

**Sermon Series:** *From Willingness to Giftedness*

**Sermon title:** The Prophecy Gift

**Scripture Reading:** 1 Corinthians 14:1-5

August 5, 2018

Clearwater Bay International Baptist Church

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As we have discussed Spiritual Gifts over the last few weeks, we have seen a few things.

1. **God is the giver of the gifts.** He empowers them. He chose who got what.  
He composed the body the way he wanted.

He appointed whom he wanted to play each role. And this is important in light of today's message on prophecy because since he gave them as a gift, he can cause any of the gifts to stop at any time.

He can do what he wants. So, although I am currently in a place where I don't think the gifts have ceased, some of them could be and I am ok with that.

He is God and I am not.

2. **The purpose of the gifts** as we have seen and will mention again and again **is to build up the church.** That's their purpose. They are for others and not for ourselves.

3. **The pursuit of the gifts is Love.** The purpose may be to build up the church but without a heart of love all the gifts are meaningless. You want to know your gift?

**Be willing to serve the church and pursue love and you'll find where people are most blessed by and through you.**

So, today we come to the gift of prophecy and the reason why I am preaching a whole message on this is because of **chapter 14 verse 1 and chapter 14 verse 39**. Like 2 bookends of the chapter it says that we should **'earnestly desire to prophesy'**.

But prophecy is a touchy subject and hotly debated. Even amongst evangelical scholars there is disagreement. So, I am giving you my best shot today and you can 'weigh what is said' and do your own study.

I see good arguments for the gift of prophecy still existing today, even though we have a lot of bad examples and few good examples. I see good arguments for the cessation of some of the gifts.

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I don't know if you saw the news this past week about a female Korean pastor who was arrested for abandoning about 400 members of her church and accused of forcing them to beat one another in Fiji. You see, some time ago she 'prophesied' that there would be a great famine on

the Korean peninsula and that the safest place for her church to go was to Fiji, an isolated tropical island in the middle of the ocean.



So, there are a lot of ideas out there about what prophecy is. Let's begin with what prophecy is NOT.

**What prophecy is NOT.**

- I. **It is not the same as Old Testament prophecy, which was speaking the very words of God.** It is not, "Thus saith the Lord"(Zhe shi Shen de hua). OT prophecy was directly from God. It was clear. It was not to be questioned or weighed whether it was correct or not. And if a prophet's message was incorrect the punishment was death. (Deuteronomy 18:20)

If New Testament prophecy and prophecy today is the same as Old Testament prophecy, then the Bible is not authoritative.

Every prophet that speaks would be writing scripture for us. Almost no one believes this.

Most Pentecostal and Charismatic scholars do not believe that prophecy today has the same authority as the written scriptures.

The equivalent of OT prophets in the New Testament is the Apostles, not prophets or a prophecy.

We see this in **1 Corinthians 14:37-38** where Paul says to a group that has a lot of prophets that he has authority over them and that he is **'writing them a command from the Lord.'**

So, that authoritative unquestionable speaking directly for God has ceased with the Apostles.

They were the foundation built on the prophets of the Old Testament and Christ himself being the cornerstone.

When the Apostles died, no one speaks like that for God anymore. We have the scriptures they wrote and they are authoritative. N.T prophecy is not the same as O.T prophecy.

- II. **Prophecy is not preaching and teaching.** These are always listed as different gifts. Prophecy is not based upon a biblical text. In the New Testament at least, it was a spontaneous revelation from God. Though

prophecy may happen while someone is preaching or teaching.

III. **Prophecy is not foretelling the future or predicting the future *mainly*.** Even in the Old Testament, prophets were mainly reminding people of what God had said, much more than they were predicting the future. Most of the future they predicted was the immediate future and not the distant future like our time.

I could go on, but let's talk about what prophecy is straight from 1 Corinthians 14.

### **What prophecy IS.**

In verse 1 and 39 he says that the church in Corinth **“should earnestly desire the spiritual gifts and earnestly desire to prophesy.”**

There is at least some proof that he is speaking specifically to the situation in Corinth, which was focusing on tongues too much and because of that he is saying, “earnestly desire to prophesy more than tongues.”

It is possible that he means earnestly desire to prophesy more than the other gifts as well. But we must remember the time period. The Bible is being written as he speaks... so it is not the same for us. We have something they didn't have; the whole Bible finished. Complete.

