

Is There Still a Prophetic Element Today?

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Look if you have your Bibles with you, you might want to open them right now to 1 Corinthians 14. I'd like you to look at a text, because in the reformed community I think they misdefined prophecy, actually.

You know, I just had a missionary friend, who's serving the Lord in China, visit here in the United States, and he was in our home. And he said that his fear is that the preaching ministry in the United States of America is losing its prophetic element. Can I tell you something? John Piper has said, and maybe some of you have heard it. He prays for the gift of prophecy every time he goes into the pulpit. What are these guys talking about? Many in the reformed community would say that prophesying is nothing different than preaching. I would take issue with that because I don't think that's what Paul means and I'm gonna show you.

If you're in 1 Corinthians 14, I would have you look where he begins talking specifically about prophesying, verse 19. "Nonetheless, in the Church, I would rather speak five words with my mind in order to instruct others, than ten thousand words in a tongue. Brothers, do not be children in your thinking. Be infants in evil, but in your thinking be mature. In the Law it is written, by people of strange tongues and by the lips of foreigners will I speak to this people..." And he keeps going on, he talks about tongues. Verse 24, If all prophesy, and an unbeliever or outsider enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all, the secrets of his heart are disclosed, and so, falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you. What then, brothers? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up. If any speak in a tongue... Then he goes on with that... Verse 29, Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said.

Now here it is! Verse 30. I want you to see something about what Paul believes prophesying is. He says if a revelation... Now notice verse 29, he is speaking about prophets, Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said. If a revelation is made to another... Another, aside from who? From the first prophet speaking. If there's a revelation, made to a second or a third prophet sitting there, let the first be silent. For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all may be encouraged, and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets. Now what I would have you guys understand and see is that in verse 30, If a revelation is made to another sitting there. Here's the picture. You have one prophet speaking, others are sitting there weighing what's said and a revelation is made to one of the prophets sitting there. Now what I'd have you understanding is this. What Paul means by prophesying right there is not that's something is pre-studied, pre-learned, pre-meditated upon. It is something revealed right there.

Now when this missionary just was here and he said that he's afraid that we're losing the prophetic element. Let me tell you something, I believe a prophet element has come back into the church by men like Piper, and by men like Washer. There is a prophetic element. In other words, things are being revealed, which are not necessarily studied. Now you know the reformed community tends to call it things like 'light on their feet'. Oh, they are scared to death

of the terminology, prophesying. Just as much as they're scared of tongues. But they might have a different name for it, but I tell you the Puritans believed in it. They might have called it by a different name, they might have called it... They called it something, what did they call it? The Spirits, something of that nature. but you know, you read Spurgeon's autobiography, you see that he had gifts of it. You listen to Paul Washer, you see that he's had gifts of it. You listen to John Piper, you see that he has had gifts of it. You listen to this certain missionary...from China, you see that he has had gifts of it.

What is this? It's things that God reveals to us. It's Spurgeon, basically declaring something that he could not otherwise know to be true... It's Paul Washer saying somebody's going to come into this auditorium and seek to break up this service. And he is thinking: Why did I say that? And somebody breaks in through the doors and tries to break up the thing. It's Spurgeon saying something about somebody in the audience that he could not otherwise know and it turns out to be true. It's John Piper saying that as he is preaching, that all of the sudden things are revealed to his mind and afterwards people come up to him and say, I really appreciated that message. Well, what was it that helped you so much? Bang! Right there, the part of that message that he's saying, God gave that to me right there in the pulpit. That is a prophetic ministry.

It is God giving us a word. Sometimes a word that has been forgotten that the church needs. Sometimes it's things that otherwise could not be known. It tends to be that which is helpful for the immediate context of the church. It's comforting, it's edifying. It's not equal to the canon of scripture, it is not. In fact Paul says that if you... You know right there at the end of the chapter. If you guys are really prophets, then let... basically approve of what I'm saying, that it is indeed the Word of God. In other words, you know what, prophets are subject to prophets. But it says, Paul says apostles are not subject to prophets. In fact, prophets need to be subject to the apostles. He says I taught this and if you truly are prophetic then prophesy this, approve this, and basically certify this that what I'm saying is indeed the Word of God, it's true.

