to be classified in the same way, too.

In practice most of the Charismatics and Pentecostals claim that those “newly revealed words of God” have a higher authority than the “old” revelations of the Bible itself. After all it is very inviting to them to think that God speaks to them unmistakably and thus imparts to them a direct guidance related to a given situation, which seems to be not so easily attainable through the Bible.

This will become obvious at the latest whenever such “spirit guidance” is generally accepted, which is clearly contrary to the inspired Word of the Holy Scriptures. In the Pentecostal and Charismatic Movement you will find, for instance, the widespread acceptance of women ministering as prophetesses and female apostles, teachers and pastors/leaders. Whereas the Scriptures is entirely unambiguous in expressing the unchangeable will of God through the instruction of the Apostle Paul: **“And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence.”** (1Ti 2:12), such “calls” to the ministry (brought about by inner voices, visions or prophetic words) are in most cases very well accepted and thus put above the Scriptures.

Yet the fact, that very many “prophecies” are turning out to be false, constitutes a difficulty for the high self-image of Charismatic prophets claiming to receive revelations directly from God. In order to explain this fact the Charismatics distort the Biblical teaching about the ministry of prophecy. The Bible clearly testifies clearly, as we will see more in more detail below, that the genuine prophets of the New Testament received revelations from God. Therefore their prophecies were inerrant and spoken with divine authority. But the Charismatics maintain that their gift of prophecy is a mixture of human error and genuine divine message. Yet the Bible says it very clearly: When a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, and it does not happen, he is evidently a false prophet. God has not spoken through him and he has not been called to be a messenger of God:

“But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in My name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die. And if you say in your heart, 'How shall we know the word which the LORD has not spoken?'— when a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing does not happen or come to pass, that is the thing which the LORD has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.” (Deut 18:20-22)

If the Charismatic prophets were to be measured by this criteria then one after another ought to be chased away! But now they pull wool over the eyes of people, and they are advised to pick from these prophetic messages whatever their ears are itching for and not to even to contemplate when so much of it turns out to be a lie and deceit.

Take for example a famous Pentecostal preacher such as David Wilkerson who told about a great vision in which God allegedly revealed to him what will happen during the next decades, and then we find out thirty years later that essential elements of this “vision” were never fulfilled. This in fact renders the prophet himself to be untrustworthy and his “inspiration” is unmasked to have originated from the father of lie. But many end-times Christians prefer to be told lies and be deceived. They do not want to hear the Biblical truth any more, as it is written:

For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. (2Ti 4:3.4)

Therefore they are not bothered about the countless lies and errors of their prophets and still keep on clinging to them, even after they are publicly exposed to be false prophets. In the messages of those prophets the devil offers them too much which flatters them and gives them the impression that they are called to something great and are considered to be specially chosen vessels of God.

Meanwhile the siren song of the false prophets attracts more and more circles of those who formerly were orientated by the Biblical Christianity. Thanks to the abandonment of the Biblical separation (Evangelical Alliance, Free Churches) the leaven of Charismatic heresies about prophecy was increasingly able to enter even those Christian circles during the past few decades, which are not reckoned to be part of the Pentecostal and Charismatic Movement. Today we have arrived at a situation that even earnest evangelical believers are seriously considering the idea that God might speak to His people through new prophets and they are increasingly ready to take heed to

“impressions”, visions and internal voices, instead of listening to the unmistakable Word of the Holy Scriptures.

b) Charismatic miraculous signs in the end-time

Just as it was during the time of the Apostles when genuine gifts of miraculous signs confirmed the divine ministry of the Apostles and prophets of the New Testament (cf. Heb 2:3-4), the Pentecostal and Charismatic Movement claims to have received genuine gifts of miraculous signs in the present end-time, which are allegedly used by God powerfully to confirm the new apostles and prophets and to lead unbelievers to Christ (cf. John Wimber’s well known scheme of “Power Evangelism” = evangelism through the power manifestations of signs and miracles).

Most of the Pentecostals and Charismatics regard miraculous signs as a manifestation of a “genuine”, “spirit anointed” Christian life. In so doing they refer to such Bible passages as Mark 16:17.18 or Matthew 10:7.8, which they understand to be a direct commission to all believers to lay on hands in order to heal people, to cast out demons, to speak in tongues, yeah even to raise the dead.

Without such signs the Charismatics consider the life of a Christian to be powerless and hollow, without real “authority from above”. But they regard miracles as a proof for a genuine, “apostolic” Christianity. Thus they deem the biblically sound believers, whose life does not show a continuous experience of miraculous signs, to be second class believers at best, and if at all they may have been saved just by the skin of their teeth.

One of the most favourable miracles that are repeatedly mentioned by the followers of this movement is the healing of sick ones - allegedly or really supernatural healings from all kinds of physical sicknesses, from stomach pains and back-aches up to paralysis, crippled feet or cancer. When we read personal testimonies of Charismatics, such healings often play an essential role.

Besides, there are mainly the false prophets and apostles of the movement who are telling about a number of other miracles, which in most cases are imitations of miracle reports from the Book of the Acts of Apostles - for example encounters with angels, walking through closed doors, or even supernatural transportations to different places, as Philip has experienced it.

A more recent example of such deceitful reports of miracles is the book “Heavenly Man” that has fascinated many Christian readers and was meant to identify the author to be a genuine apostolic Christian. Many approved leaders among the Chinese Christians are warning against this book and its author and accuse him to be a deceiver. The “miracles” he is telling about are following the pattern of many Pentecostal reports of miracles.

The Charismatics reckon the experience of miraculous signs to be a manifestation of God’s presence and authority, which are given to underscore the credibility of the new prophets, apostles, workers of miracles, evangelists and pastors. Therefore such reports of miracles constitute an essential part of the promotion of the public image of almost all leaders of this movement. Even obvious frauds and demonic seducers like Todd Bentley have a large number of followers, just because of the fact that they perform „great signs and miracles”. It is characteristic that in the wake of the affair of Todd Bentley an American Pentecostal evangelist said that he is now convinced that the majority of the Charismatics will follow the Antichrist one day, as soon as he appears, because they lack the of discernment and will therefore fall for his miraculous signs.

If we examine the Charismatic miraculous signs soberly by Biblical standards and compare these with the genuine miraculous signs of Christ and His Apostles, we may soon discover that there are essential differences, which will expose the modern miraculous signs of the Charismatics as counterfeit signs. Let us pick up the healing miracles, for instance, as the most common sign, and we be able to notice: The genuine miraculous healings of the Lord and His Apostles were always complete, permanent healings, even when there were serious organic defects as was with the man born blind. The NT repeatedly emphasises that everyone who had desired healing was thus healed wonderfully.

On contrary, the false healing miracles of the present Charismatics are marked by the fact that many people are not healed at all; in their disappointment the sick people often have to be lead outside again in the same wheel chair with which they had been brought in. Many “healings” occur only temporally under the influence of suggestion and the effects of heretical spirits, and soon afterwards the symptoms come back again. Again and again we hear reports of how people jump up from their wheel chairs excitedly and hop and run round - only to sit in their wheel chrs again later on.

In USA several miraculous healers like Benny Hinn and Kathrin Kulman were asked to name at least some persons with whom physicians may testify that they have been doubtlessly and permanently healed from a serious organic disease through the ministry of these healers. The spokesmen were not able to present even one clearly witnessed case.

In the majority these “healings” occur in the psychosomatic realm, with back aches or similar symptoms, which may also be well treated though suggestion or with placebos, for instance. Apart from these real miraculous healings may certainly occur sometimes - but such can also be performed by occult spirit healers, and they are no evidence that God is at work hereby!

Despite of the obvious deception noticed by sober observers we realise that nowadays the Pentecostal heresies about miraculous signs have been accepted by many Evangelicals in the meantime, whose forefathers would have rejected these resolutely. An important role in this development was played by Billy Graham and others in their effort to incorporate the Charismatics and Pentecostals in the worldwide evangelical movement and especially in the missions work (among others the Lausanne Congress for World Evangelism).

An important role in those discussions about effective evangelism among the Evangelicals on the 80s and 90s decades plays the charismatic scheme of power evangelism, which was mainly spread by John Wimber and his followers. According ti this teaching the Gospel can only effectively spread among the modern sceptical people, when the preaching is accompanied by signs and miracles.

Today even Evangelicals and other conservative Christians are trying to perform miraculous healings and exorcism, while the opinion, that God is still working apostolic signs through miracle performers even today, is more and less accepted or at least not openly rejected in many Christian circles. Thus the leaven of false signs and miracles may spread out far and wide into those groups which formerly had been faithful to the Bible.

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In my opinion both in the question of present day prophetic revelations and the questions miraculous signs of the of end-time the overlap of the relevant Charismatic teaching and practises on to faithful Bible-believing Christians was facilitated due to the fact that in many Christian circles there is a doctrinal uncertainty in this matter. Many teachers, even those faithful to the Bible, maintain that according to the Bible there is the possibility of genuine prophetic revelations and miraculous signs on a large scale.

But the question is: What does the Bible actually teach about the appearance of prophecy and miraculous signs in the church of the end-time? Do we thus have any orientation and guidelines in the Holy Scriptures for evaluation of the charismatic gifts of prophecy and miraculous signs or not? In the following sections we will attempt to answer this question.

2. The Teaching of the Apostolic Epistles about the Spiritual Gifts

First of all we want to get a brief general idea of what the teaching of the Apostolic Epistles in the New Testament says about the spiritual gifts in the church. We find the teaching of the Apostles on this subject mainly in 1 Corinthians 12, 13 and 14 as well as supplementary in Romans 12:4-8. We do this because we are convinced that the teaching of the Apostolic Epistles is given to us in a particular way as a guideline for the Biblical church life as well as to help us in our understanding of the entire Scriptures.

a) The statements about the spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12

Let us first of all study the supremely important chapter 12 of the first Epistle to the Corinthians and focus on its most relevant statements. Due to lack of space we are not able to offer a detailed verse by verse interpretation, yet this investigation will surely help us to obtain some clarity already.

1 Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be ignorant: 2 You know that you were Gentiles, carried away to these dumb idols, however you were led. 3 Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed, and no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.

Paul taught the Corinthians about this theme due to a specific occasion. Apparently some things had happened there in the church which had shaken and confused the Corinthians, so that the Apostle found it necessary to clarify the matter. There is a strong evidence to assume that some people appeared among them who had delivered prophetic messages and spoken „in the spirit“, yet at the same time they had uttered blasphemous words about the Lord Jesus. Now, Paul wanted them to learn how to discern genuine works of the Spirit (Greek *pneumatica* = spiritual things, works of the Spirit) from false ones.

