

The Gift of Prophecy

Recap—Supernatural—Gift of Prophecy—Prayer

A Definition of the Gifts:

- Any ability that is **given by** and **empowered by** the Holy Spirit and used in any ministry of the church¹
- Supernatural enabling to engage in the mission of Christ (lists not exhaustive. Cf. Intercession/worship leading)

The Purpose of the Gifts

- To build up, strengthen, enable and comfort the church in being faithful to Christ and His mission until He returns

Key text is 1 Corinthians 12-14

- Paul mentions several gifts in these chapters (**1 Cor 12:4-11**)
- Corrects the church in Corinth's abuse of the gifts—they were out of order; selfish ambition; wrong motives; pride
- A few of the ways he tries to them to correct them:
 1. God's gifts are designed to make sure we all **need each other**—have to depend on one another—within the church (**1 Cor 12:12-26**)
 2. God's gifts **don't mean much** unless they are done in the context of and with the goal of love (**1 Cor 13:1-3**)
 3. God's gifts are to be **desired** (**1 Cor 14:1**)
 - This last point is interesting—it is not that the answer to the abuse in the church in Corinth was to decrease their use. He does not tell them to do the gifts less—but to do them better (want even more)

There is the verse that kind of frames why we are talking about the gift of prophecy

- 1 Corinthians 14:1 (NLT)
Let love be your highest goal! But you should also desire the special abilities the Spirit gives—especially the ability to prophecy.

Why does Paul want the church to **especially desire** the spiritual gift of prophecy?

- 1 Corinthians 14:12
Since you are so eager to have the special abilities the Spirit gives, seek those that will strengthen the whole church.
- 1 Corinthians 12:7
A spiritual gift is given to each of us so we can help each other. (Or for the common good in NASB)
- **Prophecy has the tremendous potential for these things**—common good; helpful; strengthen whole church
- Therefore in 1 Corinthians 12:31+ it is referred to as one of the “greater” or “most helpful”
(...earnestly desire the greater gifts.)
- 1 Corinthians 14:5
I wish you could all speak in tongues, but even more I wish you could all prophesy. For prophecy is greater than speaking in tongues, unless someone interprets what you are saying so that the whole church will be strengthened.
- Nothing is more **potent in giving us a sense** that **truly God is with us** (Cf. 1 Cor 14:25) = **strength!**

Therefore Paul wished that everyone could prophesy

- Technically, everyone could
- But ultimately, only those that the Spirit enables to do so will
- **1 Corinthians 12:11**
- The Spirit is sovereign in what gifts He gives to whom (everyone has gifts), and what gifts He does not give—but **we can and should ask for certain gifts!**
- We are told to want and ask for the gift of **prophecy especially** (**14:1**)

¹ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI, 1994), 1016.

The Gift of Prophecy (its definition, purpose and practice)

Definition: The human reporting of divine revelation. Speaking forth in merely human words something that God has spontaneously brought to mind²

- It may be about the present, past or future
- God addressing what has happened, is happening or will happen (done, doing or did)
- Involves receiving revelation and faithfully reporting that to others

Purpose: To encourage, build up, comfort and strengthen God's people in His loving care, sovereignty and proximity

- 1 Corinthians 14:3
One who prophesies **strengthens others, encourages them, and comforts them.**
- One of the ladies in our church that I would call a prophetess says:
The Gift of Prophecy is ALWAYS an opportunity to share with someone the LOVE of GOD. Whenever I receive something that I discern the Lord wants me to share, I am learning that if it is not shared **to reveal the Love of the Father** for that individual then problems occur! Even when a word is a correction or a warning, it is given because God loves them and wants His fullness to be worked in them or through them. Often He wants to give them hope and have their faith increased to believe in Him. It's relational between the Father and the individual. It should always draw them closer...
 - Just like we talked with the Spirit leading us—it is a **love thing** and a **glory thing**
 - It should reveal the Father's love and bring glory to Jesus Christ
- This may happen through a **timely** word
 - Zoe's Text
 - Isaiah 4:10
Do not fear, for **I am with you**; Do not anxiously look about you, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, surely I will help you...
 - A verse or passage
- This may happen through an **encouraging** word
 - "One Saturday morning I saw you holding a budding almond branch in your hands and the Lord was saying He was making you and your ministry very, very fruitful. I think that's the only Saturday morning I've ever called you. You picked up and were amazed, partly because you and **Kate** were sitting down and eating almonds right then." –A friend, intercessor, spiritual mother at Reality
 - **Cool, little, meaningful things (show's the kindness and nearness of God)**
 - A vision with scriptural content
 - In the Old Testament, the almond was a symbol of watchfulness and promise, due to its early flowering, symbolizing God's sudden or **rapid blessings** or punishment upon His people
- This may happen by revealing the **future**
 - A pastor to pastors...
 - Did **not make sense** for years but would bring amazing encouragement and confirmation at certain times... still does and it has been nearly 20 years!
 - Not for me to go after, but to remind me that God is doing it—keep eyes on Him
- This may happen through **warning or rebuke that helps us**
 - Before the launch of one of our campuses: "Your heart is not in it—trouble doing the hard things"
 - I had to search my heart and confess and repent and get help (= **strength**)
 - Revealed: I was on the brink of walking away from ministry and the life I knew (they came and found me)
 - A **prophetic leading** for them to help (a **warning about me** more than to me)

