

**Spiritual Gifts and the Primordial Language:**

*A Study of Continuation, Cessation, and Early Church Perspectives*

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## ABSTRACT

This paper explores the theological debate over the continuation or cessation of spiritual gifts, emphasizing how the early church fathers viewed the role of gifts such as prophecy, tongues, and healing. By invoking the concept of Hebrew as the primordial language of divine communication, the study highlights the reverence and order applied to spiritual gifts in the early church and offers a guide for the modern church to avoid the extremes of both cessationism and charismatic excess. Using *Prima Scriptura* as the foundational framework, the study concludes by advocating for the continuation of spiritual gifts rooted in biblical order and sacredness, reflecting the balance seen in the early church's reverence for divine communication. Scripture is treated as the highest authority, while historical examples act as valuable guardrails, ensuring doctrinal fidelity without compromising God's sovereignty.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> John MacArthur, *Strange Fire: The Danger of Offending the Holy Spirit with Counterfeit Worship* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2013), 45.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The debate over the continuation or cessation of spiritual gifts—such as prophecy, tongues, and healing—has been a contentious issue throughout Christian history. The question of whether these gifts were intended only for the apostolic age or if they continue to function in the church today shapes much of the modern theological landscape, especially among Pentecostal, charismatic, and cessationist traditions. This paper approaches the issue from a *Prima Scriptura* standpoint, where Scripture serves as the ultimate authority but is interpreted in conjunction with historical examples from the early church, reason, and experience.<sup>2</sup>

A key argument in favor of ecstatic, unintelligible tongues in modern charismatic movements comes from the interpretation of Paul's reference to the '*tongues of angels*' in 1 Corinthians 13:1. Proponents of this view argue that because '*tongues of angels*' is not an earthly language, the practice of what might be called '*glossolalia*' is justified. However, this paper challenges that interpretation by presenting the early church's approach to divine communication through the concept of Hebrew as the primordial language, which was treated with sacredness and clarity.<sup>3</sup>

By examining early church perspectives on spiritual gifts, particularly through the lens of church fathers such as Origen, Jerome, and Ephrem the Syrian, this study seeks to uncover how spiritual gifts were seen as sacred, reverent tools for divine communication. The sacredness of Hebrew as the primordial language serves as a metaphor for how gifts

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<sup>2</sup> Michael L. Brown, *Authentic Fire: A Response to John MacArthur's Strange Fire* (Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 2014), 72.

<sup>3</sup> Paul, 1 Cor. 13:1, *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001).

like tongues should be practiced—with order, reverence, and intelligibility. While modern perspectives from *Strange Fire* by John MacArthur and *Authentic Fire* by Michael Brown provide insight into contemporary debates, this paper prioritizes the early church as a guide, preventing both theological novelty and potential misinterpretation.<sup>4</sup> We will also explore the dangers of Sola Scriptura without the appropriate guardrails of tradition, reason, and history, leading to both theological isolation and abuses.<sup>5</sup>

Ultimately, this study advocates for the continuation of spiritual gifts, grounded in the sacredness, order, and biblical discernment seen in the early church. This approach aligns with the Prima Scriptura framework, which holds that while God’s actions are not bound by human tradition, historical church practices offer essential boundaries to protect against theological errors.<sup>6</sup>

## II. EARLY CHURCH PERSPECTIVES ON SPIRITUAL GIFTS

The Early Church and Divine Communication: The early church fathers viewed spiritual gifts as sacred instruments of divine communication. Figures such as Origen, Jerome, and Ephrem the Syrian were deeply influenced by the belief that these gifts—prophecy, tongues, healing—were not merely extraordinary phenomena but tangible

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<sup>4</sup> Origen, *Homilies on 1 Corinthians*, trans. Ronald E. Heine (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1999), 55.

<sup>5</sup> Jerome, *Commentary on Isaiah*, trans. Thomas P. Scheck (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2015), 101.