At first it is obvious from his answer that any embossed (driven) and compulsive manner of people who claim to speak in the Spirit of God points to the influence of darkness and to demonic origin. The demons that are operating behind idolatry (cf. 1Co 10:20) often turn their media often into passive tools and bypass their will and consciousness. This can lead to automatic writing, forced eloquence or talking in trance conditions (this is happening again and again in the Charismatic Movement). Such occurrences are always an indication of demonic activity, because **“where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.”** (2Co 3:17), and **“the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. For God is not the author of confusion but of peace...”** (1Co 14:32-33).

Those people, who had appeared Corinth in a kind of „prophetic ecstasy“ and thereby uttered curses about our Lord, had thus given evidence that they did not prophecy in the Spirit of God but through another spirit. It is characteristic of the prophets of the Charismatics that they often speak only about a „Jesus“ or a „Lord“, but rarely, if at all, about the Lord Jesus Christ in His full biblical sovereign title. Even in general the Pentecostals and Charismatics almost exclusively speak about „Jesus“, but not about the „Lord Jesus“.

4 There are diversities of (or different kinds of) gifts, but the same Spirit. 5 There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. 6 And there are diversities of (or different kinds of) activities, but it is the same God who works all in all. 7 But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all.

A serious grievance with the Corinthians was found in the fact that these carnal, selfish believers did not understand what for were the spiritual gifts given to them. Quite obviously some of them had the tendency to boast with their striking spiritual gifts (like speaking in tongues or prophecy) and to like to be the centre of attention, while they disregard others with unobtrusive gifts (e.g. in the charitable service). Conversely it seems that some “less gifted” Corinthians were jealous about

those “higher gifted” ones and by all means wanted to become prophets or speakers of tongues, too. Unfortunately these circumstances appear in some churches even today.

Therefore Paul pointed the believers to the fact that the various spiritual gifts which they have received all come from the same God. (We should pay attention to the fact that in this context the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are mentioned together - one of the references where the Holy Trinity is being testified.) God gives the gifts to us for the benefit of the entire church, so that the church may be edified - not to exalt or enrich ourselves. Now Paul went on to consider the different kinds of spiritual gifts in detail, which the Corinthians had obviously received in their church:

8 for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, 9 to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit, 10 to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues.

Looking at the gifts mentioned here by the Apostle Paul we may indeed classify three different kinds of charismata: Gifts of revelation (prophecy, word of knowledge), gifts of signs (healings, miraculous powers, tongues) and gifts of edification (in 1 Corinthians 12 these are just a word of wisdom as well as helps and administration - verse 28).

We cannot determine exactly in every case how these gifts listed here worked practically. The “word of wisdom” might simply be a gift of edification by which a believer may be given a wise counsel in certain situations; yet it might also belong to the gifts of revelation. The “word of knowledge” is best to be understood as a gift of revelation: God’s Spirit gave a word from God to the believers, which was meant to communicate to the church insight about her commission and direction.

In this context we cannot refer faith as spiritual gift to the saving faith (which is given to all believers in general). It is best understood as miracle working faith (“Faith that moves mountains“, cf. 1Co 13:2 and Mt 17:20). As such it could be placed among the gift of signs; yet is also possible that it worked as gift for edification. Healings are clearly a gift of signs: whoever possessed this gift was able to heal sick ones (probably by the laying on of hands as we find it described with the Apostles - Mk 16:18; Acts 28:8).

Works of miracles are also gifts of signs, which are described in the Acts of Apostles: the poison of the snake had no effect on Paul (Acts 28:5); doors of prisons opened by themselves, chains fell off (Acts 16:26); a sorcerer became blind (Acts 13:11).

Prophecy (Greek: *prophēteia*) is mentioned next; this is to be understood as receiving divine revelations. This gift is identical with the ministry of prophets, as we see in verse 28, where the gift itself is no longer mentioned but the ministry which exercises this gift, namely that of the New Testament prophet. A prophet receives divine revelations, as we see in 1Co 14:29.30. That means that he received an inspired message from God in order to edify the church.

The gift of prophecy was serving to complement the gift of an apostle, and both of them are always mentioned together (cf. 1Co 12:28-29; Eph 2:20; 3:5; 4:11; Rev 18:20). Since the Apostles were never able to stay in one church for a long time, and considering that in the beginning the churches did not have access - or just to a limited degree - to the epistles of the Apostles, the mainly verbal ministry of the prophets was essential to edify the churches. Some books of the New Testament originated by the hand of prophets (Luke, Jude; James).

The gift of discerning of spirits (Greek: *diakriseis pneumatōn* = lit. discerning / judging the spirits / the work of the spirits) was a necessary gift of testing as supplement to the gift of prophecy; the message of a prophet had to be tested and judged, whether it originated from God's Spirit or from another spirit (cf. 1Co 14:29, where the corresponding verb *diakrinein* is used).

The speaking in foreign languages belongs to the realm of sign gifts, which is - as Acts 2 demonstrates - the supernatural ability to speak a pagan foreign language that the speaker had never learned. It is explicitly taught in 1Co 14:22 (also Mk 16:7) that this gift served as a sign. The necessary complement of this gift in the churches was the ability to translate a speech uttered in another language. That was also a supernatural gift which sometimes (1Co14:13), but not always

(1Co 14:28) was given to the speaker of tongues himself. That means that he could not automatically understand the speech he had spoken by himself.

11 But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills. 12 For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. 13 For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free – and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.

All these spiritual gifts were no effects resulting from some sort of human power or virtues; all of these had been worked by God's Spirit. No man was therefore permitted to boast about them or to seek his own honour by exercising these gifts. They were meant to edify the body of Christ, the church (cf. Eph 4:11-16), and this body was one; it formed a unit worked out by God's Spirit (Eph 4:3-4); every single believer was brought into this body by the Spirit of God and had received the same Spirit; so the believers ought to be of one spirit and not cause divisions over the possession of spiritual gifts (cf. Philippians 1:27; 2:1-4).

Contrary to the deceptive doctrine of the Pentecostals, where the believers are told to desire eagerly the "special gifts" (speaking in tongues, prophecy), this passage makes it clear, too: it is God Himself who determines the distribution of the spiritual gifts and gives them according to His wise council. Nowhere the believer is personally required to strive for such gifts as prophecy or speaking in tongues, but he it is expected to serve faithfully with the gifts God has given him at regeneration. Incidentally, 1Co 12:13 teaches explicitly that the genuine baptism with the Holy Spirit occurs together with the regeneration, and that it does not result in an enthusiastic "armament of power" or false gifts of miracles and revelations, but it brings about the incorporation of a former pagan or Jew in the one body of Christ.

14 For in fact the body is not one member but many. 15 If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body? 16 And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body? 17 If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling? 18 But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased. 19 And if they were all one member, where would the body be?

The Apostle went on to show now, how absurd and destructive it would be, if the various members of the body, having the manifold spiritual gifts and therefore specific functions in the body, were to reject the charisma and the work of another member or exclude themselves from this organic fellowship. God in His wisdom and sovereignty has given to each individual member the adequate spiritual gift fitting to him or her, and He has it ordered in such a way that the body as a whole may be edified only when the various gifts work together.

If we take the illustration of the body and its various functioning organs serious, then this passage proves that every believer has already received the spiritual gifts determined for him when he was born again: God decides about the function of each member at the time when He incorporates the believer into the body of Christ, not later. With the regeneration the decision is made - so to say according to the illustration -, whether we ought to be ear or hand or foot. This is an important testimony against the deceitful claim of the Charismatics that the believer would receive his gifts later (during the charismatic "baptism in the Spirit"). The believer receives the genuine gifts altogether at the moment of his regeneration; those gifts which a believer receives during the false "baptism of the Spirit", are not genuine!

20 But now indeed there are many members, yet one body. 21 And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." 22 No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary. 23 And those members of the body which we think to be less honourable, on these we bestow greater honour; and our unrepresentable parts have greater modesty, 24 but our presentable parts have no need. But God composed the body, having given greater honour to that part which lacks it, 25 that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. 26 And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honoured, all the members rejoice with it. 27 Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually.

Here the Apostle admonishes the Corinthians because of their tendency to esteem certain gifts more important and “better” than others. Such rivalry is contrary to our calling and grieves the Lord; those gifts in particular, apparently considered to be “the lesser ones”, which work in a hidden way, are also important for the body. Every one who has received a gift should humbly serve the entire body instead of boasting himself.

28 And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues. 29 Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? 30 Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? 31 But earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way.

Once again the Apostle makes it clear here, God determines which spiritual gifts a believer will receive, and that it would be incorrect if a believer desires speaking in tongues, when in fact God has not given it to him. We also perceive clearly that no believer has got all the gifts (with the probable exception of the Apostles). Moreover, the claim of many Pentecostals, that every genuine believer should have the gift of speaking in tongues, is hereby explicitly disproved. The rhetoric question, “Do all speak in tongues?” calls for the answer: No, they don’t!

The Corinthian believers were therefore not at all urged to desire the gifts of speaking in tongues or of prophecy, but to seek the more desirable gifts of the Spirit, and these are: faith, love, and hope, as it is shown in chapter 13 of the first Epistle to the Corinthians.

b) The various kinds of spiritual gifts and the different tasks for the edification of the church

As we have seen already in the exegesis of 1Corinthians 12, there are various kinds of spiritual gifts that God has given to the edification of His church during the time of the Apostles. We can thus classify the spiritual gifts according to the different functions for the body of Christ in this way:

1. Gifts of revelation: God gives light about His council and will

Right from the beginning God related to man His Holy Word by revelation. This key word (Greek: *apokalypsis* = removing a cover, unveiling) signifies the divine communication about spiritual, divine truth, that by nature is hidden to men, because their sinful mind is darkened (1Co 2:6-15).

This revelation of God’s Word is called “prophecy” in the Old Testament already. Thus prophecy (Greek *propheteia*) basically means the passing on of the Word of God which has been inspired by God’s Spirit through holy men of God (cf. 1Pe 1:19-21). In this sense all authors of the Old and of the New Testament were “prophets”, and Paul calls all the parts of the New Testament “prophetic Scriptures”.

In the Church of God the Apostles were the chief agents of the word-based revelation. Beside of them the Epistles of the Apostles testify of the ministry of New Testament church prophets who received revelations from God (cf. Eph 4:11; 2:20; 3:5; 1Co 12:28). The ministry of prophecy supplemented the ministry of the Apostles and conveyed to the churches understanding about their way at a time, when as yet they did not have or hardly had access to the Epistles of the Apostles. The corresponding spiritual gifts are “prophecy” and the “word of knowledge”.