² Sam Storms, *The Beginner's Guide to Spiritual Gifts* (Ventura, Ca: Regal, 2012), 110.

- This may come as a **clue to reveal and confront** the opposing work of the enemy
 - A season of witchcraft at Reality Carp (attending; pentagram; physical affliction)
 - Was unaware that the affliction was witchcraft
 - A friend had a vision of me and the other pastors with our hands lifted in authority praying against it (a prophetic lead)
 - When we did that the work of the witchcraft was broken!

Lots of ways that the gift of prophecy may play out in our lives (**indispensible**)

- This kind of stuff is all over the bible—because we are shaped by Scripture, we cannot imagine life without it!

Practice

The NT gift of prophecy is different from the OT office of prophet

OT prophets spoke the very words of God and as such had absolute authority in what they said

- To disobey a OT prophet was to disobey God
- As such, they had tremendous responsibility. When they were wrong, they were held accountable with their lives
- Their words became Scripture (**Cf. NT Apostles**; see: 1 Thess. 2:13; 4:8, 15; 2 Thess. 3:6)

The NT *gift of prophecy* is not the same

- We now have the completed Bible and it holds absolute authority for what God speaks
 - To disobey Scripture is to disobey God
- Since we have completed Scripture, the NT gift of prophecy **is not** the reporting of the very words of God
- Rather, it is reporting in merely human words something that God has brought to mind

Much of what we learned the last two weeks in talking about *Being Led by the Spirit* applies to the gift of prophecy

- Because it works in much the same way—hearing from God in a prophetic manner
- It could be a voice, a dream, a vision, a thought, an impression, a sign, a passage in Scripture, a sense
- This kind of stuff is all over the bible

Two things must be present for the *gift of prophecy* to be happening

- 1. Revelation from God
- 2. Reporting to others

Because of the nature of it, it **requires interpretation/translation** by the one receiving the revelation

- And so in the reporting **there can be error**—either in **what we think it means** or the **words we use** to report it

An example: **Acts 21:4, 10-14**

- What is happening here?
 - Paul received a prophecy that if he went to Jerusalem he would suffer persecution
 - He decided to go anyway—why?
 - **1 Corinthians 14:29** (judge or evaluate)
 - Paul judged the **content** of the prophecy to be right (**what would happen**), but the **interpretation** to be wrong (**what he should do**)
 - Those urging Paul not to go to Jerusalem had received revelation of the persecution awaiting him and were correct in reporting that (Agabus), **but wrong in** their interpretation/application/implications (that he should not go)
 - Perhaps the reporting or interpretation should have been: **God is revealing to you that hard times are coming, but He is with you and will sustain you through them—that He loves you and cares for you and is using you in amazing ways**
 - **NT prophecy is not the very words of God but rather reporting in merely human words something God brings to mind**

For this reason when exercising the NT gift of prophecy we should never say, “**Thus saith the Lord**”

- Or anything else that connotes that sort of **absolute, infallible authority**
- Rather we should say things like: “**I think the Lord is showing me that...**” or “**I think the Lord is indicating that...**” or “**It seems that the Lord is putting on my heart a concern that...**”

For this reason: Sometimes we just get it wrong—and there can be a lot at stake

- We had a few people tell us, “**God has shown me that Daisy will not die**”