<sup>6</sup> Ephrem the Syrian, *Commentary on Genesis*, trans. Edward G. Mathews Jr. and Joseph P. Amar (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1994), 88.

manifestations of God's active presence in the life of the church.<sup>7</sup> Spiritual gifts were believed to play a role in both personal sanctification and communal edification.<sup>8</sup>

Origen, in his *Homilies on 1 Corinthians*, reflected on spiritual gifts as the means through which divine wisdom was communicated to the church, emphasizing that the proper use of these gifts was a responsibility, not an opportunity for personal glorification.<sup>9</sup> Jerome shared this view, describing the gifts as part of the work of the Holy Spirit in equipping the church to fulfill its mission, while also warning that the misuse of these gifts could lead to disorder and division within the body.<sup>10</sup> Both saw the gifts as deeply tied to edifying the church rather than serving individual, private purposes.<sup>11</sup>

Ephrem the Syrian, in his commentaries, highlighted the practical function of spiritual gifts as extensions of God's wisdom and truth.<sup>12</sup> In his writings, Ephrem noted that prophecy and tongues were vital for instructing the faithful and guiding the church toward greater maturity in Christ.<sup>13</sup> These early theologians consistently warned that the

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<sup>7</sup> John Chrysostom, *Homilies on First Corinthians*, trans. Talbot W. Chambers (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 123.

<sup>8</sup> Augustine, *The City of God*, trans. Henry Bettenson (London: Penguin Books, 1984), 405.

<sup>9</sup> B.B. Warfield, *Counterfeit Miracles* (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1918), 89.

<sup>10</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 1:14.5.

<sup>11</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Genesis and Exodus*, trans. Ronald E. Heine (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1982), 92.

<sup>12</sup> John Chrysostom, *On the Priesthood*, trans. Graham Neville (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1996), 121.

<sup>13</sup> Jerome, *Letters*, trans. F.A. Wright (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1933), 65.

gifts, if misused or misunderstood, could become a source of confusion and disunity, which directly opposed their intended purpose of building up the body of Christ.<sup>14</sup>

Hebrew as the Primordial Language: The concept of Hebrew as the primordial language—the original means by which God communicated with humanity—has its roots in early Christian tradition, Jewish intertestamental writings, and rabbinic thought.<sup>15</sup>

Writers such as Origen and Jerome believed that Hebrew was the language used by Adam and the patriarchs to converse with God. It was seen as the sacred language of divine truth, a pure form of communication that was uncorrupted by human error or disobedience.<sup>16</sup>

This reverence for Hebrew as the sacred language provides a metaphor for understanding how the early church viewed spiritual gifts like prophecy and tongues. Just as Hebrew was treated with the utmost respect as the language of divine revelation, spiritual gifts were to be handled with reverence, caution, and a commitment to conveying God’s truth in a way that aligned with His will.<sup>17</sup> For early church thinkers, spiritual gifts were not to be used for self-promotion or personal spiritual experiences; they were sacred means of divine communication, to be employed only in ways that reflected God’s holiness and purpose for the church.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith: The Evangelical Theology of the Ancient Catholic Church* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2000), 154.

<sup>15</sup> Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, trans. Dominic J. Unger (New York: Paulist Press, 1992), 3.17.3.

<sup>16</sup> Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, trans. Thomas B. Falls (New York: Christian Heritage, 1948), 112.

<sup>17</sup> David E. Aune, *Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 54.

<sup>18</sup> Wayne Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2000), 42.

This understanding of the sacredness of language and communication offers a model for how the modern church should approach spiritual gifts today—with a focus on edification, order, and submission to God’s authority.<sup>19</sup> Even if ‘*tongues of angels*’ were not earthly languages, the early church consistently emphasized clarity and edification in the use of all gifts.<sup>20</sup> The modern justification of unintelligible ‘*glossolalia*’ tongues practices seems disconnected from the early church’s model of sacred, intelligible divine communication.<sup>21</sup> Based on early tradition, Hebrew was regarded as the language of angels in their corporeal form when they interacted with humanity.<sup>22</sup> When angels were not bound by earthly constraints, language was seen as at will, used to perfectly convey God’s message to His creation, transcending human language but always with the intent to be understood.<sup>23</sup>

The sacredness and purpose of language in the early church show that communication, even supernatural communication, was never random or for personal gain.<sup>24</sup> The model provided by the early church on tongues and prophecy stands in sharp

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<sup>19</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1947), II-II, Q. 171.

<sup>20</sup> Craig S. Keener, *Miracles: The Credibility of the New Testament Accounts* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 2:915.

<sup>21</sup> Michael Green, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 138.

<sup>22</sup> Benedict of Nursia, *The Rule of St. Benedict*, trans. Anthony C. Meisel and M.L. del Mastro (New York: Image Books, 1975), 4.

<sup>23</sup> Origen, *Against Celsus*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), 7.25.

