

A THEOLOGY OF PROPHECY

Introduction

Paul wrote nearly 2000 years ago, “For in it [the gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, ‘The one who is righteous will live by faith.’”¹ The notion of “justification and righteousness by faith”² is commonly taught to Christians today. For Martin Luther, however, this was a profound revelation that he received only when God’s Spirit granted him enlightenment on the verse.³ This revelation brought forth reformation that changed the landscape of Christianity over the last 500 years. When Agnes Ozman, a student at Charles F. Parham’s Bethel Bible School in Topeka, Kansas, received the baptism of the Holy Spirit and spoke in tongues on January 1, 1901, it also shaped the future of Christianity.⁴ Christians have not only rediscovered the baptism of the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues, but have been gradually rediscovering the gift of prophecy.

When Paul met believers in Ephesus, he asked them if they had received the Holy Spirit. Their answer echoes many Christian responses today. They had not heard that there is a Holy Spirit. When Paul laid his hands on them, “The Holy Spirit came upon

¹ Romans 1:17, New Revised Standard Version (NRSV). All verses in this paper are quoted from NRSV unless noted otherwise.

² Joseph W. Tkach, “The Message of Jesus: Justification and Righteousness by Faith,” accessed October 11, 2020, <https://www.gci.org/articles/justification-and-righteousness-by-faith/>.

³ Herman Hanko, “Martin Luther and Justification by Faith,” *Standard Bearer* 65, no. 5 (December 1987): 1-3, accessed October 11, 2020, <http://www.prca.org/resources/publications/articles/item/5020-martin-luther-and-justification-by-faith>.

⁴ John Sherrill, *They Speak with Other Tongues* (Grand Rapids, MI: Chosen Books, 2012), 596, Kindle.

them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied” (Acts 19:6). There are other biblical instances where prophesying followed the infilling of the Holy Spirit. For example, Zacharias prophesied after being filled with the Holy Spirit in Luke 1:67 and Peter prophesied after being filled with the Holy Spirit during Pentecost in Acts 2. Prophesying is one of the supernatural gifts of the Holy Spirit that the Apostle Paul mentions in chapter twelve of First Corinthians.

Larry Randolph, one of the leading prophets in the Pentecostal and Charismatic Movement, authored the book, *User Friendly Prophecy*. To reiterate the idea that the gift of prophecy is a product of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, he says,

First, there is a requirement that we must fulfill, which is the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Second, it appears that once New Testament believers have received the infilling of the Spirit, the gift of prophecy lies resident within them. As a result of this abiding anointing, we have the capacity to prophesy when and where the Spirit desires us to speak.⁵

Despite Randolph’s opinion, there is a lot of debate between traditional evangelical churches and Pentecostal and Charismatic churches about the baptism of the Holy Spirit and its accompanying signs. While the Pentecostal Movement has grown tremendously in the last 100 years, many evangelical churches still do not believe these gifts are available today. According to a report from 2011, there are approximately 285 million Evangelical Christians compared to 584 million Pentecostal and Charismatic Christians worldwide.⁶ Another report from the *Annuario Pontificio* (Pontifical

⁵ Larry Randolph, *User Friendly Prophecy* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 1998), 29.

⁶ Pew Research Center, “Global Christianity – A Report on the Size and Distribution of the World’s Christian Population,” Pew Research Center on Religion and Public Life, December 19, 2011, accessed March 6, 2020, <https://www.pewforum.org/2011/12/19/global-christianity-exec/>.

Yearbook) states that the number of Catholics in 2017 was 1.3 billion.⁷ A report from 2013 stated that over 160 million Catholics are Pentecostal or Charismatic.⁸ If all of this data is correct, that means there is an incredibly large number of believers (millions) who believe the gift of prophecy is still available today.

Despite these numbers, the Christian population in the United States (US) dropped from 78.4% in 2007 to 70.6% in 2014. Amidst this decline, Protestant Christians decreased from 51.3% of the US population in 2007 to 46.5% in 2014.⁹ One report from *Pew Research Center* states, “In 2007, there were an estimated 41 million mainline Protestant adults in the United States. As of 2014, there are roughly 36 million.”¹⁰ Other numbers reveal that Pentecostal and Charismatic populations reached 76 million in the United States in 2010.¹¹

While the total number of American Christians decreased from 2010 to 2014, these statistics still demonstrate there is an increasing community of believers who (at least) believe in, if not practice, the gifts of the Holy Spirit. These numbers show that it is

⁷ Cindy Wooden, “Global Catholic population tops 1.28 billion; half are in 10 countries,” *National Catholic Reporter*, April 8, 2017, accessed March 6, 2020, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/world/global-catholic-population-tops-128-billion-half-are-10-countries>.