2. Gift of miraculous signs: God confirms His new revelation before men

Complementary to the gifts of revelation there were several gifts of miraculous signs in the apostolic church. By miraculous signs (Greek *semeia*) we understand a publicly exhibited miracle, a supernatural intervention worked by God in the natural course of events, which is designated to confirm the divine message of Christ (cf. Ac 14:3; Heb 2:3-4 etc.). The Lord Himself performed such miraculous signs when He appeared publicly on earth, and thereby He testified that God did these

miracles through Him in order to demonstrate, that He had sent His Son and that the message of the Lord Jesus Christ was the message of the God of Israel to His people (cf. Jn 5:36; Acts 2:22).

Then the Apostles, too, whom the Lord had called, possessed the gift in a particular manner to perform miraculous signs. This applied to the twelve Apostles in Israel (cf. Mt 10:5-10; Acts 5:12), but also to Paul, the Apostle to the gentiles (cf. Ro 15:19; 2Co 12:12). In that period, when God caused His Word to be newly revealed and preached by the Apostles, other believers, too, beside the Apostles, had the gift to perform miracles. This is testified by 1Co 12 and Mk 16 and shown in Acts of the Apostles with Stephen (Acts 6:8) and Philip (Acts 8:6).

3. Gifts for edification: God enables His children to serve each other for edification

Finally, God gives to the church a whole series of gifts for edification, enabled by the Spirit of God to serve the church and the believers. These abilities are also spiritual gifts and should not be mixed up with the natural abilities and gifts.

The spiritual gift of teaching, for example, is the ability, enabled by the Spirit, to recognise spiritual correlations and meanings from the Word of God, and to teach them to others exegetically. This has nothing to do with the natural gift of eloquence or the ability to teach on worldly subjects. The gift of leading is a Spirit-given ability to serve as an elder in God's church and must not be mixed up with natural leadership qualities, such as a manager may have.

The gifts of edification are only briefly mentioned in 1Co 12. We find a detailed list of them in Ro 12:6-8:

6 Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; 7 or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; 8 he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

Compared to the gifts of revelation and signs, which did not appear any more in the true church of Christ after the time of the Apostles, but only in counterfeit form in all sorts of heretical trends, the gifts of edification remained operative in every Biblical church throughout the centuries of history till now. They are essential spiritual abilities which are given to equip the believers for the ministry for the Lord and one another in the church. We want to characterise these gifts briefly, at least, although in this publication we have to concentrate mainly on the gifts of revelation and signs.

**** General prophecy:** This is not the same as the gift of prophetic revelation. In the Apostle's teaching prophecy (*propheteia*) does not only occur as the gift of prophecy, but we also find it mentioned as a general gift which is given to every believer (cf. 1Co 14:31; 11:4.5) and enables him or her to speak for the edification of the other believers. ("**But he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men.**" - 1Co 14:3).

This general prophecy was not inspired and had no character of revelations. Even human mistakes could happen alongside; therefore the advice is given that such edifying speech must agree with the faith (= doctrinal basis of the faith), moreover the advice that everything said in such edifying speech had to be tested and only that which is good was to be held fast (1Th 5:20-21). In our view this special gift of edification by prophecy is actually the gift of preaching the Word, so that, being led by God's Spirit, the Word of the Bible may be applied to the hearts and the situation of an individual believer and show them, what God wants to tell them (cf. 1Co 14:3-4. 24-25. 31).

**** The ministry of charitable service:** This broad and diversified spiritual gift (Greek: *diakonia*) enables believers to serve in various ways, for instance the task to help poor and sick people in the church. (cf. Acts 6:3).

**** Teaching:** This spiritual gift enables the servant of God to recognise spiritual correlations and the doctrinal lines of the Scriptures in the ministry of preaching and pass these on to others (cf. 1Tim 1:8-11; 4:6-16; 2Tim 2:15; 4:1-5). Teaching (*didaskalia*) is one of the most important spiritual gifts in the church, it is especially important for pastors and elders (cf. Tit 1:9; 1Tim 3:2; 5:17).

**** Exhortation:** This gift seems to be rather a spiritual gift for the ministry of counselling. It is important in preaching God's Word (cf. 2Tim 4:2; 1Tim 4:13; Tit 1:9), but also in the ministry to individuals (cf. Acts 20:31). Exhortation (Greek: *paraklèsis*) includes several aspects. The Greek word can also be translated with "encouragement"; according to the particular situation of the individual it may carry the meaning of "exhortation, encouragement, stimulus, comfort". The basic idea of it is to apply the Word of God to the personal situation of the individual who is in need. The one who is ensnared by sin needs admonition and rebuke; the one who is discouraged and weakened needs encouragement and comfort; the one who is tired and lethargic needs exhortation and stimulus. Similar to prophecy, exhortation is a ministry which can be performed by every believer (cf. 1The 5:11), but there is also a special spiritual ability for this ministry.

**** Giving:** Giving or sharing surely is very important in many situations of the church world-wide, even though it may not always be so obvious in our rich country. Giving implies the upright and generous passing on of material goods to needy believers (which may even live far away in Africa or Romania).

**** Leadership:** This spiritual gift (greek *pro-istamai* = to be in charge, to be the responsible leader of a church) refers to spiritual leadership, which is of great importance in the church, too. The spiritual pastoral ministry (shepherding) in the church is difficult and responsible; it necessarily requires a spiritual ability; a person with natural "leadership qualities" cannot straighten anything in the Kingdom of God, but rather create damage when it is misused.

**** Showing Mercy:** This gift is surely meant to applied to the realm of counselling - the sensitive accompaniment of suffering believers.

These gifts of edification are of great importance for the church of God, and they still play the same relevant role in the church of the 21st century as they did in the church of the first century. These spiritual gifts are rarely mentioned in the various circles of the Pentecostal and Charismatic Movement, where they almost exclusively focus on the gifts of signs and revelation.

We want to keep in mind that these spiritual gifts for the edification are accepted by every Bible believing Christian as still existing. Therefore, the accusation of some people who say that we reject all spiritual gifts or assert that the charismata do not exist any more today, is not true.

3. The Gift of Prophecy in the light of the teaching of the New Testament

a) Prophecy and its function in the apostolic churches

The believers in the apostolic churches needed first of all knowledge and clarity about God's plan with the church and His will for them personally. However, this knowledge was necessarily limited in the beginning. The apostles and evangelists, who founded the new churches, were given the assignment to move ahead after a certain time of teaching in order to bring the light of the Gospel to others, too. Therefore the young churches were requiring additional instruction, which had to come to them through revelation in that situation.

The developed teaching of the Apostles in the form of the Epistles of the New Testament was not available to the early church for many years or was not even complete at that time. The total of the most important Epistles of the New Testament were only written about 20 to 25 years after spreading the Gospel among the Gentiles. Even at the time when the first Epistle to the Corinthians was written, the believers might have had, if any at all, just one Gospel and two or three Epistles of the New Testament. God's important revelations like the Epistles to the Ephesians or to the Colossians were not yet written.

The most important agents of the spiritual gifts of revelation doubtlessly were the Apostles, whom God had entrusted the task of spreading the Gospel, but also the inspired doctrine for the newly established churches. They - and among them predominantly the Apostle Paul - were also given the task to lay down the permanent foundation of the church (cf. Eph 2:20), namely the recorded apostolic teaching in the Epistles of the New Testament. We may well assume that the Apostles were the only believers who were equipped with all the spiritual gifts in order to fulfil their special assignment, that is they were prophets, too, and had gifts of miraculous signs as well as the gifts of edification.

The prophets of the New Testament were called to support and to supplement the ministry of the Apostles, who apart from the Apostles had also received gifts of revelation (prophecy, "word of knowledge"). The prophets had the task to pass on to the believers the divinely inspired messages, in order to convey to them the teaching, encouragement and admonition for their life as Christians.

The messages of these prophets were called "revelations" (Greek: *apokalypsis* - 1Co 14:30). In the light of other references this means that they were inspired by God and invested with divine truth and authority. (cf. Mt 11:25; 16:17; 2:11; 14:21; 17,6; Acts 26:16; Ro 1:17; 16:26; 1Co 2:10; 2Co 12:1; Eph 1:17; 3:3; 3,5; 1Tim 3:16; Tit 1:3; 1Pt 1:12; Rev 1:1).

Only God Himself can give genuine revelations; they are inspired by God. Such revelations were not given to every believer, but only to chosen ones who were specially called and sanctified tools, whose task may well be compared with that of the prophets of the Old Testament. Similar to those the prophets of the New Testament received primarily visions, dreams or word messages. (cf. Nu 12:6: "...If there is a prophet among you, I the LORD, make Myself known to him in a vision; I speak to him in a dream." as well as the example of Agabus in Acts 21:10-11).

b) The testimony of the Scriptures about the temporary limitation of the prophetic gifts to the time of the Apostles

As we are about to carefully study the testimony of the New Testament now, we will find definite evidence that God had intentionally limited the gift of prophecy in the church to the time of the Apostles. Therefore we are going to arrange the different references as follows:

1. The warning in Revelation 22:

God's utterances of revelation are finished after completion of the New Testament.

The book of Revelation is definitely the logical keystone of the Holy Scriptures; it is certainly the last written book of the NT, too. (The Apostle John was banished on the Isle of Patmos at the time he wrote this book, where he might have died, too, although he had indicated in his Second and Third Epistle that he was still able to travel.) In the book of Revelation all those lines were taken up and brought to the conclusion, which began in the book of the beginnings (Genesis) - creation, the fall of man, and redemption.

Therefore it is very important that at the conclusion of the revelation of the New Testament the Lord has given an explicit warning, which forbids any further "revelations" and thereby signifies that with this book God's utterances of revelation for the church had come to a conclusion:

For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book. (Rev 22:18.19)

Thus this statement testifies that the book of Revelation contains the final prophecies authorised by God. If anyone else appears now and claims that he had also received prophetic words "from God" which the believers would have to accept, that person will be subject to God's judgement. God Himself, the Author of every genuine prophecy, does not add on this book, and human beings, too, are not permitted to add anything, otherwise they will be judged as false, deceiving prophets.

2. The Bible does not predict any further genuine prophets, but only warns against false prophets in the post apostolic period

If the gift of prophecy had been designated as an essential divine source of revelation as supplementation to the ministries of the Apostles for the entire age of the church, then the Apostles would have surely referred to this important source of spiritual orientation. Instead of this, the task of the prophets is described in Eph 2:20 in a way that, together with the Apostles, they had laid the foundation of the church - namely the inspired Holy Scriptures of the New Testament. (The expression "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets" may at best explained as genitive of the origin: on the foundation which was laid by the apostles and the prophets. Even if this passage is explained in a different way, the fact remains that the prophets as well as the apostles had played a role only at the beginning of the establishing of the church; the foundation does not have to be laid down anew, but upon it the building process continues later on.)