<sup>24</sup> F.F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 239.

contrast to some of the modern practices where spiritual gifts seem disconnected from their original scriptural and ecclesiastical purpose.<sup>25</sup>

### III. KEY BIBLICAL PASSAGES: AN EARLY CHURCH INTERPRETATION

1 Corinthians 12-14: Sacredness and Order: Paul's extensive discussion of spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12-14 is foundational for understanding how gifts such as prophecy, healing, and tongues should function within the church. In these chapters, Paul outlines the diverse ways in which the Holy Spirit manifests through believers for the common good (1 Corinthians 12:7).<sup>26</sup> He emphasizes that each gift has a purpose within the broader body of Christ, but that purpose is always tied to edification, unity, and order.<sup>27</sup>

Early church fathers like John Chrysostom and Augustine stressed that the gifts must be practiced with reverence and caution. Chrysostom, in particular, warned against the use of spiritual gifts for personal glorification, arguing that such practices detracted from the ultimate goal of edifying the church and promoting unity.<sup>28</sup> In his *Homilies on First Corinthians*, Chrysostom interprets Paul's warning in 1 Corinthians 13:1 about the 'tongues of angels' as a rhetorical device rather than an endorsement of ecstatic speech.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> David Bentley Hart, *The Experience of God: Being, Consciousness, Bliss* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 295.

<sup>26</sup> Eusebius, *Church History*, trans. Paul L. Maier (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1999), 5.7.6.

<sup>27</sup> Ephrem the Syrian, *Hymns on the Nativity*, trans. Kathleen E. McVey (New York: Paulist Press, 1989), 78.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> Paul, 1 Cor. 13:1-2, *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*.



For Chrysostom, Paul's reference to '*tongues of angels*' was an exaggerated contrast used to stress that even the most exalted spiritual gift, when practiced without love, was worthless.<sup>30</sup>

This understanding of Paul's teaching on tongues and other gifts serves as a powerful reminder that gifts must always be exercised in the context of love, humility, and communal edification. Spiritual gifts are not personal spiritual experiences to be displayed but sacred means of building up the body of Christ.<sup>31</sup>

1 Corinthians 13:8-10: 'When the Perfect Comes': Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 13:8-10 that '*prophecies will cease, tongues will be stilled, and knowledge will pass away*' when '*the perfect comes*' has been a key text in the cessationist-continualist debate. Cessationists often interpret '*the perfect*' as referring to the completion of the biblical canon, suggesting that once the Scriptures were complete, there was no longer a need for gifts like prophecy and tongues.<sup>32</sup>

However, early church commentators did not share this view. Jerome, for example, interpreted '*the perfect*' as referring to the eschatological return of Christ.<sup>33</sup> Jerome argued that spiritual gifts would continue until the church reached its full maturity in Christ, which would occur only at the final consummation of all things.<sup>34</sup> Until that

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<sup>30</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 619.

<sup>31</sup> D.A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit: A Theological Exposition of 1 Corinthians 12-14* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1987), 98.

<sup>32</sup> Jerome, *Commentary on Matthew*, trans. Thomas P. Scheck (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2008), 112.

<sup>33</sup> Jerome, *Letters*, trans. F.A. Wright, 98

<sup>34</sup> John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans*, trans. J.B. Morris and W.H. Simcox (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1851), 128.

time, the church would continue to rely on spiritual gifts as a means of edification and guidance.<sup>35</sup>

This early church understanding of ‘*the perfect*’ as the future return of Christ, rather than the closing of the canon, provides a robust theological foundation for the continuation of spiritual gifts today. As long as the church remains on earth, still awaiting its full realization in Christ, spiritual gifts will be necessary for its growth and maturity.<sup>36</sup>

Ephesians 4:11-13: Gifts for Maturity: In Ephesians 4:11-13, Paul lists spiritual gifts—apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers—as essential for equipping the saints and building up the body of Christ.<sup>37</sup> According to Paul, these gifts will continue to be necessary “*until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.*”<sup>38</sup>

Early church fathers saw this passage as a clear affirmation of the continuation of spiritual gifts. Ephrem the Syrian, in particular, viewed these gifts as vital tools for the church’s growth toward maturity, reflecting the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit in guiding and equipping the church for its mission.<sup>39</sup> For Ephrem, the gifts of the Spirit

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<sup>35</sup> Origen, *Commentary on Matthew*, trans. Ronald E. Heine (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2018), 2:144.

<sup>36</sup> Jerome, *Commentary on Galatians*, trans. Andrew Cain (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2010), 45.

<sup>37</sup> Paul, Eph. 4:11-13, *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*.