⁸ Alessandra Nucci, “The Charismatic Renewal and the Catholic Church,” *The Catholic World Report*, May 18, 2013, accessed March 6, 2020, <https://www.catholicworldreport.com/2013/05/18/the-charismatic-renewal-and-the-catholic-church/>.

⁹ Pew Research Center, “America’s Changing Religious Landscape,” *Pew Research Center on Religion and Public Life*, May 12, 2015, accessed March 6, 2020, <https://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/>.

¹⁰ Pew Research Center, “America’s Changing Religious Landscape,” *Pew Research Center on Religion and Public Life*, May 12, 2015, accessed March 6, 2020, <https://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/>.

¹¹ T.M. Johnson, “The Global Demographics of the Pentecostal and Charismatic Renewal,” *Soc* 46 (2009): 480, accessed April 24, 2020, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/225417423_The_Global_Demographics_of_the_Pentecostal_and_Charismatic_Renewal.

valuable to study the role of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, especially the revelatory gift of prophecy, because it relates to the growth of Christianity worldwide. This paper will examine the gift of prophecy from a theological and Pentecostal perspective. It will consider the history and growth of the prophetic gift into today and the implications of using it nowadays.

Has the Gift of Prophecy Ceased?

The belief that the gift of prophecy has ceased may come from the interpretation of the following passage in 1 Corinthians 13:8–10,

Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end.

Many speculations have been made on the termination of the gifts because Paul states that prophecy is imperfect and will cease when the perfect comes. Some theologians and pastors have interpreted the completion of the Bible canon as the complete. They, therefore, reason there is no longer a need for the revelatory gift of prophecy or even apostleship. Thomas R. Schreiner, a New Testament scholar from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, is a prime example of someone who believes this. He writes in his article, “Why I Am a Cessationist,” “The early churches didn’t have the complete canon of Scripture for some time, and hence an authoritative and infallible prophetic ministry was needed to lay the foundation for the church in those early days.”¹² He continues to say,

¹² Thomas Schreiner, “Why I Am a Cessationist,” The Gospel Coalition, January 22, 2014, accessed October 31, 2020, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/cessationist/>.

Over the years I've become convinced that some of the so-called charismatic gifts are no longer given and that they aren't a regular feature of life in the church. I am thinking particularly of the gifts of apostleship, prophecy, tongues, healing, and miracles (and perhaps discernment of spirits).¹³

Other scholars also believe the gift of prophecy ceased, but they disagree that the completion of the Bible is the perfect that Paul refers to. For example, Roger Ellsworth believes the perfect refers to the time when Christians go to heaven. For Ellsworth, Scripture is the continuation of prophecy. He states,

Even though the gift of prophecy ceased, we have in Scripture the essential truths God delivered through the prophets. So, the gift of prophecy can be said to continue in Scripture. When the perfect age comes, we shall no longer need the testimony of Scripture to guide us.¹⁴

Ellsworth and Schreiner make statements that are partially true, but their speculations fail to consider what Paul teaches in other verses which imply that the community of believers need to grow in faith to prophesy and reach the full stature of Christ. They also fall short of considering that Paul teaches believers to pursue the gift of prophecy earnestly (1 Cor. 14:1) and instructs to not forbid speaking in tongues (1 Cor. 14:39). To understand the cause of Cessationist interpretations, these verses should be examined based on a few things.

First, there are different forms of prophesying in the Old Testament (OT) and New Testament (NT). In the OT, prophets spoke when the Holy Spirit visited and came upon them. In the NT, it is the Holy Spirit who lives in the believer that produces a

¹³ Schreiner, "Why I Am a Cessationist," <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/cessationist/>.

¹⁴ Roger Ellsworth, *Strengthening Christ's Church: The Message of 1 Corinthians* (Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 1995), 217.

prophetic message. Both are from the Spirit of God, but the means of receiving the message changed.