Passages such as Acts 20 are relevant here: By prophesying the Apostle Paul revealed as prophet the decline and the deception in the church after the departure of the Apostles he would have consequently informed the believers for their orientation about those future genuine apostles and prophets who might have come after him. But instead of this he declared that God's means for their protection and orientation would solely be the Holy Scriptures:

So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified. (Acts 20:32)

In a similar way the Apostle Peter emphasises the absolutely sure prophetic Word of the Holy Scriptures as an orientation for the believers until the return of the Lord (2Pe 1:19-21), instead of telling the believers that after the apostles of the first century there might still be apostles and prophets in the future who would equip the church with more revelations. We find the same notion in 2Tim 3:13-17: Having foretold future deceptions Paul points to the entirely sufficient Holy Scriptures.

We find the same pattern, too, in 1Tim 4:1-16 as well as in the warnings against the deception of the end-times in 2 Peter and Jude: everywhere the Word of the Scriptures is mentioned as guideline for the believers (in Jude 3 and 4 "the faith", which means the inspired doctrinal basis of the faith as documented in the Scriptures). Nowhere in the Bible do we find any reference to genuine prophets and apostles to appear in the end time, although this very reference would have been very important, if this source of edification would still be available to the church at that time.

Contrariwise we find a continuous line of warnings that in the end-time of the church, just prior to the return of Jesus Christ, false and lying prophets will appear who will seduce the people of God through counterfeit messages. The Lord Himself expressed this prophetic warning three times in His end-time discourse in Matthew 24 (Mt 24:4-5, 11-12, 24-25; cf. Mt 7:15-23). In his first epistle John warns against the false prophets in the church, and Paul mentioned them indirectly together with the false teachers in 1Tim 4:1-2, also in 2The 2:9-10. Again we find a direct warning in Rev 16:13-14, where we are told explicitly that Satan will make extensive use of false prophecy at the climax of the end-time.

3. The Scriptures testify that it is the only entirely reliable source of authority and prophetic orientation for the believers

The statements in which the Bible itself, being the complete inspired revelation of God, is mentioned as the only and completely sufficient source of teaching and edification constitute another weighty testimony. Thus the alleged necessity of new prophetic messages for the orientation of the believers in the end-time, as is claimed by the followers of the Pentecostal and Charismatic Movement, is definitely refuted:

But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom

you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2Tim 3:13-17)

In the light of the progressing deception believers are not referred to any new prophets or apostles, but to the inspired Holy Scriptures. They declare explicitly that they have the power, to prepare man entirely and equip him completely - therefore there is no need for a continuous ministry of prophets and apostles, since the Holy Scriptures of the New Testament are completed. The Apostle Peter testifies this fact quite similarly:

And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts; knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, (...) (2Pe 1:19-21 and 2:1)

This passage emphasises again the inspired prophetic word of the Holy Scriptures as the sole authoritative orientation for the believers. It is totally reliable and gives us light, until the Lord returns. It stands contrary to the misleading messages of false prophets and teachers who would enter the churches in the post-apostolic period. In the context of this passage we regard the "completely confirmed prophetic word" to be understood here as reference to the whole Bible having been inspired by the Holy Spirit and recorded by the prophets, and not just a selection of the specific "prophetic" passages (predicting the future).

These testimonies indicate that with the completion of the recorded revelation of the New Testament there is no further necessity for additional revelations, for any further ministry of apostles and prophets, because the believers have got everything they need in the complete and perfect Word of God.

4. The Testimony of 1Corinthians 13: Prophecy and words of knowledge will be taken away by God

Immediately after the presentation of the spiritual gifts in chapter 12 the apostle emphasises that exactly those gifts, which the Corinthians had been so smug about, will be taken away by God or they will cease. **"But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away" (1Co 13:8-10).**

We will explain this passage more detailed in the section No. 5 below; here we just want to emphasise that the argument of the apostle makes sense only when those gifts have been removed while the church is not yet situated in glory. Paul is in fact arguing that here on earth these gifts are already considered less important than the more excellent spiritual gifts: faith, hope and love. The meaning of this argumentation becomes absolutely clear, when we presume that "that which is perfect" is the complete revelation of God's will for the church in the Scriptures of the New Testament. In that way this passage does also agree with the general testimony of the New Testament about the limited role of the gift of prophecy in the church.

4. The Gift of Miraculous Signs in the Light of the Teaching of the New Testament

First of all it is important to clarify what we understand by “miraculous signs”. Many Charismatics give the impression as if sober believers, who are faithful to the Bible, deny each supernatural work of God and rely on a cold rational faith. This is surely not the case. We believe in the almighty God who is above all natural laws and appearances and is always able to intervene in nature supernaturally. The God of the Bible, our God is a God who can perform miracles, and this applies generally at all times.

We believe that God is performing miracles even today, also in the lives of His people, that He answers prayers by intervening in a supernatural way, and that He may even heal illnesses and He does so in answer to prayer according to Jas 5. Yet it is quite a different question whether God still works signs on a large scale, i.e. publicly exhibited miracles, in order to confirm His Word, as it happened in the days of the Apostles. We have to find an answer to this question based on the testimony of the Bible. Are there genuine agents of the spiritual gift of miraculous signs (healings, miracles, languages) even today?

a) The purpose of the miraculous signs in the time of Jesus Christ and the Apostles

What were the miraculous signs given for in the time of the Apostles? What was the purpose for which God had appointed them? What does the teaching of the Apostles say about miraculous signs? The Bible gives us a cardinal reference to answer to these questions:

For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him, God also bearing witness both with signs [sèmeioi] and wonders, with various miracles [terata], and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will? (Hebr 2,2-4)

Here it is stated very clearly what God had given the signs for: through these supernatural manifestations He wanted to give His testimony to the message of His Son and His Apostles (see also Acts 14:3). The divine authority and commission of the Lord Jesus Christ and of His special messengers were to be confirmed by miraculous signs, which God had granted to take place in their ministry. The Apostle Peter testifies of this fact about the Son of God:

Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles [dynameis], wonders [terata], and signs [sèmeioi] which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know (...) (Acts 2:22)

This confirming function of the signs is likewise testified of the Apostles of Jesus Christ:

And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word through the accompanying signs. (Mk 16:20)

These miraculous signs were first and foremost aimed at the Jews who requested such signs (1Co 1:22; Jn 2:18). They were predominantly given to the Apostles themselves, as the Apostle Paul pointed out: **“Truly the signs of an apostle were accomplished among you with all perseverance, in signs and wonders and mighty deeds.”** (2Co 12:12; cf. Ro 15:19; Acts 2:43; 4:16; 5:12).

Moreover there have been even other believers, too, performing signs, who possessed the corresponding spiritual gifts (for instance Philip and Stephen). These signs were not simply given to effect saving faith. When we study the Gospel of John, we notice that the signs of the Lord brought about only a superficial, sensational faith, but not genuine, saving faith (cf. Jn 2:23-25; 6:14, 63-64; 12:37).

Saving faith can only be produced by the proclamation of the Word of God (Ro 10:17), and for this purpose there is no need of accompanied signs, for the Word of God itself has saving power (cf. Ro 1:16-17; 1Co 1:17-18; 2:1-5; 1The 2:13; 2Tim 3:15).

God had added the signs in the beginning to authenticate the newly appointed messengers and their new message, when compared with the Old Testament. God directed men to write down these signs in His Word, so that the people of future generations may believe the written testimony of the Bible and accept the Lord Jesus Christ:

And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name. (Jn 20:30-31)

God had never planned to rouse the faith of men by miraculous signs. That was to come about by the Word. This Word has recorded all the miraculous signs which God has worked in order to authenticate His Son and His Apostles.

Today we do not need new miraculous signs to be able to evangelise the sceptical and rebellious people of the end-time's generation, but the Word of the Holy Scriptures must be preached with the power of the Holy Spirit - not with miraculous powers but by the convicting, heart piercing, enlightening power which the Holy Spirit exercises to apply the Word of God to the heart of men and causes it to work effectively in them. What was once said about the Israelites applies to this present generation, too:

Abraham said to him, 'They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.' And he said, 'No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' But he said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.' (Lk 16:29-31)

b) The testimony of the Scriptures about the temporary limitation of the gifts of miraculous signs to the apostolic period

Following what has been said above we may conclude that the Scriptures testifies clearly and explicitly that the genuine divine miraculous signs were limited to the apostolic period. In the reference cited above from Hebrews 2 it is said who had the miraculous signs: "which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him", which definitely refers to the Apostles themselves who had been direct witnesses of His ministry.

Now it is important to read the testimony of the Bible carefully. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews (we believe that it was the Apostle Paul) testifies clearly that at the time of the composition of this letter (which was about 66 A.D.) these miraculous signs had occurred in the past already and have thus been concluded: **"and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him, God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will"**. With this it is clear that the testimony of miraculous signs was given only to Christ and the Apostles of the first century, and that it was finished already towards the end of the time of the Apostles.

Another important Bible reference testifies exactly the same fact, a passage which is quoted again and again in support by the advocators of the Charismatic movement miraculous signs, that is the end of the Gospel of Mark (We want to remark that we regard it mistaken, when certain Bible teachers claim on the basis of a erroneous textual criticism that the closing passage of the Gospel of Mark may not be genuine. We are convinced the every word in Mk 16:9-20 is inspired by God):

14 Later He appeared to the eleven as they sat at the table; and He rebuked their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they did not believe those who had seen Him after He had risen. 15 And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. 16 He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned. 17 And

these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; 18 they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover." 19 So then, after the Lord had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God. 20 And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word through the accompanying signs. Amen. (Mk 16:14-20)

The interpretation of the Pentecostals and Charismatic promoted the idea that since the days of the Apostles every true believer must have the signs described here in this passage, otherwise there is something wrong with his or her faith and salvation. Considering the consequence this exegesis is in itself absurd and untrustworthy, because that would mean that all true believers throughout many generations, the Waldensians, the Hussites, the Anabaptists, the Pietists, the Baptists, all blessed tools of God like Menno Simon, John Wesley, George Whitefield, William Carey, Hudson Taylor, Charles Spurgeon etc. had not been true believers, because they did not have these signs. Moreover, the true believers should have actually experienced all these miraculous signs, even the drinking of poison and being kept safe from snakes; according to this criterion even Pentecostals would not be reckoned as genuine.

Yet what is really written here? To whom were these miraculous signs designated which the Lord mentioned here? Now, the context makes it perfectly clear: Christ speak was speaking here to the eleven disciples, i.e. to His chosen Apostles. It is to them that He gives the charge: "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature!"

This is definitely a special assignment that was given to the Apostles only - which we can see further on in verse 20, were it is clearly testified that the eleven Apostles fulfilled this charge: „**And they went out and preached everywhere,...**”. This applies doubtlessly to the same eleven Apostles, whom the Lord addressed before and commissioned them to proclaim the Gospel to the whole creation.