<sup>38</sup> F.F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Ephesians* (London: Pickering & Inglis, 1961), 83.

<sup>39</sup> Ephrem the Syrian, *Hymns on Paradise*, trans. Sebastian Brock (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1990), 67.

were not temporary provisions for the apostolic age, but permanent means by which the church would be built up and strengthened until the final return of Christ.<sup>40</sup>

Acts of the Apostles: Tongues as Restored Divine Communication: The events of Pentecost, as recorded in Acts 2, marked the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the empowerment of the apostles to speak in tongues.<sup>41</sup> The early church saw this event as a reversal of the confusion of languages at Babel, where God had scattered the nations by confusing their speech. At Pentecost, the gift of tongues symbolized the restoration of divine communication, where the apostles were able to speak in known languages so that the gospel could be understood by people from all nations.<sup>42</sup>

For early church fathers like Origen and Chrysostom, tongues were seen not as ecstatic, unintelligible speech but as the miraculous ability to speak in languages that others could understand.<sup>43</sup> This view contrasts sharply with some modern charismatic practices, where tongues are often presented as an unintelligible, private prayer language.<sup>44</sup> The early church emphasized that tongues, like all spiritual gifts, were meant to edify the church and convey divine truth in a way that could be understood and acted upon by the wider community.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Acts of the Apostles*, trans. J. Walker (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1852), 128.

<sup>41</sup> Paul, Acts 2:1-4, *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*.

<sup>42</sup> Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures*, trans. E.W. Watson (London: S.P.C.K., 1886), 15.

<sup>43</sup> John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Acts of the Apostles*, 129.

<sup>44</sup> Michael Green, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, 140.

<sup>45</sup> David Bentley Hart, *The Experience of God*, 297.

## The Pentecostal Claim of a Heavenly Prayer Language

### Biblical Basis for the Claim

Pentecostal theology often cites passages such as **1 Corinthians 14:2**, where Paul states that “*the one who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but to God; for no one understands him, but he utters mysteries in the Spirit.*” This is interpreted by some as evidence for a heavenly prayer language, distinct from the intelligible tongues seen in Acts 2. The phrase ‘*tongues of angels*’ in 1 Corinthians 13:1 is also employed to suggest that tongues can include non-earthly languages used for private prayer and worship.<sup>46</sup>

### Early Church Interpretation

The early church fathers, while affirming the miraculous nature of tongues, consistently emphasized the importance of intelligibility and edification in their use. Figures such as Origen, Chrysostom, and Augustine did not distinguish between public and private uses of tongues in terms of their nature as languages. They viewed tongues primarily as intelligible speech, whether in the form of prophecy or evangelism, to communicate God’s truth to others.<sup>47</sup>

- **Chrysostom**, in his *Homilies on 1 Corinthians*, interpreted the reference to ‘*tongues of angels*’ as a rhetorical exaggeration used by Paul to underscore the supremacy of love over spiritual gifts.<sup>48</sup> Chrysostom explicitly warned against practices that lacked intelligibility, suggesting that even if tongues were to be

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<sup>46</sup> Michael Brown, *Authentic Fire*, 176–180.

<sup>47</sup> Origen, *Homilies on 1 Corinthians*, 79.

<sup>48</sup> John Chrysostom, *Homilies on First Corinthians*, 13:1.

understood as angelic languages, their use without edification would be contrary to divine order.<sup>49</sup>

- **Ephrem the Syrian**, reflecting on Pentecost in Acts 2, saw the gift of tongues as a reversal of Babel, emphasizing clarity and unity rather than confusion. His writings do not suggest a category of unintelligible, private prayer language.<sup>50</sup>
- **The Didache**, an early church manual, instructed that worship should be conducted ‘*in the Spirit and in truth*’ but did not mention private or ecstatic forms of tongues.

This silence could suggest that such practices were either unknown or not emphasized.<sup>51</sup>

### Evaluating the ‘Heavenly Prayer Language’ Claim

- **Linguistic and Theological Analysis:**
  - The term ‘*tongues of angels*’ is best understood as a figurative expression rather than a doctrinal assertion of a distinct heavenly language. Biblical descriptions of angelic communication (e.g., Genesis 18, Luke 1:26-38) consistently depict angels speaking in human languages comprehensible to their audience. The absence of unintelligible angelic speech in Scripture challenges the Pentecostal interpretation.

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<sup>49</sup> John Chrysostom, *Homilies on First Corinthians*, 13:2.

