

GIFTS OF CONTROVERSY (PART TWO)

—MESSY (BUT BEAUTIFUL) CHRISTIANITY, WEEK 48—

1 Corinthians 14 (NIV)

I. SPIRITUAL GIFTS IN THE CHURCH MUST DEMONSTRATE _____ (AS IN CHAPTER 13)

^{14:1} Follow the way of love and eagerly desire gifts of the Spirit, especially prophecy. ² For anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to people but to God. Indeed, no one understands them; they utter mysteries by the Spirit. ³ But the one who prophesies speaks to people for their strengthening, encouraging and comfort. ⁴ Anyone who speaks in a tongue edifies themselves, but the one who prophesies edifies the church. ⁵ I would like every one of you to speak in tongues, but I would rather have you prophesy. The one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets, so that the church may be edified.

⁶ Now, brothers and sisters, if I come to you and speak in tongues, what good will I be to you, unless I bring you some revelation or knowledge or prophecy or word of instruction? ⁷ Even in the case of lifeless things that make sounds, such as the pipe or harp, how will anyone know what tune is being played unless there is a distinction in the notes? ⁸ Again, if the trumpet does not sound a clear call, who will get ready for battle? ⁹ So it is with you. Unless you speak intelligible words with your tongue, how will anyone know what you are saying? You will just be speaking into the air. ¹⁰ Undoubtedly there are all sorts of languages in the world, yet none of them is without meaning. ¹¹ If then I do not grasp the meaning of what someone is saying, I am a foreigner to the speaker, and the speaker is a foreigner to me. ¹² So it is with you. Since you are eager for gifts of the Spirit, try to excel in those that build up the church.

¹³ For this reason the one who speaks in a tongue should pray that they may interpret what they say. ¹⁴ For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful. ¹⁵ So what shall I do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my understanding; I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my understanding. ¹⁶ Otherwise when you are praising God in the Spirit, how can someone else, who is now put in the position of an inquirer, say “Amen” to your thanksgiving, since they do not know what you are saying? ¹⁷ You are giving thanks well enough, but no one else is edified.

¹⁸ I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you. ¹⁹ But in the church I would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue.

²⁰ Brothers and sisters, stop thinking like children. In regard to evil be infants, but in your thinking be adults. ²¹ In the Law it is written:

“With other tongues and through the lips of foreigners I will speak to this people,
but even then they will not listen to me, says the Lord.”

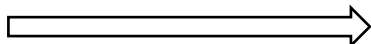
²² Tongues, then, are a sign, not for believers but for unbelievers; prophecy, however, is not for unbelievers but for believers. ²³ So if the whole church comes together and everyone speaks in tongues, and inquirers or unbelievers come in, will they not say that you are out of your mind? ²⁴ But if an unbeliever or an inquirer comes in while everyone is prophesying, they are convicted of sin and are brought under judgment by all, ²⁵ as the secrets of their hearts are laid bare. So they will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, “God is really among you!”

II. SPIRITUAL GIFTS IN THE CHURCH MUST INVOLVE _____ (AS IN CHAPTER 12)

²⁶ What then shall we say, brothers and sisters? When you come together, each of you has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. Everything must be done so that the church may be built up. ²⁷ If anyone speaks in a tongue, two—or at the most three—should speak, one at a time, and someone must interpret. ²⁸ If there is no interpreter, the speaker should keep quiet in the church and speak to himself and to God.

²⁹ Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said. ³⁰ And if a revelation comes to someone who is sitting down, the first speaker should stop. ³¹ For you can all prophesy in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged. ³² The spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets. ³³ For God is not a God of disorder but of peace—as in all the congregations of the Lord’s people.

We will skip this difficult passage for now and come back to it later.



³⁴ Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the law says. ³⁵ If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.

³⁶ Or did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only people it has reached? ³⁷ If anyone thinks they are a prophet or otherwise gifted by the Spirit, let them acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord’s command. ³⁸ But if anyone ignores this, they will themselves be ignored.