- **verse 3-** Prophecy is speaking to people for their 'upbuilding, encouragement and comfort or consolation'.
- **verses 4 and 5-** Prophecy is for 'building up the church'.
- **verse 19-** Prophecy is 'speaking words in order to instruct others'.
- **verse 22-** Prophecy is for believers. It's for the church.
- **verse 24 and 25-** But if believers come into the church and hear prophesying they will be convicted, called to account, secrets of their hearts are disclosed and they'll worship God.
- **verse 29-** Prophecy is to be 'weighed' or sifted. It is to be tested by the congregation. In verse 32 it says something similar; 'the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets.'
- **verse 30-** Prophecy is revelatory and spontaneous. It isn't something someone has studied. It just comes to them. It is 'made to one sitting there.'
- **verse 31-** Prophecy is to be done one by one, not all at the same time.
- **verse 31-** Prophecy is done that all may learn and be encouraged. It's not a private thing but a public thing.
- **verse 40-** Prophecy (like all things) are to be done 'decently and in order.'

Here are a few definitions from scholars and theologians on what N.T. prophecy is.

**[Wayne Grudem:] “Speaking merely human words to report something God brings to mind.”**

**[John Piper:] “A Spirit-prompted, Spirit-sustained utterance that does not carry intrinsic divine authority and may be mixed with error.”**

**[Tom Schreiner:] “Reception of spontaneous revelations that are communicated to God’s people.”**

**[Eerdman’s Bible Dictionary:] “Communication of a divine message through a human messenger.”** (Note: this is prophecy in general)

Let’s look at an example of prophecy in the book of Acts and see if it shows us something about what prophecy is.

Turn to **Acts 21:10-14** and let’s look at the N.T. prophet Agabus.

**10 While we were staying for many days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. 11 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.” 12 When we heard this, we and the people there urged him not to go up to Jerusalem. 13 Then Paul answered, “What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be imprisoned but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.” 14 And since he would not be persuaded, we ceased and said, “Let the will of the Lord be done.”

**Notice a few things:**

1. Agabus is a prophet.
2. Agabus has a message of human words not scripture.
3. They took his message as truth. verse 12
4. They weighed the message according to God’s will.
5. Paul didn’t obey his message.
6. Agabus actually got the details wrong, even though he got the general idea right. In Acts 21:33 we see that the Romans actually bound Paul not the Jews. And the Romans delivered Paul from the Jews though Agabus said it was the other way around.

What do we do with this?

This is not an example of O.T prophecy. The O.T. prophets didn’t get the details wrong. Nor is Agabus accused of being a false prophet and stoned.



So, on one side we have O.T prophecy where prophets spoke God's very words directly and on the other side we have False Prophets.

Paul says that there is a 3rd kind of prophecy. It is a spontaneous revelatory word that a person speaks from the Spirit of God but it must be weighed, it must be sifted to see if it is accurate to the word of God.

This is what Paul is describing in 1 Corinthians 14.

Now, what *might* this look like? What would be some examples of this that are healthy or sound in doctrine?

**Example:** Charles Spurgeon was preaching one time and out of the blue in his sermon he yelled out, "Young man, the gloves in your pocket are not paid for." A young man came up to him after the service and gave his life to Christ.

**Example:** John Piper was preaching one time and suddenly said, "*A Bible study on the 36th floor of the IDS Tower with well-to-do business men is not mercy ministry, but it is crucial and valuable and necessary.*" Wasn't in his notes. A woman came up later and was visiting the church. She said she had been asked to join a Bible study on the 36th floor of the IDS tower and was praying about confirmation.

**Example:** I was in a Sunday School class one morning and a friend of mine was speaking on Missions. I had been searching for my place in life and praying about what God wanted me to do. In his teaching, he was talking about opportunities around the world and said, “I know in China there are opportunities and you should Go.” God did something in that moment. He was speaking merely human words....but I was called through them.

Maybe someone has said something to you before and God used it to encourage, convict and comfort you.

Perhaps that is a kind of prophetic word.

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In closing, let me give us some final encouragement and cautions.

- 1. It seems to me that it is possible that God can give us gifts for a moment or a lifetime.** After all, Paul does say that God gives the gifts, but also tells them to earnestly desire to prophesy. Seems to suggest that you may have the gift of service in general but God may use you in another way as he chooses.
- 2. Don't overvalue prophecy....but don't undervalue it either.** Don't get the big head and don't feel like God

can never lay something on your heart to say to someone.

**3. Just because you think you need to say something doesn't mean you should.** Most of the times I have seen someone come up after church and want the microphone cause they have a 'word from the Lord', it was not helpful and sometimes even silly. Better to come to myself or other church leaders and let us weigh it first.

**4. Here's my final thought:**

**You can't ever go wrong speaking God's written word. But, you can go wrong speaking what comes to mind.**

**So, weigh what comes into your mind and check it with God's word.**

**Weigh what other people say to you and check it with God's word.**

You'll never go wrong doing that.