Thus this assignment is not exactly the same one which the Lord had given to His Apostles, too, which is recorded in Matthew 28. In that passage the Lord says:

Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Amen. (Mt 28,19-20)

This general “missionary commission” is evidently extended in its chronological validity “to the end of the age” and contains the whole age of salvation of the church. Moreover, the commission in Luke 24 is likewise given to the ministry of the Apostles without limitation: “(...) **and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem**” (Lk 24:47).

In contrast we see the charge in Mark 16 being evidently limited to the eleven ones, and it was fulfilled by the eleven during the first century as verse 20 testifies clearly. Within the scope of the fulfilment of this charge the Lord also worked the promised signs: „**and confirming the word through the accompanying signs**”. From Mark’s point of view, who had written the Gospel about 65 A.D., all this had happened in the past already and was thus finished!

This fact, which may be unusual for some, was also confirmed by the testimony of the Apostle Paul: „**(...) from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister.**“ (Col 1:23) Thus the Gospel was already preached in the whole creation even during life time of the Apostle Paul. (This is exactly the same expression as the one in Mk 16:15!)

The explanation of this is lies in the fact that the Apostles obviously went out after the day of Pentecost to fulfil this commission, having thereby penetrated into all areas of the world. We know from historical reports that traces of the Apostles’ activity were found in India and even in China. Peter wrote his first letter from Babylon (1Pe 5:13). We may presume that other Apostles went to East Asia, Africa, and America, in order to fulfil this commission in a God-pleasing manner. We do not know of any details about it, but we can believe the testimony of the Bible: The special commission from Mk 16 was fulfilled by the Apostles and during the time of the Apostles.

The miraculous signs promised in Mark 16 were in fact promised to those who would become believers directly through the message of the Apostles, i.e. the first generation of believers who lived during the time of the Apostles and who had been evangelised by the Apostles themselves. It is therefore remarkable that all these signs up to drinking deadly poison are testified as fulfilled in the Acts of Apostles. Their fulfilment is marked in verse 20 as final. Nowhere else do we find an indication that these signs were also promised to later generations of believers.

Often there those who like to mention that the Lord had promised to all who believe, to do the same works He did Himself, yeah even greater ones (Jn 14:12). But “greater works” cannot mean “greater signs”, for who is able perform greater signs than raising a dead person? According to our understanding the greater works are realised in having the privilege to lead people to be born anew of the Spirit. This was only possible after Christ’s ascension to heaven.

There is another reference which the Charismatics often interpret to be an assignment still applicable to us today to perform miraculous signs, which, after careful study, turns out to be limited to the Apostles, namely the instruction the Lord gave to His twelve disciples in Matthew 10:

These twelve Jesus sent out and commanded them, saying: "Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans. But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as you go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons. Freely you have received, freely give. Provide neither gold nor silver nor copper in your money belts, nor bag for your journey, nor two tunics, nor sandals, nor staffs; for a worker is worthy of his food. (Mt 10:5-10)

Here we can see how dangerous it is when Bible passages are taken out of their context and arbitrarily given a twisted interpreted. The Lord gave His disciples the assignment to proclaim the Kingdom of Heavens being near at hand, because He as the Messiah and King of this kingdom was working in Israel. In relation to this they should perform the miraculous signs of the Messiah to confirm the message of Christ.

But this assignment was limited to the “lost sheep of the house of Israel” with the explicit prohibition to go to the Gentiles! If the charismatic miracle workers want to claim this assignment for themselves, then all of them had romp about in Israel and spare us; irrespective of the fact that their handling of money certainly does not at all comply with the requirements of our Lord.

It constitutes a basic misunderstanding or a false doctrine if somebody says that God had given the miraculous signs in order to confirm the message of every preacher today. The Word of God limits the miraculous signs explicitly to the Lord Himself and His immediate apostles, and there could not have been these signs after the first century, because the apostles had to be witnesses of the life of the Lord Jesus here on earth, His ministry as well as resurrection (see Ac 1:21-22). When there are workers of miracles today who claim to have the apostolic powers to perform miracles, then we must reject them as impostors and reckon them as part of the predicted deceptive movement of the false prophets in the end-time.

That does not mean, as I have said before, that God might not work any miracles even today. He works in a way as He pleases. We can by no means claim that God may not moves the hearts of men during evangelism among unreached peoples for instance through miraculous answers to prayer, which is also confirmed in the ministry of faithful and sober servants of God.

But such miracles do not happen on a large scale as public signs, and today there are no more „agents of miraculous gifts“, who may, as it were, permanently produce such miracles. This applied in particular to the gift of healing sick ones by laying hands on them, such as many charismatic deceivers claim to possess.

5. The Teaching of Cessation of Certain Spiritual Gifts in 1 Corinthians 13

We will now return to an important reference of the Bible, which seen in the right perspective supports the teaching about the cessation of the spiritual gifts of revelation and miraculous signs in the post-apostolic church. This chapter is also differently explained by some evangelical, non charismatic exegetes.

When we examine carefully the statements in 1Corinthians and interpret them in the context with the other Bible passages we handled before, then we perceive that this important chapter confirms the conclusion that according to God's counsel the spiritual gifts of prophecy and signs are no longer given today. Even if our exegesis of this portion is not compelling, we are nevertheless convinced that it represents the most conclusive interpretation, which agrees best to various individual statements and to the general context

In the introductory section 1Co 13:1-3 the Apostle Paul once again picks up the tendency of the carnal Corinthians to boast with their noticeable gifts such as prophecy and speaking in tongues and to put themselves in centre of attention because of these gifts. That had caused jealousy and quarrels among the church members.

In chapter 12 the Apostle had reminded them that they all belong to one body, that is being built up by the humble, loving co-operation of the various gifts, and that God in His wisdom had allocated to them the adequate gifts, so that every form of jealousy and selfish desire for particular gifts would be wrong:

Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? But earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way. (1Co 12:29-31)

In the following chapter the Apostle goes on to show that this more excellent way is the selfless love, which they were lacking very much, and that the more excellent spiritual gifts, which are even more important for the edification of the church than those mentioned in chapter 12, are faith, hope and love.

1 Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. 2 And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. 3 And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing. (1Co 13:1-3)

The Apostle purposely singles out the specially desired and noticeable gifts among those mentioned in chapter 12 and thereby shows with an intended exaggeration and pointed emphasis that these gifts, even if any one possesses them to an unheard-of culmination, that person would still be nothing without the agape-love.

In chapter 14 the Apostle shows that the Biblical speaking in tongues (12:10) consisted of a supernatural mastery of heathen foreign languages (languages of nations which were strange to the Israelites, see Acts 2:7-11). Even if a believer would master all those foreign languages and moreover even the languages of the angels (which the Scriptures do not mention and what would not agree with the character of signs of languages), he would nevertheless be hollow and useless without love.

Even if a believer had the gift of prophecy (12:8) to an exaggerated degree, so that he would know all mysteries (such as even Paul did not claim for himself), and even if he had the gift of knowledge (12:8) to perfect degree, he would still be nothing without love. And even if he had the miracle working faith (12:9, which is an obvious reference to Mt 17:20 and 21:21) to a spectacular extend, he would still be nothing without the agape-love. All those statements were made to point to the

Corinthians to the fact that the love is the most excellent gift, which they ought to desire strongly, because they were lacking it very much.

In the following famous passage verses 4 - 7 the divine agape-love is portrayed in a striking manner. It is the same selfless, bestowing love of God, which the Lord Jesus Christ so perfectly personalised when He lived on earth. This love constitutes a shameful contrast with the behaviour of the Corinthians - and so many carnal minded Christians today. They were quarrelsome - love is patient and kind. They were jealous - love does not covet. They were boasting and puffed up against each other - love does the opposite. In that way we might continue to set these wonderful virtues of the love in contrast with the failures of the Corinthians, but this touches our theme just marginally.

In the next passage, which is of special interest to us, the Apostle continues his argument. It is not only fact that the extraordinary spiritual gifts, which were desired so much by the carnal Corinthians, are nothing without agape - love; according to God's plan they were given to the church only temporally, whereas the „more excellent spiritual gifts“ - faith, hope and especially love - are given to the church permanently (v. 13).

8 Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away. 9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part. 10 But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away. (1Co 13:8-10)

Paul shows in verse 8, that the spiritual gift of prophecy (Greek: *propheteia*) which he had mentioned in 12:10 and 29 will not be given to the church permanently, but it would be taken away at a future point of time (the Greek word *kat-argeo* can have the meaning: “to put out of action, abolish, destroy, remove”). God Himself will remove them, while faith, hope and love will remain - that means they are less weighty than the more excellent spiritual gifts, thus the Apostle is arguing here.

Also the gift of speaking in tongues (*glossai* = tongues, languages), about which Paul was compelled to say something in chapter 14 concerning its misuse, will cease (*pauro*). Here another word is used than that concerning prophecy. The gift of speaking in tongues was a miraculous sign that was addressed to unbelieving Jews (14:21-22). It ceased gradually after it had fulfilled its purpose in the history setting of salvation, which was a process generated by God, of course, who in His sovereignty gives and takes away every gift.

Even the gift of knowledge (Greek = *gnosis*) will once be taken away by God. Regarding this statement there are wide-spread misunderstandings. This spiritual gift cannot be regarded to represent the general spiritual knowledge, because this knowledge of God and His councils will never cease; on the contrary, it will be fully unfolded when the church will be united with Christ in glory (this is in fact the meaning of “that which is perfect” in verse 10, according to many exegetes).

With this is meant (as in verse 2, too) the gift of revelation, which was mentioned in chapter 12:8, the “Word of knowledge” (or „utterance of knowledge“) that was given to the early churches in order to impart to them orientation about God's plan for the church and His will for her life. This speech of knowledge is closely connected with prophecy by the same verb “done away” or “removed”; both of them are gifts of revelation which obviously complemented each other and both were no longer needed as soon as “that which is perfect” had come.

In verse 9 the reason is given, why the two gifts of revelation will have been removed by God. The believers practised these gifts at the time when the first Epistle to the Corinthians was written, and thereby they received revelations and knowledge, but there was something missing in these, because they did not impart a clear general view of God's plan to the believers, but only fragments of it (literally parts; Greek *ek merous* = partially, fragmental).

We may compare their quality of information with an image of a puzzle, of which only 500 out of 1000 parts are available. If you try to assemble them you will get partial impressions, small areas of the picture, but the complete picture is not yet clearly recognisable. As has been said before, the fragmental character of these gifts is given as a reason why they were not meant to remain in the church, but had been removed. They are inferior and less valuable compared with that which is “perfect”, which was to be given to the church.

