

Title: So, What is the Gift of Prophecy?

Text: 1 Corinthians 14.1-5

Theme: The gift of prophecy

Series: 1 Corinthians #78

Prop Stmt. The gift of prophecy is a speaking gift given to benefit the church become a more accurate reflection of the King and His Kingdom.

Read Text: 1 Corinthians 14.1-5

The church is the means that God has established to bring honor to Himself by spreading the fame and knowledge of His Son. We spread the fame and the knowledge of Christ in and to this world by both the message of Christ we proclaim and the message of Christ that we live.

Your part in the church is not to inflate the ego of the pastor so he can derive some selfish satisfaction over accomplishing certain goals. No, God designed you to be part of the church in order to spread the word about the King and the Kingdom. This is why you exist. You are here on this earth to glorify God by being a vital part of the church in order to spread the word about the King and His Kingdom. Your part is needed to help the church carry out her divine mission. We are the present form of the Kingdom that will come. We live now as a preview, a movie trailer, a taste of what life will be like then.

Worship now is absolute priority because worship then is ultimate experiential fulfillment of our entire reason for being. That is why true worship is so gloriously satisfying and critically important and sacred. If you only have the energy and time to do one thing in the course of a week, it should be gathering with your church family when they assemble as a church in order to worship. What else could you possibly do that would be a consistent reflection of who you are and who you have been made to be?

Life in the church now, is absolute priority because life together as the people of God then is the ultimate reality of reflecting the Trinity and His Triumphant reign and His glorious supremacy as God in every relational aspect of our lives. The health and the vitality and the integrity and the reputation and the function of the church now is a direct expression of what we really think about the King and His Kingdom. If we live in defiance to His Law, and replace His Word with our own rules, we are saying that in reality, we are the king, not Christ. If we live without love, concern or regard or accountability to the other believers, we are saying that in reality we do not believe in His kingdom. Because the King loves His subjects, and because the King is the ultimate expression of love, His kingdom and His subjects, who are indwelt by Him, will be a place and people of love, trust and harmony.

Since, we are not the King, and since we are part of the kingdom of the King, then, gathering as a body is the assembling, the merging, the bringing together of her various parts into a loving, happy, humble, and therefore, functioning, unified and organized whole. When, in our weaknesses and strengths, in our gifts and our needs, in our

brokenness and wholeness, in our vision and our blindspots, we function as a team, a body, a family, we set the character of God on display and help spread the fame of Christ even as our relationships in the church support the integrity of the message.

Love is more important than knowledge (8.1-3)

Love is more important than gifts (13.1-13)

Gifts matter, but not as much as love.

Of the gifts, the gift of prophecy is the most beneficial for the church. So...what is the NT gift of prophecy? This morning I am attempting to answer that, while next week I will address the gift of tongues. I am not going to answer every question you have on the gift of prophecy this morning, but will hopefully give you enough of a working definition that as we go through this chapter, the rest of the pieces will come together.

### **The Setup:**

When we use this word (to prophecy), as a verb, we tend to assume that the person who is doing the prophecy is therefore a – prophet. A prophet brings to mind people like, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah and others who, in the OT predicted events before they actually happened. Therefore, it is easy to think of the gift of prophecy as a gift that involves the prediction of future events. However, predicting future events was only one aspect of OT prophesying. Prophets spoke the Word of God as it was revealed to them and they gave that Word to the people that God intended to hear it. Sometimes the nature of that message was specifically predicting future events, other times it was specifically addressing a present situation. OT prophets spoke and/or wrote the Word of God. To disbelieve and disobey them was to disbelieve and disobey God. (Deut. 18.19)

Therefore, the matter of identifying a true OT prophet was a very, very important issue. A true OT prophet was validated in two ways: 1) Everything he said had to be consistent with what God had already revealed (Deut 13) and 2) everything he said had to be fulfilled exactly as he said it would be. (Deut 18.20-22) The standard of accuracy was 100%. There was no margin for error.