In the OT, only a small group of people were considered prophets. In the NT, this gift is diffused to all believers in Christ. Mike Bickle, a leading figure in the Modern Charismatic and Prophetic Movement, writes in his book, *Growing in the Prophetic*,

Luther also taught the doctrine of *private judgement*, which is the principle that every person can hear God and interpret the Scriptures for himself. That was another radical idea for the sixteenth century. There are parallels in Luther's emphasis on the priesthood of all believers to the New Testament understanding of prophetic ministry. Every Christian can hear from God, exercise discernment, and be led by the Holy Spirit. Ministry that was exclusive in the Old Testament (prophet and priest) is now diffused and common in the New.¹⁵

Historically, some groups like the Montanists violated Scriptures in their practices. These mistakes made by adherents of New Prophecy (as Montanism was called) caused many Christians to question the legitimacy of this gift. This afforded scholars the opportunity to raise concerns about whether prophecy may be threatening the authentic status of the Scriptures and/or leading the church astray. For example, David F. Farnell uses the Montanists and their erroneous statement on prophecy—that there are no more prophets after them—to refute Wayne Grudem's (a former Cessationist influenced by the Third Wave Signs and Wonders Movement) case that evangelical churches today should practice prophecy as people do in Pentecostal church settings.¹⁶ What Farnell likely does not realize is that he is also causing harm by using the error of others to refute a Christian publicly and thus cause more confusion around the topic of prophecy. The

¹⁵ Mike Bickle, *Growing in the Prophetic* (Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 1996), 56.

¹⁶ F. David Farnell, "The Montanist Crisis: A Key to Refuting Third-Wave Concepts of NT Prophecy," *The Master's Seminary Journal* 14, no.2 (Fall 2003): 235-262, accessed April 24, 2020, <https://tms.edu/msj/msj14.2.4/>.

question of why God gave mankind both the Scriptures and prophecy needs to be answered.

There are sixteen literary prophets. Five OT books were written by Major Prophets—Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel. The twelve books of the Minor Prophets include Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi. The writings of OT Prophets are recognized as parts of the Bible. However, during OT times there were prophets who wrote the Bible and there were also prophets whose messages are not recorded or regarded as such.

Moses and Samuel are also considered prophets and may be the authors of the Torah and 1 and 2 Samuel. Gad, Nathan, Elijah, Elisha, and Huldah (the prophetess in 2 Kings 22:14), and possibly John the Baptist are the non-literary prophets in the OT. Interestingly, Elijah is regarded as one of the greater prophets of the Bible, but he did not write any part of the Bible as far as we know.

In the NT, apostles and prophets are mentioned, but it was the apostles and other persons who wrote NT Scripture; none of the prophets mentioned in the NT wrote any part of the Bible as we know. Agabus, Anna the Prophetess, Silas, and Simeon (Gospel of Luke) are some of the prophets mentioned in the NT. There are also the four daughters of Philip who had a gift of prophecy (Acts 21:9). If there were so many prophets who were not called to write the Scriptures, what was the function of these prophets? The NT role and function of a prophet was to carry and speak God's messages. This is even a little different than the role of OT prophets who periodically also wrote.

God often used prophets in the OT to criticize kings and to correct the Israelites and their enemies. However, in the NT, it says "those who prophesy speak to other

people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation” (1 Cor. 14:3). Jon Mark Ruthven offers an illustration of this. He relates Scripture to the role of the Constitution of America. Ruthven states,

Saying that there can be no more direct, immediate “words from the Lord” to someone today because they would add to Scripture is liking saying that Congress can’t pass any more laws today because that would add to the Constitution! Ideally, both the Scripture and the Constitution guide and restrict their subsequent expressions (or they at least should). Prophecy and revelation are both like new laws in that they should appropriate application of the original documents into real life. Neither the Scriptures nor the Constitution are changed by these applications that they themselves authorize. Just as the Constitution expects the enactment of new laws that apply constitutional principles, so Scripture urges preaching, prophecy, and miracles as applications of the intention and message of the Scripture.¹⁷

The Constitution is our manual and the new laws passed by Congress are the application of the manual to our real lives. The Constitution is like the Bible in that both are final versions, closed to change. They serve as authorities, offering guiding principles. Although the Constitution sets forth the principles of what a US citizen can or cannot do, this does not take away the ability of Congress to make new laws. The prophet is someone who knows the Bible well and knows God intimately, just as a congressman knows the Constitution and works to abide by it. Since the function of prophecy and Scripture are different, they cannot be expected to replicate or replace one another. In fact, it would be imprudent if congressmen were eliminated simply because the Constitution existed. In the same way, one would not expect prophecy to cease solely because the Bible exists.