In verse 10 we are told, now, when God will remove the fragmental gifts of revelation: when “that which is perfect” (Greek: *to teleion*) is there. The Greek word *teleion* (from *telos* = end, aim) denotes something which has reached the aim of a development; depending on the context it may mean “the perfection / accomplishment” (in the sense of a highest possible perfection) or the “complete thing” (in the sense that nothing is missing any more) or the „mature one“(in the sense of a finalised development, the stage adulthood).

If we consider the previous verse, the phrase „that which is perfect“ is at best related to the knowledge of God’s counsel for the church, which could be conveyed only partly, fragmentally. Verse 9 shows exactly that these gifts were not perfect and could not bring about perfect of knowledge. Considering the term “in part”, “partially” in verse 9, the meaning “that which is perfect” may definitely be applied to the Greek word *teleion*, i.e. the complete and entire revelation of God’s counsel for the church.

Having said this it is consequent, indeed, if we assume that the meaning of „that which is perfect“ is the complete, finalised and perfect revelation of the counsels and teaching of the Lord in the Holy Scriptures of the New Testament. Paul shows in this passage that the gifts of revelation of prophecy and utterance of knowledge could not give a complete and clear picture of God’s plan and will for the church (cf. verse 12: „in a mirror“, „like a puzzle“). Compared with to these God’s revelation in teaching and in the Scriptures of the Apostles was more superior and more explicit; these only could convey to the church a complete instruction and guideline.

According to my conviction this understanding of verse 10 is the most conclusive, clearest one, and it agrees with most of the other statements of the Scriptures. The predominant traditional exegesis related “that which is perfect” to the perfect condition of the church when she will be transformed in the rapture and always be with the Lord in the heavenly glory. This interpretation has quite a few arguments which agree in its favour, for it is seen to find support, for instance, by some statements in verse 12, which may well be related to the perfect condition of the church. Even in the general sense it is true that all our knowledge is “patchwork” as Luther translated.

However, there are good reasons to discern and to reject this interpretation for this passage as inapplicable. One the one hand this would mean that, according to God’s plan, the church would have to remain in a condition of immaturity for her whole time here on earth, because in verse 11 the spiritual gifts of prophecy and utterances of knowledge are evidently linked to the immature status of the church. Yet this would be contradictory to other statements of the Scripture, according to which it is God’s aim that the church becomes mature and grown up here on earth already (see e.g. Eph 4:13-14: “a perfect man”, “no longer be children”; Col 1:28: perfect [or “grown up, mature, Greek *teleios*] in Christ Jesus“; Hebr 5:12-14).

A weighty reason against the interpretation of the perfect heavenly status of the church is in the statement in verse 13, whereupon at the very moment when the gifts of prophecy had been removed, faith, hope and love nevertheless remain in the church. Can this really be related to the heavenly glory?

Will the glorified and perfect church in heaven still need faith? Surely not, because we need faith only as long as we do not see Jesus and the final state of His kingdom; we need faith as long as we are here on earth and the glorified Lord is in heaven (cf. 1Pe 1:8: “whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory). Today we confess: **“So we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord. For we walk by faith, not by sight”** (2Co 5:6-7). When we are with the Lord in the consummation we no longer need faith, because by then we have come to behold!

The same applies to hope. We need hope as long as we as we live as believers here on earth and our perfection, the **“redemption of our body”**. (Ro 8:23), is still going to be accomplished in the future. But as soon as we will be united with our Lord, we no longer need hope, just as we are taught in Romans 8, too:

For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance. (Ro 8,24-25)

When the rapture has taken place then our hope is fulfilled indeed; we will see what we have hoped for, and we no longer need hope in heaven.

The logical conclusion is that prophecy and utterances of knowledge will be taken away by God from the church already before the rapture, at a time when the church still needs faith and hope besides love (which will remain in eternity). Therefore the only coherent interpretation of “that which is perfect” in verse 10 is related to the complete revelation of the Holy Scriptures of the New Testament. We have already seen above that this agrees with other statements of the Scriptures, which indicates denote the Scriptures as a complete and fully sufficient divine revelation for the church.

It is also harmonious when the church at a whole is being declared mature as soon as God’s whole counsel in form of the Apostolic Scriptures of the New Testament has been committed. A trainee (or disciple) is not fully responsible as long as he has not yet been fully instructed in his sphere of assignment.

To be immature has something to do with deficient insight and knowledge. In that sense the early church was still regarded immature, because she was lacking in the knowledge of the whole counsel of God. But as soon as the complete teaching of the Apostles had been delivered, she was responsible to live according to this light. She had reached the state of maturity.

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

Following the sense of what is said above it is quite natural, therefore, that in verse 11 the Apostle uses the picture of the underage boy or youth, who has not yet acquired the full knowledge about his life and actions; he is still immature, and his thinking corresponds to this stage of immaturity. Applying this picture from everyday life, the prophetic utterances and the word of knowledge are marked once again, as already in verse 9, as something incomplete and preliminary in the will of God.

Such identification would hardly make sense when these gifts would actually be removed after 2000 years of church history have elapsed. The admonition of the whole passage will become most evident only if the removal of the gifts would have taken place during the realm of experience if the Corinthians, namely towards the end of the Apostolic age.

In verse 12 the Apostle shows again the limitation of prophecy and the word of knowledge by using some pictorial comparisons. We only can understand the statement of this verse properly, when we bring it into the line with the context of argumentation of the entire section and take into account that Paul was using verbal images here.

Even in this verse the Apostle characterises the knowledge, which was given to them by verbal gifts of prophecy and utterances of knowledge, as something imperfect and in a sense deficient and therefore temporary. During the period of immaturity, when these gifts were still active, the knowledge which was conveyed by them was not completely clear (the ancient mirrors were polished sheets of metal which could only reflect considerably less of the reality than our crystal mirrors. Paul describes this limited knowledge as dimly, “like a puzzle” (or “enigmatically”, suggestively).

In prophecy visions and dreams actually play an essential role, and these are often conveyed in pictures, which by themselves are not normally entirely clear in their meaning and need additional interpretation. We may illustrate this character of riddles in the gift of prophecy at best by giving an example: The vision of the Apostle Peter with which God prepared him for the visit of the messengers of Cornelius.

Peter saw a great sheet with several unclean animals in it and heard the call: “Rise, Peter; kill and eat.” (Acts 10:10-13) This vision was given to show Peter that the Gentiles, whom he abhorred, should no longer be avoided from God’s point of view, but this message was given to him in the form of a riddle. We read in verse 17: **“Peter wondered within himself what this vision which he**

had seen meant (...)” Again and again we find similar visions and mysterious messages with the prophets. Like the tree of the watchman in Jeremiah or the two olive trees with Zechariah.

In contrast to this the verbal revelation of the Apostolic Scriptures is clear and explicit. In the epistles of the Apostle Paul we find the secret of the church, one body consisting in Jews and Gentiles, and the free offer of salvation to the Gentiles, understandably taught and interpreted, so that no riddle remains. In the epistles of the Apostles God had presented His plan in plain text, ready to be viewed and comprehensible, so that the church was able to come to a clear and definite knowledge.

Paul paraphrased this explicit knowledge in a pictorial expression: “but then face to face”. That means, in the definite Apostolic teaching God is imparting Himself in unmistakable terms, so to say, as if we might meet Him face by face. Even today, in the age of electronic communication over far distances, we prefer the personal talk “from face to face”, when we want to make sure what the other person means, when we have to talk about difficult matters. In the Scriptures of the NT God is talking with us in this direct and unmistakable way.

An Old Testament quotation from the Bible may help us here to obtain a better understanding, which is dealing precisely with the theme of our passage and uses almost the same pictorial language, so that Paul might have alluded to it. We find this word in Num 12:6-8:

Then He said, “Hear now My words: If there is a prophet among you, I, the LORD, make Myself known to him in a vision; I speak to him in a dream. Not so with My servant Moses; He is faithful in all My house. I speak with him face to face, even plainly, and not in dark sayings; And he sees the form of the LORD. Why then were you not afraid to speak against My servant Moses?”

Miriam and Aaron had rebelled against Moses and wanted to be equal with him; for that reason they mentioned the fact that even they themselves had received prophetic revelations from the Lord: „Has He not spoken through us also?” (Num 12:2) Then the Lord replied to them and rebuked them by emphasising the unique, special position of Moses among all prophets in those days. Normally prophetic revelations occurred through visions and dreams, which were mysterious. But by contrast Moses received the clear word of the Lord, such as he had written it down in the Holy Scriptures.

Now, God defines this clear word revelation with the same terms as in 1Co 13:12: God speaks to Moses “face to face”, not mysteriously (cf. also Ex 33:11; Deut 5:4). The fact that this term is used here figuratively for a clear, perfect revelation follows from the many Bible references which testify that no human being is literally able to see God face to face. (cf. Ex 33:20; Jn 1:18).

Thus the Apostle Paul goes on to emphasise again the superiority of the apostolic word revelation over the gifts of prophecy, when he writes: “Now I know in part, but then I shall know [literally: acknowledge clearly, perfectly; Greek: epi-gnosomai] just as I also am known.” [literally: acknowledged clearly, perfectly; Greek: epignosomai] The gift of prophecy as well as utterance of knowledge conveyed just a fragmentary knowledge, and so provided only a fragmentary, incomplete picture of the whole. However, the apostolic word revelation of the Holy Scriptures provides us with a clear, perfect knowledge, just as God knows us clearly and perfectly.

Of course, our knowledge of God is in a sense limited, so that today we are not able to know everything of God's character and His counsels, but that which God has told us in His Word makes it possible for us to know God clearly and reliably as if He would stand before us personally.

In a sense our knowledge of God will doubtlessly be perfect only when we will see Him in His glory. Yet in another sense the Word of God communicates to us an entirely reliable knowledge about things which God wants us to know (see also 1Co 2:10-16). I know for sure and reliably from the Word of God that God is gracious and merciful, as if I could see Him already.

Therefore we find in this verse once again a vivid account of the certainty and reliability of the Word of God that enables us to have a clear orientation and definite knowledge, which is thus for more superior to the temporal gifts of revelation in the beginning, so these were actually no longer needed, as soon as this word revelation was available to the church in form of the New Testament.

Having understood this passage in this way it becomes evident what has been testified in the history

of the church, namely that the gifts of revelation and miraculous signs of the apostolic age did never again appear in later centuries among the true believers and the Biblical churches.

Wherever we hear about such things later on in the history of the church, they were without exceptions deceitful forgeries of these Biblical gifts, which appeared in false prophetic movements like Montanism and demonic heretical movements at the fringe of the Christianity.