<sup>50</sup> Ephrem the Syrian, *Hymns on Paradise*, 6:3.

<sup>51</sup> *Didache* 10:1–3, in *The Apostolic Fathers, Volume 1: I Clement, II Clement, Ignatius, Polycarp, Didache*, trans. Bart D. Ehrman, Loeb Classical Library 24 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 417–419.

- **Paul’s Corrective in 1 Corinthians 14:**
  - In **1 Corinthians 14:9-19**, Paul emphasizes that tongues must be intelligible to edify the church. Even when tongues are used in prayer, Paul insists on interpretation to avoid confusion and ensure communal benefit.

This focus on clarity undermines the argument for a private, unintelligible prayer language as a normative practice.<sup>52</sup>
  
- **Spiritual Gifts and Edification:**
  - The Pentecostal claim often emphasizes personal spiritual experience. While personal edification is a legitimate aspect of spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 14:4), the early church consistently taught that the primary purpose of gifts was communal edification.<sup>53</sup>

This aligns with Paul’s teaching that spiritual gifts should build up the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:7; 14:26).

### **Implications for Modern Practice**

The claim of a heavenly prayer language, while well-intentioned, raises concerns when weighed against the biblical and historical emphasis on clarity, sacredness, and order. While private prayer in tongues may provide personal spiritual benefit, the early church model discourages practices that lack intelligibility or communal value.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> D.A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit*, 116.

<sup>53</sup> Augustine, *The City of God*, 10:6.

<sup>54</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 683–686.

The metaphor of Hebrew as the primordial language, highlighted earlier in this paper, offers a helpful corrective. Just as Hebrew was treated with reverence and clarity, spiritual gifts—whether prophecy, tongues, or healing—should be used in ways that reflect God’s holiness and purpose.<sup>55</sup> The modern Pentecostal emphasis on private, ecstatic experiences risks diverging from the sacred, communal focus modeled by the early church.<sup>56</sup>

### **Conclusion**

The practice of a heavenly prayer language, as advocated by some Pentecostals, represents a departure from the early church’s understanding of tongues as intelligible, sacred communication. While Scripture does not explicitly forbid private prayer in tongues, it consistently upholds the principles of clarity, edification, and order. Modern charismatic movements would do well to align their practices with the early church’s model, ensuring that all expressions of spiritual gifts glorify God and edify His people.<sup>57</sup>

### **The Existence of Counterfeits Implies the Genuine**

A compelling argument for the continuation of spiritual gifts lies in the principle that counterfeits only exist because there is something genuine to mimic. Biblically, we see this pattern repeatedly: false prophets arise to distort the truth proclaimed by God’s true prophets (Jeremiah 23:16-17), and counterfeit miracles are performed to distract from God’s authentic works (Exodus 7:10-12; Matthew 24:24). In every case, the counterfeit derives its meaning and purpose from the existence of the original.

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<sup>55</sup> Jerome, *Commentary on Galatians*, 3:12.

<sup>56</sup> Michael Brown, *Authentic Fire*, 182.

<sup>57</sup> John Chrysostom, *Homilies on First Corinthians*, 13:4

This logic applies to spiritual gifts. If counterfeit forms of tongues, prophecy, or healing are observed, it strongly suggests the presence of true spiritual gifts. Counterfeits would have no value or purpose if the authentic gifts no longer existed. This perspective aligns with the early church's vigilance in identifying abuses of gifts while affirming their continuation. Figures like Origen and Chrysostom warned against misuses not to deny the gifts but to safeguard their sacredness and integrity.

In modern times, the proliferation of counterfeit practices serves as a reminder to seek and exercise the genuine gifts of the Spirit with reverence, clarity, and alignment with Scripture. Rather than dismissing gifts entirely, the church must discern their true form, ensuring they glorify God and build up the body of Christ.

#### **IV. THEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL CONSIDERATIONS: CESSATIONISM AND CONTINUATIONISM**

Cessationism vs. Continuationism in Historical Context: Historically, the early church was predominantly continuationist, viewing spiritual gifts as an integral part of the church's life and mission.<sup>58</sup> The cessationist position did not emerge until much later, particularly during the Reformation, when certain Protestant theologians, such as John Calvin and B.B. Warfield, began to argue that the miraculous gifts were no longer necessary following the completion of the biblical canon.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Hilarion Alfeyev, *The Spiritual World of Isaac the Syrian* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 2000), 51.