¹⁷ Jon Mark Ruthven, *What’s Wrong with Protestant Theology? Tradition vs. Biblical Emphasis* (Tulsa, OK: Word & Spirit Press, 2003), 42.

God can and will speak today, and He speaks through many different forms. For example, when Bible teachers are interpreting the Bible, they may teach or add words out of their own inspiration. These inspirations are prophetic and, therefore, these teachers are speaking as a prophetic voice whether they realize it or not. These inspirations help Christians to apply the Scriptures to their daily lives. Christians receive encouragement when they listen to such anointed preachers.

Prophecy can be also be a format of Bible interpretation like counseling or preaching. Since prophecy has a foretelling aspect and carries divine power, it can influence, change, correct, or encourage a person's life. Wayne Grudem writes about a prophetic experience related to 1 Corinthians 14:25. He shares,

I heard a report of this happening in a clearly non-charismatic Baptist church in America: A missionary speaker paused in the middle of his message and said something like this: "I didn't plan to say this, but it seems the Lord is indicating that someone in this church has just walked out on his wife and family. If that is so, let me tell you that God wants you to return to them and learn to follow God's pattern for family life." The missionary did not know it, but in the unlit balcony sat a man who had entered the church for the first time just moments before. The description fit him exactly, and he made himself known, acknowledged his sin, and began to seek after God.¹⁸

This example of prophecy, in the form of a word of knowledge, demonstrates the inspiration believers can receive to share messages with others on behalf of God. In his writing, Witness Lee also told a story about the famous Chinese Pentecostal evangelist John Sung, who died in 1944. In a meeting, John Sung pointed to a woman and called her someone's concubine (without knowing it in advance). The woman became angry for

¹⁸ Wayne. A. Grudem, "Why Christians Can Still Prophecy," *Christianity Today* 32, no. 13 (September 1988): 34, accessed April 24, 2020, <http://www.waynegrudem.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/Why-Christians-Can-Still-Prophecy3.pdf/>.

being exposed in public, but she was later convicted by the Holy Spirit because it was true. She repented and received the Lord.¹⁹

Lee also shares examples of his own prophetic words that brought fruits of repentance. On one occasion, Lee pointed to someone in a meeting and disclosed that he was stealing chalk from school and even drawing circles on the ground with it. This knowledge was not known in advance. The young man ended up confessing his sin. On another occasion, Lee pointed to a woman and revealed that she made her husband work many hours to support her habit of buying high heel shoes. This woman also converted after receiving this word.²⁰ Yet again, in another ministry moment, Lee pointed to a woman and declared that a demon was using her to stop people from getting saved and even preventing her mother from receiving Christ. Both the mother and daughter were saved after this word was given.²¹

Lee was never considered a prophet. He also never claimed that he had prophetic gifts. Yet, in Charismatic circles, these examples would be considered prophetic words spoken through him by the Holy Spirit during his preaching. Many preachers have similar experiences. Although such prophetic messages will never add to the Bible or replace it, they should not be discounted as ungodly.

¹⁹ Witness Lee, *A Living of Mutual Abiding with the Lord in Spirit*, chap. 5, sec. 1 (1983), in Living Stream Ministry, accessed March 8, 2020, <https://www.ministrybooks.org/books.cfm?cid=3D>.

²⁰ Witness Lee, *The Fullness of God*, chap.6, sec.4 (1985) in Living Stream Ministry, accessed March 18, 2020, <https://www.ministrybooks.org/books.cfm?n>.

²¹ Watchman Nee, *The Collected Works of Watchman Nee (Set 2) Vol. 42: Conferences, Messages, and Fellowship (2)*, chap. 28, sec. 2 (1993) in Living Stream Ministry, accessed March 8, 2020, <https://www.ministrybooks.org/SearchMinBooksDtl.cfm?so=C&id=10F8EA>.

Prophesying: Forthtelling or Foretelling?

