

USING THE GIFT OF PROPHECY
2010 Prophecy Class, Session 2
April 18, 2010

God has given gifts to believers to be used for the encouragement and edification of the church. Every individual believer is a steward of the gifts given: "Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them..." (Romans 12:6). In this lesson, we discuss how to discover and deliver the gift of prophecy.

I. THE GIFT OF PROPHECY IS FOR TODAY

- a. See appendix, "Views of the Holy Spirit Today"
- b. Experience is useful but not determinative. The fundamental question is: **"What does Scripture say?"**
- c. Throughout the NT, the spiritual gifts are depicted in a way that seems to assume their ongoing, everyday use. (See Rom. 12:3-8; 1 Cor. 12-14; Eph. 4:11-12; 1 Thes. 5:18-21; 1 Peter 4:10-11). The burden of proof is on the cessationist to explain why, when, and how gifts ceased to function.
- d. The cessationist argument from 1 Corinthians 13:8-13 (also, Eph. 2:20, Eph. 4:11-14, etc.): that miraculous and revelatory gifts ceased to function early in the history of the church.

1 Corinthians 13:8-13 "Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known. So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love."

Continuationist interpretive considerations:

- i. Purpose: The priority and permanence of love
- ii. Timing: The meaning of "when... then... then..."
- iii. Meaning: "face to face" and "know fully"
 1. Cf. 1 Corinthians 1:7
- iv. Conclusion: the gifts will cease when Christ returns

"This suggests that Paul saw the gifts as a temporary provision made to equip believers for ministry *until the Lord returned*."¹

¹ Wayne Grudem. *Systematic Theology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004. p. 1035.

- e. Cessationist objection: the continuation of prophecy today challenges the authority of Scripture.
 - i. Response: Prophecy in the NT and today is always to be tested by and subordinated to Scripture.

1 Corinthians 14:29 "Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said."

1 Thessalonians 5:20-21 "Do not despise prophecies, 21 but test everything; hold fast what is good."

- f. Cessationist objection: the gift is sometimes abused or elevated to compete with Scripture
 - i. Response: "The *abuse* of a gift does not mean that we must prohibit the *proper use* of the gift, unless it can be shown that there cannot be proper use—that *all* use has to be abuse."²
- g. Cessationist objection: Miraculous gifts ceased early in the history of the church.
 - i. Response: The historical record is of varied quality as the church underwent a variety of influences that were either favorable or opposed to the miraculous gifts. But it can be shown that miraculous gifts have persisted in every age of the church.
- h. Continuationist conclusion:
 - i. There is no unambiguous evidence in the NT that any of the spiritual gifts ceased after the closing of the canon, the death of the apostles, or the foundation of the church.
 - ii. Every text that mentions the spiritual gifts seems to assume their ongoing use. This approach has the benefit of exegetical consistency.
 - iii. Therefore, we believe it best to strive for continued use of all the spiritual gifts in the church today.

"I do not believe the Holy Spirit simply inaugurates the new age and then disappears. He, together with these gifts and fruit, *characterizes* the new age."³

II. PROPHECY IS A GIFT, SO DEPEND ON THE GIVER

- a. *1 Corinthians 12:4-11 "Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in*

² Grudem, p. 1040.

³ Sam Storms, "A Third Wave View." *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today? Four Views*. Ed. Wayne Grudem. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996. p. 206.

everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.”

III. DISCOVERING PROPHECY

- a. Do I have the gift of prophecy? Discover it like any other gift:
 - i. Pray and commit your way to the Lord
 - ii. Have right motives and be content with present gifts
 - iii. Use the gifts you have and be eager for more
 - iv. Start small and be faithful
 - v. Ask for evaluation

IV. DELIVERING PROPHECY: SOME GUIDELINES

- a. Remember what prophecy is: “telling something that God has spontaneously brought to mind.” – Wayne Grudem.
 - i. Form: May be a paragraph, a sentence, a word, a picture, a verse of Scripture, a dream, a poem
 - ii. Content: “The principal content of most prophetic utterances is defined by the effects they produce. Prophetic utterances may *edify, exhort, and console* (1 Cor. 14:3). They may bring *conviction* as the secrets of the sinner’s heart are *exposed* (14:24-25). They may *teach* (14:31). They may on occasion give *direction for ministry* (Acts 13:1-3), contain *warnings* (21:4, 10-14), or present *opportunities*. They may even *identify and impart spiritual gifts* (1 Tim. 4:14).”⁴
- b. Avoid first person, “thus says the Lord,” or anything else that would give a prophecy a sense of authority that it doesn’t actually have.
- c. Speak normally
- d. Personal vs. public

V. PRAY...

- a. Thanks for current gifts
- b. Courage to prophesy and clarity about what to say
- c. Faithfulness to use what we’ve got
- d. Distribution of new gifts and greater measure of gifts in our church

⁴ Storms, p. 204.