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

The final verse in this chapter picks up again the introductory argument of the superiority of the agape-love over all other spiritual gifts. At the same time the statement, that faith and hope still remain with the church, whereas prophecy and utterance knowledge have already been taken away, also confirms our interpretation of verse 10: that which is perfect is the recorded revelation of the New Testament which gives us reliable knowledge and makes further prophecies unnecessary. Thus the passage we have dealt with fully agrees with other Biblical statements which we have already evaluated. In the-end time we may keep firmly on the totally reliable prophetic Word in the Scriptures and must not look out for new prophetic messages.

6. The Warnings of the Scriptures Against False Prophets and Miraculous Signs in the End Time

There is still one point to consider, namely to verify what we have already stated briefly before, that whenever the Holy Scriptures speaks about the end-time, it relates to the church exclusively serious warnings against a massive appearance of false prophecy and false miraculous signs.

As in the case of genuine spiritual gifts at the time of the Apostles there is a close relationship between the counterfeit gifts of prophecy and counterfeit gifts of miraculous signs in the church of the end-time: the false miraculous signs likewise serve as an attestation of the deceptive messages of false prophets and false teachers and apostles in the end-time.

By massive spectacular miracles Satan wants to achieve that many people, even true believers, believe the false doctrines and prophecies of lies, with which the enemy floods the church of the end-time. Therefore practically everywhere false doctrines and revelations appear hand in hand with false miraculous signs (healings, speaking in tongues etc.).

a) The warning against false prophets in the New Testament

In the New Testament we find several consistent testimonies that with the progressing end-time, that is the period shortly before the return of the Lord Jesus Christ on earth, false prophets will appear in an increasing and extensive degree. The most important testimony certainly is the prophetic “end-time discourse” of the Lord Jesus Christ, as it is recorded in Mt 24:

3 Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, “Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?” 4 And Jesus answered and said to them: “Take heed that no one deceives you. 5 For many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and will deceive many. (...) 11 Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. 12 And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. (...) 24 For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs

and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. 25 See, I have told you beforehand. (Mt. 24,3-5;11-12; 24-25)

The prophetic discourse of the Lord Jesus covers a wide range from the beginnings of the post apostolic time up to the predicted “great tribulation” for the people of Israel. The Lord makes it very insistently clear that the primary danger, even the main indicator of the last time before His return is deception - massive religious delusion in the name of Christ, whereby false prophets and false miraculous signs are going to play a key role.

What does the Bible mean by with “false prophets”? The Greek word literally says *pseudo-prophetai*, actually “lying prophets”, “deceitful prophets”. As the true prophets of the Old and New Testament were holy men of God who passed on the words of the living God to the people, so the false prophets are unholy servants of Satan, who appears as “angel of light”. They are passing on to the people the deceptive words of the adversary to lead them astray and deprave them. They pretend to be messengers of God and the Lord Jesus Christ, but they just deceive the people.

In Matthew 7 we find an important instruction of our Lord about the false prophets, which we have to consider as complementary to the statement in Mt 24, in order to get a clear picture.

15 Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. 16 You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thorn-bushes or figs from thistles? 17 Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. 18 A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. 19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 Therefore by their fruits you will know them. 21 Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. 22 Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ 23 And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’ (Mt 7:15-23)

At this point we can only touch the most relevant statements of this passage for our theme. The Lord tells us in very explicit terms. here, that although the false prophets appear as born again Christians and have the appearance of godliness and genuineness, but at heart they are not really born again and Satan’s servants.

So we must not be misled by the “sheep’s clothing”, by the pious facade and the deceptive words of those people. This verdict of our Lord, which may surely sound rather “hard” and “unmerciful” for some Christians today, has been confirmed by the judgement of the Apostle Paul about the false prophets, whom he had to face:

For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works. (2Co 11:13-15)

Many statements of the New Testament are in conformity with the testimony, that the false teachers, apostles and prophets are not born again and as Satan’s servants are designated under the judgement of God’s wrath. We find it also expressed in verse 22 - 24. This is also testified by the Apostle Peter about the heretics (2Pe 2:1-22), which is confirmed by the Epistle of Jude (Jud 4-19). The end of the false prophets will be the lake of fire (Rev 19:20: 20:10).

The false prophets are of the world, not from God (1Jn 4:15). They resist the true preachers of Christ and are seeking to keep people away from faith. They are sons of the devil, as we see in the example of the false prophet Bar-Jesus:

Now when they had gone through the island to Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew whose name was Bar-Jesus, who was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, an intelligent man. This man called for Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God. But Elymas the sorcerer (for so his name is translated) withstood them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith. Then Saul, who also is called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him and said, “O full of all deceit and all fraud, you son of the devil, you

enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease perverting the straight ways of the Lord?” (Acts 13:6-10)

The work of the false prophets will be seen by their fruits (verse 16). What is the result of their messages and their work? As we are able to see clearly in the Pentecostal and Charismatic Movement, the fruits of the false prophets of the end-time are evil, perishable fruits: separations, religious deception, ecumenical seduction, corruption of the Gospel, loss of assurance and joy of salvation, blindness and wrong ways that contradict God's Words and dishonour God.

In verse 22 we are shown quite plainly, which are the characteristics of the false prophets in the end-time. They boast to have done three things in the name of Jesus Christ: They have prophesied, they have cast out demons, and have performed many miraculous signs.

When we seriously consider these inspired identification marks of the false prophets and ask ourselves, where do we find such a trend in the Christianity of the end-time which displays these three characteristics? We realise that they are exclusively occurring in this form in the Pentecostal and Charismatic Movement! God's Word warns us clearly enough against the deception - the question is whether we are prepared to listen to these warnings.

We find another warning of false prophets in 1John 4:1-6:

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world. You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. They are of the world. Therefore they speak as of the world, and the world hears them. We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

In this Epistle, which is an equally important letter for the end-time, the Apostle John warns us against the deception through lying prophets in the churches. He points out in particular that it is a demonic “spirit of error” working through the false prophets, which he exposes as the spirit of the Antichrist.

One characteristic of these deceivers is that they disregard and twist the teaching of the Apostles, instead of taking heed to them (verse 6) Vice versa it is necessary to test the false prophets today by judging their messages and their activities on the basis of the sound teaching of the Apostles.

In view of the deceptive trend of the Gnosis [particular knowledge] prevalent in his days, John mentions a very special distinguishing characteristic: the Gnostics denied that Jesus Christ was truly man and truly God. That does not mean that false prophet who pays a lip service to the Biblical teaching about the divinity and incarnation of Christ might not be a false prophet. We are concerned about the content of the spirit messages, and the confession of the devil's tools who disguise themselves behind an orthodox cloak.

In relation to 1John 4 we want to mention some further references which refer to false prophets indirectly. There is first of all to emphasise 1Timothy 4, where we find an explicit warning that the false prophets and teachers of the end-time are tools of misleading demonic spirits:

Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, peaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron. (1Tim 4:1-2)

We notice here, too, that the fundamental warning is connected with an example that had developed shortly after the time of the Apostles, namely the development of the heresies of the Roman Catholic Church. Yet this principle applies to every kind of end time deception. Similarly this applies to the warning of the end time deception, which we find in 2Co 11:3-4, where all deceivers (the false prophets, teachers and apostles) are likewise characterized by their works, too:

But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ [or, towards Christ]. For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted – you have well put up with it! (own translation)

With the false prophecy of the end-time there is another spirit at work, they are referring to another Jesus, who sometimes even appears to the false prophets and speaks through them, and they proclaim another Gospel. The false prophecy is indirectly mentioned in 2Thessalonians 2:1, where Paul warns the Thessalonians, that they may not be troubled by any sort of message by a spirit.

Once again we find an expressive warning referring to the deception by false prophets in the book of Revelation:

Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent. Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds. I will kill her children with death, and all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works. (Rev 2:20-23)

Jezebel is a symbol of the power of end-time deception, which seduces the believers to commit spiritual fornication by having fellowship with demons and committing idolatry. Wherever women appear contrary to God's order as prophetesses and teachers (which is very often the case in the Pentecostal and Charismatic Movement) we have to be particularly watchful, because this is a definite indication of deception.

Finally we want to mention, too, that even during the terrible climax of the antichristian deception there are again both false prophecy and false miraculous signs playing a key role, and that especially a charismatically gifted leader is mentioned in that context, who directly prepares the way for the Antichrist:

Then the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshipped his image. These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone. (Rev 19:20)

Considering the ever increasing power of false prophecy within confessing Christianity, first and foremost triggered off by the leaven-like growth of Charismatic influence, we must always remember that, according to the testimony of the Scripture, false prophecy in connection with delusive miraculous signs constitute the primary means which the Antichrist will employ to deceive the people and subject them under his bondage.

b) False miraculous signs in the end-time

That which applies to the teaching of the New Testament about false prophecy may also be said about signs and miracles in the end-time. Nowhere the Bible mentions any more genuine miraculous signs, whenever it speaks about the church in the end-time; the Bible rather warns us seriously and resolutely against numerous false miraculous signs which will occur during the time short before Christ's return.

We find such prediction first mentioned in the end-time's discourse of the Lord Jesus Christ, where He explicitly warns that such signs will also constitute a danger and deception even for believers: **“For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs [sèmeia] and wonders [terata] to deceive, if possible, even the elect.” (Mt 24,24).**

The Lord emphasizes the fact, that in the eyes of the people these miracles will be apparently powerful and magnificent. He also mentions in Mt 7:22 the miraculous deeds in relation to false

prophecy, and even here he emphasises its significance: the false prophets are boasting that they have performed many miraculous deeds [Greek: *dynameis*].

In the Acts of Apostles we find two warning references that the enemy may use performers of miracles and religious personalities with a fascinating charisma in order to resist the Biblical truth and to keep people away from a genuine conversion. The first example is Simon the sorcerer who had a great influence among the Samaritans:

But there was a certain man called Simon, who previously practised sorcery in the city and astonished the people of Samaria, claiming that he was someone great, to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, "This man is the great power of God." And they heeded him because he had astonished them with his sorceries for a long time. (Acts 8:9-11)

It is obvious that Simon had performed some kind of false signs and had worked miracles through occult powers of sorcery by which he had deceived the pagans. False miraculous signs are in reality a result of occult sorcery and differ from the actions of shamans, spiritualists and spirit healers only by their pious facade behind which they perform their actions. This applies similarly to the false prophet called Bar-Jesus who is mentioned in Acts 13:6-10, whom we have already mentioned earlier on. We find another warning against such people in 2Tim 3:6-8:

For of this sort are those who creep into households and make captives of gullible women loaded down with sins, led away by various lusts, always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. Now as Jannes and Jambres resisted Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, disapproved concerning the faith.