For Lee, to prophesy is not to predict the future. When Lee visited Pentecostal churches in the United States, he did not think it was much different from the early Pentecostal Movement he experienced in China. People often prophesied saying “thus says the Lord,” but many prophecies including the great earthquake of Los Angeles, given in 1960, never came true.²² According to Lee, Paul means something different when he refers to prophesying. He says,

This is what Paul calls prophesying. It is not foretelling but “forth-telling,” speaking for God and speaking forth Christ from the Word of God for the edification of the believers and for the building up of the church (1 Cor. 14:3-4). This “all-saints-prophesying” meeting provides the brothers and sisters with the teaching, revelation, consolation, and exhortation that they need as the one church in their locality, and these things are ministered not by a few gifted ones but by all the members mutually (1 Cor. 14:1, 31).²³

Lee recalls his experience with Watchmen Nee and concludes: “We have come to the clear understanding that prophesying in 1 Corinthians 14 does not denote foretelling or predicting. To prophesy in the sense of 1 Corinthians 14 denotes to speak for God and Christ and speak forth God and Christ.”²⁴ Lee explains his point with a couple examples,

Likewise, a minister of the Word may minister Christ to people but not dispense Christ into them. A nursing mother, on the other hand, not only ministers food to her babies but dispenses it into them. Babies sometimes do not want to eat the food given to them, but mothers have a way to compel them to eat. We must learn not only to speak for God and Christ but also to speak forth God and Christ. Moreover, in speaking forth God and Christ, we should not only minister God and Christ to people but also dispense into them what we are speaking forth. Experienced doctors are skilled at dispensing medicine to their patients.²⁵

²² Witness Lee, *The Practice of Prophesying*, chap. 1, sec. 1 (1990) in Living Stream Ministry, accessed March 18, 2020, <https://www.ministrybooks.org/SearchMinBooksDsp.cfm?id=33E313DFCF>.

²³ Witness Lee, *Our Meetings* (tract), chap. 1, sec. 1 in Living Stream Ministry, accessed March 8, 2020, <https://www.ministrybooks.org/books.cfm?id=1EFAEB>.

²⁴ Lee, *The Practice of Prophesying*, chap. 1, sec. 1.

²⁵ Lee, *The Practice of Prophesying*, chap. 1, sec. 1.

Even though Lee acknowledges the foretelling aspect of prophecy, he does not consider it the main function of prophecy according to Paul's writings. Grudem gives prophecy a new definition to cope with the controversial issues that arose with the predicting and foretelling that occurred in the Pentecostal Movement. These foretelling prophecies often seemed incorrect and never came to pass. He says,

An examination of the New Testament teaching on this gift will show that it should be defined not as "predicting the future," or "proclaiming a word from the Lord," or "powerful preaching"—but rather as "telling something that God has spontaneously brought to mind."²⁶

Grudem also sees a problem with predicting things using the words "thus says the Lord," since it is not guaranteed that the word is 100% from the Lord. Some prophecies may contain a mixture of revelation or inspiration from God and emotions and thoughts of the one delivering it. Grudem points out that in the NT, the apostles are the counterpart of OT prophets. He tries to lower the expectation of prophecy in the NT as something of less authority than the apostles. Yet, Grudem still encourages evangelical churches to remain open to the practice of prophesying. Grudem says,

Prophecy in the New Testament is not merely "predicting the future." There were some predictions (Acts 11:28; 21:11), but there was also the disclosure of sins (1 Cor. 14:25). In fact, anything that edified could have been included, for Paul says, "He who prophesies speaks to men for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation" (1 Cor. 14:3). Here is another indication of the value of prophecy: It could speak to the needs of people's hearts in a spontaneous, direct way.²⁷

Both Lee and Grudem soften the predicting aspect of prophesying. Grudem, though, had more participation in the late Pentecostal Movement while Lee mostly

²⁶ Grudem, "Why Christians," 29–30.

²⁷ Grudem, "Why Christians," 34.

rejected it. John W. Ritenbaugh argues that the prophets both forthtold and foretold, though mainly they forthtold. He says,

They both forthtell - that is, proclaim a message truthfully, clearly, and authoritatively to those for whom it is intended - and they will on occasion, but not always, foretell - that is, predict events before they take place.²⁸

Nee calls this forthtelling prophecy “the deep calls to deep” (Ps. 42:7).²⁹ This means to speak what one has received or processed in their spirits to the spiritual or inner persons of other people. Bickle, on the other hand, does not agree with Grudem or Lee, but he praises Grudem’s effort in promoting the understanding of the prophetic gifts among the evangelical churches. Bickle says,