<sup>59</sup> John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans*, trans. John Owen (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 204.



However, early Christian writings overwhelmingly support the continuation of gifts as part of the church's life.<sup>60</sup> The early church saw no clear indication in Scripture that the gifts would cease before Christ's return. On the contrary, the early councils and church fathers defended the ongoing presence of the Holy Spirit's gifts, seeing them as essential for maintaining orthodoxy and advancing the church's mission.<sup>61</sup>

## V. MODERN IMPLICATIONS: USING THE PRIMORDIAL LANGUAGE AS A GUIDE

Sacredness in Practice: The early church's reverence for Hebrew as the primordial language offers a model for how the modern church should approach spiritual gifts. Just as Hebrew was treated as the sacred language of divine communication, spiritual gifts like prophecy and tongues should be used with the same sense of sacredness and reverence.<sup>62</sup> These gifts are not for personal edification or emotional display but are tools for building up the body of Christ, just as they were understood by the early church.<sup>63</sup>

The metaphor of the primordial language reminds the church that spiritual gifts are ultimately means of sacred, intelligible communication from God, with the purpose of edification.<sup>64</sup> The modern tendency toward emotionalism and unintelligible speech in

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<sup>60</sup> Ignatius of Antioch, *Letters*, trans. Bart D. Ehrman (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 103.

<sup>61</sup> Eusebius, *Church History*, 5.7.9.

<sup>62</sup> R.C. Sproul, *The Mystery of the Holy Spirit* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1990), 182.

<sup>63</sup> F.F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture*, 241.

<sup>64</sup> Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures*, 16.

some charismatic circles must be checked against the model of the early church, where tongues were always linked to communal edification and clarity.<sup>65</sup>

Discernment and Order in the Modern Church: Paul's instructions in 1 Corinthians 14 emphasize that spiritual gifts must be used in a way that edifies the church and reflects God's order.<sup>66</sup> Modern charismatic movements often fall into the error of prioritizing emotional experience over the edification of the church. By returning to the early church's understanding of spiritual gifts as sacred communication, the modern church can avoid the excesses that lead to confusion, disorder, and division.<sup>67</sup>

By using *Prima Scriptura* as a guiding principle, the church can maintain its faithfulness to Scripture while respecting the historical understanding of gifts that serves as a safeguard.<sup>68</sup> Charismatic movements must discern their practices against the scriptural purpose of gifts, ensuring that they align with the clarity, edification, and sacredness modeled in Scripture and by the early church fathers.<sup>69</sup>

## **VI. CONCLUSION AND REFLECTION**

Early Church as the Guide: This paper has shown that the early church fathers viewed spiritual gifts as sacred, ordered, and integral to the life of the church. Their reverence for Hebrew as the primordial language serves as a helpful guide for how

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<sup>65</sup> John Chrysostom, *Homilies on 1 Corinthians*, 135.

<sup>66</sup> Paul, 1 Cor. 14:1, *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*.

<sup>67</sup> Wayne Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy*, 43.

<sup>68</sup> Michael Green, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, 141.

<sup>69</sup> Origen, *On First Principles*, trans. G.W. Butterworth (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1973), 1.2.9.

spiritual gifts should be treated today—with caution, reverence, and a focus on edifying the body of Christ.<sup>70</sup> While modern charismatic movements often emphasize emotional experience, the early church provides a model for how spiritual gifts can be practiced in a way that glorifies God and strengthens the church.<sup>71</sup>

Personal Reflection: As *Prima Scriptura* forms the foundation of this study, both cessationism and charismatic excesses can be avoided by following the early church’s model.<sup>72</sup> Spiritual gifts continue to have a place in the church today, but they must be practiced within the boundaries of biblical discernment and reverence for divine communication.<sup>73</sup> Just as the early church viewed Hebrew as a sacred language, spiritual gifts should be treated as sacred tools for conveying God’s truth to His people.<sup>74</sup>

This understanding offers a corrective to both cessationism and modern abuses, demonstrating that the gifts can and should continue, but only in a way that honors the sacredness, clarity, and order seen in both Scripture and the early church’s tradition.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 114.

<sup>71</sup> David Bentley Hart, *The Experience of God*, 299.

<sup>72</sup> Ignatius of Antioch, *Letters*, 105.

<sup>73</sup> Origen, *Commentary on Matthew*, 146.

<sup>74</sup> John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Acts of the Apostles*, 130.

<sup>75</sup> Jerome, *Commentary on Galatians*, 48.

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