³⁹ Therefore, my brothers and sisters, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. ⁴⁰ But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way.

III. A CONTROVERSIAL GIFT: PROPHECY

- **Definition:** Prophecy is a message from God given to (or through) a person. It may involve prediction (foretelling) or simply conveying of some truth (forthtelling). Though prophecy may involve elements of preaching or teaching, its essential character seems focused more on a direct message received supernaturally from God (though this is debated). As Paul describes it, its purpose is strengthening, encouraging and comfort (1 Cor 14:3).
- **The Essential Issue:** Does the gift of prophecy still function today?
- **The Most Difficult Question:** The charismatic view on prophecy is that modern prophets may give prophecies that turn out *to be wrong*, either in part or in whole, but charismatics will say this does not necessarily make the individuals false prophets. Rather prophecy is a gift that must be learned to be used, which allows for mistakes. Is this a biblical view, or do these failures disprove prophecy today?
- **Arguments for Continuation of Prophecy (that can sometimes err)**
 - We still live in the era of fulfillment, and there is little to no biblical evidence that prophecy would fade away before Christ's return (Joel 2:28-32//Acts 2:16-21)
 - Paul values prophecy highly, and commands us to not despise prophecy or quench the Spirit in this regard (1 Cor 14:39; 1 Thess 5:20-21).
 - Reliable testimony exists of something like prophetic gifts functioning effectively in the lives of Christians today.
 - A possible case can be made from biblical evidence that mistakes, uncertainty, or misinterpretation could occur among true prophets (this view sees prophets as less authoritative than Scripture or apostles): 2 Sam 7:3-5; 2 Kings 2:3-5, 16-18; Luke 7:18-20; Acts 21:4 (compare with 19:21); Acts 21:10-11 (compare with 21:32-33; 22:29). This is why prophecy would need to be evaluated (1 Cor 14:29; 1 Thess 5:19-22). Yet this possibility for erring prophecy certainly stands in tension with Deuteronomy 18:21-23.
- **Arguments against Continuation of Prophecy (that can sometimes err)**
 - False or questionable prophecies sometimes take place within Pentecostal and Charismatic circles, and the guidelines of Deuteronomy 18:21-23 indicate that these would thus be false prophets. This sort of false prophecy could do much damage to the church.
 - The completion of the canon of the New Testament could plausibly move our focus from "current prophecy" to God's settled scriptural revelation (see, perhaps Jude 3).
 - The dangers of possible subjectivism in expecting God to "speak to us" are very real and sometimes spiritually dangerous (though to be fair, a similar subjectivism can also impact our interpretation of Scripture).
- **A Middle Position:** We should remain open to the possibility that God could choose to speak directly to us by the Spirit, but we should follow scriptural directives to test everything, and we must remember we can be deceived. The Bible is our primary guide and must be held as the highest authority. Caution must be used in regard to what we believe God is telling us, as well as acting on what others are telling us they think they are hearing from God. Yet we must not forget that Paul calls prophecy a "greater" gift and urges us to seek it (1 Cor 12:31; 14:1). God gives what gifts He chooses to whom He desires.

If we think we may be experiencing something like a gift of prophecy, Grudem's advice might pertain: "If someone really does think God is bringing something to mind which should be reported in the congregation, there is nothing wrong with saying, *I think* the Lord is putting on my mind that..." or *It seems to me that* the Lord is showing us..." or some similar expression. Of course that does not sound "forceful" as "Thus says the Lord," but if the message is really from God, the Holy Spirit will cause it to speak with great power to the hearts of those who need to hear" (*Systematic Theology*, 1056).

THE BOTTOM LINE

- _____ God's _____ of _____ and _____
- ...by desiring to be _____ for the _____ and _____ of others.
- ...by focusing on _____, where God has spoken _____ (cautiously!).
- ...by also seeking _____ of the _____, being open to the _____ (cautiously!).