According to Jewish tradition (which here is confirmed authentically) the chief leaders of the sorcerers of Pharaoh were called Jannes and Jambres. They tried to resist Moses before Pharaoh by producing false miraculous signs through their magic skills. False miraculous signs are used by the enemy to annihilate the truth of the Word of God, to hinder its progress - this happens much more in the end-time.

A major warning in the Epistles of the Apostles against false miraculous signs in the end-time is found in 2Thessalonians 2, where they are mentioned in connection with the coming of the Antichrist, who will use such deceptive miracles to a great extent in order to deceive the people:

(...) the coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power [dynameis], signs [sêmeioi], and lying wonders [terata], and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness. (2The 2:9-12)

The same expressions are used here together which we find in Heb 2:4 to indicate the original genuine miraculous signs during the time of the Apostles. In the end-time Satan imitates what God did in the beginning of the church age - and then offers it to the misled Christians of the end-time to represent the "great revival movement"! In that passage we also find the serious statement that these deceitful miraculous signs of the end-time also constitute God's judgement on those people who refused to accept the simple preaching of the divine truth (cf. 2Tim 4:3.4).

We find the third and last warning against false miraculous signs in the book of Revelation, where we are directed straight into the time of the Antichrist as in 2Thessalonians 2. This fact must not mislead anyone to assume that the danger of false miraculous signs may not be present before this climax of deception. In fact, in Mt 24:8 the Lord describes in a remarkable comparison, that the symptoms of the end-time development have the character of uterine contractions; i.e. they appear already over a longer period before the crisis of birth and increase in frequency and intensity, the nearer one is approaching the end.

Thus, we find an increasingly massive deception by false prophets and miraculous signs in today's pre-antichristian age, too, but all that will escalate to horrible climax with appearance of the Antichrist.

Then I saw another beast coming up out of the earth, and he had two horns like a lamb and

spoke like a dragon. And he exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence, and causes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed. He performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men. And he deceives those who dwell on the earth – by those signs which he was granted to do (...) (Re 13:11-14)

Further on this beast is associated with the false prophet, about whom we have read above that he “worked signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshipped his image” (Rev 19:20). About this false prophet we also read in Rev 16:13-14:

And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs coming out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. For they are spirits of demons, performing signs (...)

So in the end-time, we have to reckon with an increasing activity of deceptive miracle workers and false prophets, through whom the demonic powers work in the form of angels of light.

Blessed are the believers who are remaining sober and know that all this cannot come from God, because God has no plan in His history of salvation for such miraculous signs in the end-time! Thus we may know that every prophet and every miracle worker, who appears today claiming to have new revelations from God and allegedly performs divine miraculous signs in order to “confirm” such claims, is a liar and deceiver, whom we certainly must not believe.

Those believers, however, who agree with the teaching according to which there are still prophetic revelations and genuine miraculous signs today, will have a hard time. They are in constant danger to be victims of particularly cunning deceivers, and they are unable to ward off decisively the deceptions of the end-time.

c) Why does God permit false prophets and miraculous signs?

At the end of this section we will briefly answer the question, which has been asked repeatedly by disturbed believers, when they recognise the extent and cunningness of the end-time deception within the church of God: Why does God allow actually such deceptions? Hereby a statement from the Old Testament may help, which gives an exact answer to this question to the people of the Old Testament:

Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it. If there arises among you a prophet or a dreamer of dreams, and he gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder comes to pass, of which he spoke to you, saying, ‘Let us go after other gods’ – which you have not known – ‘and let us serve them,’ you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams, for the LORD your God is testing you to know whether you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. You shall walk after the LORD your God and fear Him, and keep His commandments and obey His voice; you shall serve Him and hold fast to Him. But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has spoken in order to turn you away from the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt and redeemed you from the house of bondage, to entice you from the way in which the LORD your God commanded you to walk. So you shall put away the evil from your midst. (Deut 12:32 - 13:5)

The advance of the end-time deception represents a divine test for all true children of God. By God’s permission the false prophets of the end-time are trying to attract the believers away from the Biblical truth and bring them under the influence of false spirits. With this it is important for all genuine believers to be watchful and simply to hold on to the true Lord Jesus Christ and to keep to His revealed inspired Word of God. The true children of God are called to listen to the voice of the Good Shepherd and to turn away from the attracting voice of the corrupter.

The Lord Jesus is testing our faithfulness and commitment to Him through the false prophets. It is so important in these days that we guard our hearts more than any thing else, take heed to ourselves, watch and pray, so that the adversary cannot attract us away from our Lord. Thus we are enlightened by the word that the Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians in order to warn them against the deception:

For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy; for I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted - you have well put up with it! (2Co 11:2-4 - own transl.)

Our Lord wants that we are discern the deception of the end-time and overcome it; He also wants to give us abundant grace for that, to keep and guide us. Yet the end-time deceptions are a real danger for carnal and self-willed believers, who are disobedient to God's Word. One day some of them will bemoan the severe damage, if they do not take heed to the admonitions and warnings, which the Word of God warmly recommends us again and again. A life of sanctification, of studying the Scriptures and of obedience to God's Word, of love and commitment to the Lord is more than ever important today.

If we consider the serious words in 2Thessalonians 2, we see clearly enough that the pouring out of a seductive spirit, which has marked the beginning of the Pentecostal and Charismatic Movement, is in fact a judgement of God upon Christianity in the end-time, which is more and more characterised by tepidity (a lukewarm attitude), worldliness, disobedience to the Word of God, unbelief and direct apostasy from the faith (cf. Isaiah 29:9-11; 2Chr 18:22; Isaiah 19:14). The success of this movement, the rapid expansion of the leaven of the charismatic false prophecy in almost all groups of formerly Bible-abiding churches is in fact God's judgement.

For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God? (1Pe 4:17)

Our task as believers consists in the ministry of bowing before God and interceding in a priests-like attitude for the true church, so that God may have compassion in order that still many deceived children of God may be helped to walk on the right course and escape the trap of deceptive snares of the wolves, so that the Spirit of God may nevertheless bring about in the church true repentance and revival, quickening and returning to the first love.

7. Keeping the Inspired Word of God - the Way for the Church in the End-Time

It is of essential significance that we may obtain a clearer and deeper understanding God's ways, considering the question we have dealt with here whether God speaks through prophets and miraculous signs even today. Many Christians feel that the teaching about the cessation of divine revelations and miraculous signs as a kind of robbery; they desire to have visible revelations of God's glory still today, they dream of a world wide great revival in which the time of the Apostles will return. They dream of a glorious church triumphing in large scale success, causing the world to lie before her feet.

Yet when we study the teaching of the Scriptures concerning the last period of this age of grace in the whole context, we will then realise that God's Word does not predict any large-scale revival for this "end-time", but rather a large-scale apostasy from the faith, an accelerating increase of lawlessness, occultism, and antichristian misleading.

The church herself suffers under these tendencies, and therefore God's Word describes these last times as "perilous times" for true believers (2Tim 3:1). These are times of deterioration and deception, times of the judgement at God's house, in which the true believers are forming a small minority, being afflicted, mocked at and even persecuted.

In these last days God does not reveal Himself through new apostles and prophets, through spectacular miraculous signs or any sensational "pouring out the Holy Spirit". The Spirit of God was poured out on the church once and for all at the Day of Pentecost. On the other hand the work of the Holy Spirit is being frequently quenched and grieved by the carnal and bad condition of the believers, by disobeying God's Word and conforming to the world.

The faithful remnant of believers that God is still keeping in the end-time is characterised by the fact that although it has only got a small power, but it has kept His Word and not denied His Name. (Rev 3:8) The most important characteristic of genuine believers in our days is the faithful adherence to the inspired Word of God at a time, when the majority of only superficial Christians will turn away from the Holy Scriptures and turn towards the false teachers and prophets of the Antichrist.

The decisive means of grace, which God has given to the church for the perseverance in the trials and battles of these last days, is the Word of God, the Holy Scriptures, which the Apostle Paul has also emphasised:

For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears. So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified. (Acts 20:29-32)

It is our duty to firmly keep to this Word by faith and defend it against the attacks of false teachers and deceivers, against the deprivation of Bible criticism, and against the misleading amendments of the false prophets. We are obliged to live in obedience to this Word, in our daily life, in our churches, and to honour God by faithfully acting upon His Word. This Word we need to proclaim even in these difficult days as the Gospel, as the message of salvation in the power of the Holy Spirit, so that still some individuals may be saved before the day of grace comes to an end and the judgement of God's wrath befalls the godless people.

I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all long suffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfil your ministry. (2Tim 4:1-5)

Epilogue

We have come to the close of our study. Even if the teaching about cessation of the gifts of signs and revelation in the church of the end-time, which is being presented here, does not inevitably and naturally arise from the statements of the Bible, I still believe that it may become a definite conviction to everybody who carefully studies the respective Words of God and considers them before God. This is the very interpretation which best agrees with the general context of the Scriptures and most suitably satisfies the particular statements.

I am convinced that this teaching is important, too, so that the faithful believers in the end-time may obtain an adequate Biblical armour to withstand the deceptions of the false prophets of today and of those in the future. I am afraid that uncertainty concerning this relevant issue may make it difficult to some believers to discern certain subtle false prophets and miracle workers. Therefore I have written this booklet. On the other hand I do not want to quarrel about these questions, but simply testify what in my view the Word of God says about these questions that are so relevant today.

If we explicitly teach that God has taken away the apostolic spiritual gifts of prophecy and miraculous signs, we do not exclude the possibility, that in exceptional cases God may even today speak for instance through dreams or by talking within one's heart to sober and sanctified believers about something concerning their personal guidance, or that in answer to prayer He may work miracles in certain situations.

However, we declare that God does no longer keep the apostolic spiritual gifts of prophecy and miraculous signs operative today, which He had given in an overall measure and widely spread in the early churches, and that we are confronted with a subtle counterfeit of the apostolic spiritual gifts characteristic of the end-time, especially in the form of the Pentecostal and Charismatic movement, realised by the deception of demons, just as it has been predicted.

May the Lord lead us in His truth! May He give us a spiritual attitude according to the example of the Berean believers, who **“searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.”** (Acts 17:11)

About the author

Rudolf Ebertshäuser, born in 1953, had been a Marxist for many years and later on sought to the meaning of life in an alternative lifestyle and esoteric teaching. After his conversion at the age of 30 he came into contact with Charismatic groups and was actively involved in a Charismatic church for 4 years. In 1992 he dissociated himself completely from this movement. In 1995 his book entitled **“The Charismatic Movement in the Light of the Bible”** was published. From 1995 till 2003 he was a co-worker in the revision of the German Schlachter Bible. For a number of years now he is giving lectures about the Charismatic Movement, about the Bible, and about general Biblical themes; moreover he is involved in the ministry of preaching and shepherding in a church which is faithful to the Bible.

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