Other times, it is **all in the delivery** and the words chosen

- That lady 12 years ago: Something very bad will happen to your child (delivered with sadness)
- It almost ruined me (Nemo)
- The lady was right in the revelation she received—very wrong in the reporting of it
- We are never called to create fear in other believers—wrong translation
- How you say it (report revelation) is everything!
- Could have said: **I think God wants to encourage you that He knows everything that is going to happen, and even when hard times come, He will be with you to strengthen you. In everything you will encounter with your child remember that He is very near you and when you turn to Him He is available for everything you need**
- Contrast that to the time God gave someone the same revelation and she handled it correctly:
- “**I remember writing out a prophecy for Kate that she could be sure of God wanting her to stay home and pour into her kids rather than be in full-time women's ministry. The prophecy was that something would happen in Isaiah's life when he was 9 years old (little sister's cancer—this was years before) and everything she had poured into him would help him at that point in his life.**” –A friend, intercessor, spiritual mother at Reality

Tremendous responsibility

- Cf. The authority of a preacher

Therefore there is tremendous accountability—we must **judge or evaluate prophecies** given to us

- 1 Corinthians 14:29 (congregational setting—happens way less)
Let two or three people prophesy, and let the others evaluate what is said. (“**pass judgment**” in the NASB)
- “**Paul had in his mind the kind of evaluation whereby each person would ‘weigh what is said’ in his or her own mind, accepting some of the prophecy as good and helpful and rejecting some of it as erroneous or misleading.**”-Grudem³ (**a great responsibility in and of itself—all this keep us prayerful and dependent**)
- **Evaluating the prophecies**—not the **prophets**
 - We are not judging the **messenger** to be true or false (Cf. OT) but the **message** (and there may be true elements and false)
 - Because the authority is not with the prophet (as in the OT) but in Scripture
 - The idea is “**making distinctions**” and “**carefully evaluating**” the **content** and **reporting**
- The same **5 points of accountability** that we spoke of last week for **when we claim to be led by the Lord** apply to the use of prophecy
 - **We, as the church, are accountable to one another in the area of prophecy for:**
 - Our motives
 - Our direction
 - Our fruit
 - Our faithfulness to Scripture
 - Our relationships with one another (relational currency) (developing trust and reputation) (consistently wrong?)

³ Wayne Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today* (Wheaton Ill: Crossway, 2000), 57.

What should we do when we believe we have received revelation from God?

- E.g. Something takes the form of words, thoughts, or mental pictures and suddenly impresses themselves forcefully on the mind, heart or spirit
 - Pray about it—for clarity and confirmation (is this me or God?)
 - Rejoice over it—treasure God speaking to you!
 - Go slow—God is never in a hurry (He is on the throne!)
 - Know the tendency of your flesh (to hold back or rush forward)
 - Share with others with similar gifting or spiritual authority to see if there is a sense of confirmation
 - Be willing to submit to mentors and church leaders
 - Practice first—write them down and record where you were right and wrong
 - Do this with your community—trusted friends and mentors
 - Pray about what to do with it (Cf. Intercession)

Prophecy is closely linked to and a key part of intercession

- Sometimes you will receive a prophetic revelation from God—but it is not to be reported at all, it is for the purposes of prayer
- **The Israel incident...**

How do we approach the delivery or reporting of a prophecy?

- Try to be faithful with the content
- Do not try to interpret it unless God clearly shows you what it means
- Be clear with what is clear and be humble with what is not (say, “I do not know”)
- Choose your words carefully to reflect the Gospel and the love of the Father
- Deliver in a way that increases faith in God and reassures the believer of His loving care, proximity and sovereignty
- Make sure your heart is clean toward the person you are giving it to (context of love)
- Deliver it and leave it with the person and the Lord—you have done your job (this requires faith)

What do we do when we are given a prophecy from another person?

- Do not despise it and so insult the Holy Spirit (Cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:20)
- First **evaluate** it (receive the good—discard the bad)
- Ask the Lord to show you if it is from Him, what it means and what to do about it
- Rejoice over it—treasure the fact that God is speaking to you
- Look for confirmation (in lots of ways)
- Remember, God knows how to communicate to you—do you know how to listen?
- Keep your attention and heart focused on Jesus—not the prophecy
- If it is God, He will bring it to pass

All of this needs to be practiced and grown in

- **The gifts are not given in their fully matured state—we are not fully matured in our use of them**
 - They need to be developed
 - Through **practice, prayer** and **critique**
 - Cf. Teaching

Where do we start?

- 1. Ask for it (to not is to disobey)
- 2. Be prayed for (impartation)
- 3. Have faith (Joel 2:28)

I will pour out my Spirit upon all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy. Your old men will dream dreams, and your young men will see visions.

I CAN NOT IMAGINE MY LIFE WITHOUT PROPHECY

GOD HAS USED IT SO TREMENDOUSLY FOR SO MANY YEARS