So basically... what we find is the apostles, they spoke on the authority of Jesus Christ. It doesn't say there wasn't a place to have a Berean spirit and compare Scripture with what these guys were saying. But on the same level, prophets... You know, we basically have prophets like Agabus. Various prophets came along. We know that not everything they said was equivalent to scripture because Agabus was called a prophet and we only know one of the prophecies that he spoke, and yet he was called a prophet even before he made that prophesy. Clearly, Paul is implying that people at Corinth would function just the way he's saying. Clearly, Paul is implying that a multiplicity of prophets would function at Corinth. We don't have a single one of their prophetic utterances. Which tells us it is not on the level of canon. It's not on the level of...if one of these prophets has a Word of God, we need to record it in the Bible. When Paul Washer has had a word from God. When these sisters from the Hebrides revival had a word from God. When Spurgeon has had a word from God, it's not of the same caliber. It has not had to be recorded in scripture. It's basically God working through a certain New Testament giftedness. That really is helpful for the church, and Paul says we ought to desire that gift.

You know, I think this missionary from China has a real concern to say that his fear is that the preaching loses its prophetic element. You know what he is worried about, that the preaching in this country basically becomes academic. That we just become a bunch of scribes

standing in the pulpit, rehashing what other men have already taught and that we are not getting a fresh word from God. You know McCheyne said that, did he not? We get our word, we get our thoughts from God, those who preach the Word. May God give us that prophetic element. Because of a lot of unbelief, men are scared to death of it. But we need it, we need it in this day and age.

Brother, that may not have been the answer that you wanted or were expecting. But the text there in 1 Corinthians 14 seems to indicate that what Paul was talking about prophetically, it is a revelation, it is something not studied, it is something revealed to a man as he's sitting there. Question: What about vague prophecies...?

See I've seen New Testament prophecies. ...I'll tell you, I know one guy that God all of a sudden gave him a word, That the guy he was working with was involved in adultery He confronted him, it was true. I know a man who God gave him a word that a man who had gone out of our church over to Korea was involved in a cult. A week later he found out exactly it was true. ...What I have found is that these men who have a prophetic gift, they are right, and they are specific, and they are right. It's not all these vaguenesses that cant be verified. I mean, test the spirits. It says don't despise prophesying. Does it not, in 1 Thessalonians 5? It also right after that says we are supposed to test everything. I would say that we need to test things.

Again I would come back to this... you know what? if someone is telling me that they have this gift, but I know that guy. He is not the most honest guy. Sometimes it is hard to believe what he says. I'm not going there. If this guy is a guy who is spotless and blameless in his reputation and he starts telling me he has got a word from God, I'm going to listen. We need to test the spirits. Who is this coming from? Basically a little bit of examination. I mean I've known somebody before that told me that they had a word from the Lord. I began to inquire a little bit, and you know what it stood up to the Biblical gift, and I don't question it to this day. I think it's very valid. I've seen it, but I also know that we have a lot of quacks out there. We have a lot of people that would love to have the applause and they would love to be seen, to be big in people's eyes. They want to be men pleasers and... want to perform before men. They really want to be seen as some great one.

That is another thing I've seen when you have true spiritual gifts that are unusual and unique, God typically attends it with an extra dose of humility. What I have typically found is men with the gift of prophecy have never declared themselves prophets. They are typically humble, they're low key... There's another thing to look out for, if you've got a guy that is just arrogant. He's full of pride and he tells you he has some gift like this, I'd be saying, no, I'm not so sure you do.

Any other comments, questions? When Paul says we should desire the gift of prophecy, is it in that context? Which context? When Paul is talking about the gifts. Yeah, he basically says it like this, He says, Pursue love, earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy. That's how he puts it.... Look, if an apostle says, Especially... We should be desiring prophetic utterance. You can be certain it's valuable to the church. I think this man who just recently said that that is his fear that we are losing the prophetic element. I know this man. You will find few men that has the character equal to his, and for him to have that fear, and for him to have that desire... You know, I think we have lost that desire. Isn't it amazing how much the Scripture says that we just ignore, and yet there is something, God speaking through His

apostle tells us today desire this. If you are going to talk about spiritual gifts, this is the one to desire. Yet in so many circles, it's not only not desired, it is despised. It's feared. That's amazing! If we would just take scripture at face value, but we have all these presuppositions. We have all these traditions, we have all sorts of reformed camp type people that are scared to death of the supernatural. So we become disarmed. These certain academic reformed camps would disarm us of so much of the New Testament. Brothers and sisters, don't let that happen. Oh, hold onto the doctrines of grace, I'm not telling you to move out of that camp, but don't let the academic Calvinist disarm you of the scriptures. Let's be what the scriptures tell us to be and let us do what the scriptures tell us to do and let desire what the scriptures tell us to desire. Anything else?