You see, it was possible that a false prophet could make accurate predictions for the purpose of confusing God's people and enticing them to serve false gods. Because this matter of God's Word is so important because it is so authoritative and binding, no one could presume upon himself to have this authority without these two marks. Being a prophet was not something people necessarily aspired to. It was a very specific calling and brought with it, enormous responsibility because the person was a visible representative of God before the people. At times, as evidenced in Jeremiah, Habakkuk, Hosea and Jonah, it was an agonizing calling, full of personal anguish and trouble.

Jeremiah, in particular would be compelled to speak God's Word, knowing that the people would punish him if he spoke it, but yet, he was compelled by God to speak anyway. Jeremiah 20 begins with a major confrontation. Passhur, the chief officer in the temple of the LORD did not like what Jeremiah was saying, about the impending disaster that awaited Jerusalem, so Passhur had Jeremiah beaten and put into stocks. It probably

pleased the people because they were annoyed by this man's words. Jeremiah did not like what he himself was saying. He agonized over the destruction of his people. In chapter 20 he bitterly complains to God that when God made him a prophet that God deceived him by not fully disclosing all that was going to happen to him. Verses 7 through 18 (end of the chapter) reflects a war that rages in Jeremiah's soul.

This matter of speaking on behalf of God is an infinitely serious matter. It was so serious that anyone who claimed to speak on behalf of God but was in actuality not a true prophet, was to be put to the death. Prophecy in the OT was a matter of life and death.

### **The Tension:**

Some NT prophets do not measure up to that same standard. Look at Acts 21.9-14 (read)

Agabus (presumably the same man noted in Acts 11.28), makes a very specific prophecy. The problem is that this prophecy has two minor mistakes. Agabus says that the Jews at Jerusalem would bind Paul, when in reality it was the Romans who did the binding. The second mistake has to do with the Jews delivering Paul over to the Romans. They did not do such thing. Instead, the Jews attempted to kill Paul. When you look at this prophecy, you can see that these two details are really the heart of his prophecy. Yes, Paul did get arrested when he went to Jerusalem, but not the way Agabus described it. But, no one stoned Agabus over this little detail.

Also, something else to note: If Agabus was a prophet on the same level of authority as an OT prophet, then Paul is pictured here as deliberately violating the word of God, because he goes ahead and goes to Jerusalem in spite of the warning.

The other tension is that not all modern day prophecies hold to that same OT standard. For example, in 1 Thessalonians 5.19-21, the believers were told not to treat prophecies with contempt, but test them, weigh them, sift them, evaluate them and then hold on to what was good and discard the rest. There is no talk of then, after church take the poor guy out into the back parking lot and burn him at the stake. Also, in the text that we will be looking at in 1 Corinthians 14.29-30, Paul speaks of evaluating what is said, rather than automatically obeying. Note also, that he does not admonish the church to record these words as if they are on the same level as Scripture. It therefore appears that what the NT calls prophecies and some of the prophets are not on the same level or in the same league as an OT prophet.

### **The Clarification:**

1. **OT Prophets spoke to people on behalf of God.** When they spoke as a prophet, their words were authoritative and binding because they were speaking the Word of God. To disobey them, was to disobey God. OT Prophets were authoritative because the origin of their words was God and not themselves.
2. **NT Apostles are the equivalent of OT Prophets.**

3. **NT Apostles were also Teachers and Prophets.** Their teaching and preaching had unique authority (1 Cor. 14.37).
4. **The NT gifts of teaching and prophecy when given to those who were not NT Apostles, do not carry the same authority as the NT apostles did,** which is why prophecies by non-apostles should be weighed, sifted, and evaluated (14.29) (1 Thess. 5.20-21).
5. **Therefore, the OT office of Prophet is different than the NT gift of prophecy.** OT Prophets were to be executed if they spoke falsely. NT prophecies (non-apostolic) were to be evaluated and sifted by the entire congregation.

