

## **Eagerly Desire**

### **The Gift of Prophecy in the Local Church**

*“Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy. For 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. On the other hand, the one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation. The one who speaks in a tongue builds up himself, but the one who prophesies builds up the church. Now I want you all to speak in tongues, but even more to prophesy. The one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets, so that the church may be built up.” 1 Corinthians 14:1-5*

#### **The Gift of Prophecy: A Normal Expression of the Spirit’s Activity**

**“Imagine an enquirer attending an ordinary parish church, or visiting a whole number of them for that matter, for an entire year. Would he by the end of that time, do you think, have become fully convinced that the gift of the Spirit to indwell God’s people, corporately and individually, is the supreme and crowning blessing held forth by the Gospel? . . . We need frankly to recognize that explicit teaching concerning the Holy Spirit, leading Christians to appreciate the real significance of his indwelling and to experience the fulness of His power, is a sadly rare thing at the present time. Yet the Bible sets forth the bestowal and ministry of the Spirit as the true climax of God’s generosity, and the supreme glory of this gospel age.”<sup>1</sup>**

- Where does the Bible set forth the Holy Spirit as the climax of God’s generosity?

**“Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Brothers, what shall we do?’ And Peter said to them, ‘Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” Acts 2:37-38**

**“In 1 Thessalonians 5:20 we find the earliest mention of prophecy or prophetic utterance in the NT. Although not a frequent term in the Pauline corpus, it occurs in the earliest and latest of the letters: Romans 12:6, 1 Corinthians 12:10; 13:2, 13:8; 14:6, 14:22; 1 Timothy 1:18, 4:14 strongly suggests that this was a normal expression of the Spirit’s activity in the early Christian communities.”<sup>2</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> A.M. Stibbs and J.I. Packer, *The Spirit Within You*, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1967, pg. 9

<sup>2</sup> Gordon Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence*, Hendrickson Publishers 1994, pgs. 59-60

## Six Ways to Eagerly Desire the Gift of Prophecy

### 1. Pray for the Gift of Prophecy

**“Pride ignores God as the giver of one’s mind and skills, while humility gratefully employs these gifts as an expression of worship and as a way to help others.”<sup>3</sup>**

### 2. Have A Biblically Informed Definition for the NT Gift of Prophecy

- **Definition of prophecy:** *Prophecy is the human report of a divine revelation*

*“What then, brothers? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation.” 1 Corinthians 14:26a*

*“If a revelation is made to another sitting there, let the first be silent. For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged.” 1 Corinthians 14:30-31*

**“The ‘revelation’ which comes...is thought by Paul to be of divine, not human origin. This is evident, first from the fact that the word Paul uses for ‘revelation’...occurs forty-four times in the New Testament and never refers to human activity or communication. Rather whenever the New Testament speaks of a ‘revelation’ it is always given by the activity of God.”<sup>4</sup>**

**“When Paul presupposes in 1 Corinthians 14:30 that the gift of prophecy depends on revelation, we are not limited to a form of authoritative revelation that threatens the finality of the canon.”<sup>5</sup>**

### 3. Be Convinced of God’s Desire to Edify His Church

- Six times in this chapter the language of the “church being built up” is used (vv. 3, 4, 5, 12, 17, 26)
- These verses capture God’s heart for His people, that through the work of the Spirit, God desires to manifest His presence and build up our church up as He speaks to you through the gift of prophecy.

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<sup>3</sup> Kelly Kopic, *You’re Only Human*, Brazos Press 2022, pg. 105

<sup>4</sup> Wayne Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the NT and Today*, Crossway Books 2000, pgs. 116-117

<sup>5</sup> D. A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit*, Baker Books, Grand Rapids, MI 1987, pg. 214

#### 4. Keep the Gifts Connected to the Gospel

**“J. C. Ryle suggested that the gospel may be spoiled in a number of ways. We can spoil the gospel by substituting for Christ’s saving work on the cross (for example, our good deeds, as Pelagius did). We can spoil Christ’s work by adding to it (for example, faith plus circumcision as in the Galatians error). We can also spoil the gospel by disproportion when secondary biblical accents become primary (for example, clerical clothing). We can spoil the gospel when the NT sense of proportion is lost and pneumatology becomes are primary emphasis rather than Christology. The idea in some charismatic circles, for example, that ‘the major compass point for moving ahead in active ministry’ is not ‘the cross’ but ‘charisma’ is extremely troubling.”<sup>6</sup>**

#### 5. Use the Gift of Prophecy Aware of its Limitations

- **First Limitation:** The gift of prophecy is affected by our finite and fallen humanness.

*“For we know in part and we prophesy in part.”* 1 Corinthians 13:9

Practical implications:

1. You need to take any word you receive and submit it to Scripture, prayer and wise counsel
2. We don’t want people making decisions about their lives based on prophetic words alone

- **Second limitation:** The gift of prophecy has no authority if its own.
- Practical implication is that you must evaluate prophetic words in light of Scripture.
- In light of these limitations, the gift of prophecy is to be governed.

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

*“But all things should be done decently and in order.”* 1 Corinthians 14:40

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<sup>6</sup> Graham Cole, *He Who Gives Life*, Crossway Books 2007, pg. 275

Practical implication:

1. Government doesn't constrain those with prophetic gifting; it releases them into their gifting.

## 6. Have A Biblically Informed Understanding of Personal Prophecy

*"While we were staying for many days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. And coming to us, he took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands and said, 'Thus says the Holy Spirit, this is how the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.'" Acts 21:10-11*

*"This charge I entrust to you, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies previously made about you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, holding faith and a good conscience." 1 Timothy 1:18-19*

## Conclusion

**"The full range of spiritual gifts remain at work in the church and are given for the good of the church and its witness to the world. We are therefore to earnestly desire and practice them until Christ returns."<sup>7</sup>**

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<sup>7</sup> Sovereign Grace Churches Statement of Faith, printed edition 2020, pgs. 44-45