Therefore, the NT gift of prophecy is a general term that refers to the God-given ability to speak to God's people in a helpful manner for their edification. I believe that this gift would in a large degree involve the preaching of the Word, but would also overlap with teaching and with counseling/discipleship. I also believe that Paul assumes a spontaneous exercise of this gift at times, as we will see later on in chapter 14. What we do not see is an out of body experience, or some bizarre phenomenon where a person loses control over himself. No, the spirits of the prophets are under the control of the prophets.

**Back to the Text:** (14.1-5)

1. **Prophecy is a gift of speech that publicly functions in the church in the language of the church.** (14.3)

I will address the gift of tongues next Sunday, but it appears that since Paul singles out the gift of prophecy and the gift of tongues, that the Corinthian believers were viewing them as being somewhat the same, expect that the gift of tongues was to them more important and more valuable since it was more spectacular. In these opening verses of chapter 14, Paul is attempting to correct their faulty estimation of the value of the gift of tongues. Again, he is not against the gift, but he is taking issue with the pre-eminent role that some in the church at Corinth had given to it.

2. **Prophecy is a gift of speech that strengthens, encourages, comforts and edifies the believers.**

Here is why Paul commands (imperative v.1) us to desire this gift and would rather we prophesy than anything else. When we are able to speak words that strengthen a brother or sister, when we are able to encourage, give hope, provide comfort, and get someone back on track, we have done so much good for the body and for the reputation of Christ.

You cannot do that without relationships. That is part of what is involved in the word *paraklete* (trans. Encourage). This encouragement involves the coming alongside of another person. There is a place for the public proclamation (prophesy) of the Word of

God in preaching. This is needed and commanded for the church to value. There is also a place for the personal encouragement with the Word that we do with one another.

**3. Speaking to God's people in their own language in a helpful manner that addresses their needs is so much more beneficial to the body than speaking in tongues.**

**The Application:**

How does this work? Let me give a few examples of how the gift of prophecy is designed to function within the church family. If you think that the Lord is leading you in a particular manner, that he has perhaps revealed a direction for your life, I strongly encourage you to share that with several people in this church who know you well and whose lives show a high regard for the Word of God. If you think that there is something that the leadership of the church needs to consider, you ought to share that with us. We want to know that. You can be of such benefit.

A sister says to you after the service this morning, I am so bitter at my husband that I have not talked to him in three days and last night he did not come home, now I do not know what to do. I am scared and angry. I am scared that I don't care anymore about my marriage, weary with trying to do the right thing, yet guilty over my own failures, can you help me out?

Now, if you are speaking in tongues, you are not of much help to that person and their family and this opportunity for ministry. But, if you can come alongside this gal and help her thinking get in line with God's Word, you can both admonish her in love and give her hope. You may be part of rescuing a family and being part of something that has positive generational consequences. For the sake of argument, let's say that the gift of tongues was a normal part of the life of the church, like it was in Corinth. Paul is not saying, throw out the gift of tongues, he is simply saying, recognize what it is good for and what it is not. Paul is saying, I am not down on tongues per se, but recognize that it has a very limited value for the rest of the church.

Your small group is meeting and during your time of prayer, there is a verse that just keeps coming to your mind, and before it is your time to pray, you read that verse, only to find out later on, that God used that to really speak to another group member. In this case, it was not planned but was spontaneous, and yet so helpful.

Brothers and sisters, this is not an easy subject, and we are certainly not the first ones to wrestle through this. Can we be a church where there is a high reverence and regard for the Word of God and for the preaching of the Word of God, and not be a lecture hall? The knowledge of the Word is not a substitute for prayer, dependency on and sensitivity to the Spirit. Neither is "dependency on the Spirit" an excuse for a lack of preparation. The congregation is to be involved in the life of the church. Christianity is not a spectator sport. Can we be organized, purposeful and orderly, and yet allow for and not get freaked out at the impressions and leadings of the Spirit? We have to be both!