I find Grudem helpful but not adequate. His definition of prophecy is “speaking merely human words to report something God brings to mind.” The definition allows for a type of prophetic utterance that is possible for every believer, and rightfully so. He also acknowledges that in the New Testament some people ministered more regularly in prophecy and were called “prophets” (Agabus in Acts 11, 21; Philip’s daughters in Acts 21; Barnabas in Acts 13:1). Gruden does not acknowledge that there was an “office” of prophet. However, Pentecostals and Charismatics would disagree with him. Paul says that apostles and prophets will continue to function TILL or until the church is fully mature. Surely, TILL this occurs, we need apostles and prophets to equip the saints for the work of ministry.³⁰

Bickle teaches there are four levels of prophetic gifts which include simple prophecy, prophetic gifting, prophetic ministry, and prophetic office. The first level is for every believer. Each can listen to the Holy Spirit and prophesy. The second level

²⁸ John W. Ritenbaugh, “Elijah and John the Baptist,” *Bible Study Tools: Forerunner Commentary*, January 2004, accessed March 8, 2020, <https://www.bibletools.org/index.cfm/fuseaction/Library.sr/CT/PERSONAL/k/868/Elijah-John-Baptist.htm>.

²⁹ Watchman Nee, *Deep Calls unto Deep*, chap. 1, sec. 5 in Living Stream Ministry, accessed March 8, 2020, <https://www.ministrybooks.org/SearchMinBooksDsp.cfm?id=0B06C811D6>.

³⁰ Bickle, *Growing in the Prophetic*, 38.

characterizes someone who regularly hears from the Holy Spirit through impressions, dreams, and visions. The third level refers to someone who is recognized and commissioned by the local church to have regular prophetic ministry. The fourth level denotes a believer who occupies the office of a prophet like the prophets in the OT. Bickle argues that even the prophecies of level four persons may not be 100% correct like the prophets in the OT, but these persons still need to be taken seriously.³¹

Bickle listed his personal experience of how Bob Jones, a leading prophetic figure associated with Bickle and their prophetic practices, predicted future events a number of times and they came to pass. One of these prophecies by Jones was a three-month drought accompanied by only one day of rain which occurred on May 28, 1983 in Kansas City.³²

In an abstract titled, “Forthtelling, Not Foretelling,” Steven L. McKenzie offers another perspective. Like that of Lee, he argues that Christian readers typically misunderstand prophecy in the Bible because they assume that its primary intent is to foretell the future. He writes,

The intent of the genre of prophecy in the Hebrew Bible was not primarily to predict the future but rather address specific social, political and religious circumstances in ancient Israel and Judah. This means that there is no prediction of Christ in the Hebrew Bible. The writers of the New Testament and other Christian literature reinterpreted or reapplied the concept of Hebrew prophecy. This is not to disparage later Christian authors, but to point out that they were participating in a long-standing process of reinterpretation that goes back to the prophetic books themselves.³³

³¹ Bickle, *Growing in the Prophetic*, 39-41.

³² Bickle, *Growing in the Prophetic*, 17.

³³ Steven L. McKenzie, *How to Read the Bible: History, Prophecy, Literature—Why Modern Readers Need to Know the Difference, and What It Means for Faith Today* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), chap. 3, accessed March 8, 2020, <https://www.oxfordscholarship.com/view/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195161496.001.0001/acprof-9780195161496-chapter-3>.

McKenzie's statement is overexaggerated because the OT does contain the aspect of predicting regardless of the author's intention, especially in regard to foreshadowing the coming of the Christ. His statement does, however, support that prophecy has different purposes in the OT versus the NT. Randolph's definition of prophesying broadens the matter. He says, "I tell them that the Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible defines the Greek words *propheteis* and *prophetcuo* (prophecy and prophesy) in this manner: 'to predict, to foretell, to speak under inspiration.'"³⁴

Randolph points out that the Hebrew word for prophecy is *nabi*. This word means "bubble up" and it is used over 300 times in the OT.³⁵ Randolph is not shy at all in saying that prophesying contains the aspect of foretelling. He continues, "Undoubtedly, there are many other valid references that accurately define the meaning of prophecy. Yet, all of these definitions can be reduced to one simple thought: *Prophecy is God speaking through man.*"³⁶

In the same book, Randolph records a story of how God gave him a prophetic dream instructing him to go to New York City. There were few details in the instructions, but he recalled seeing a white car in his vision. Randolph obeyed and left Arkansas. Although he had no money, he trusted that God would speak to him prophetically. In a coffeehouse, he saw a depressed-looking man and God told Randolph that he was suicidal. Randolph spoke with the man and found out it was true. The man had recently gone bankrupt and his wife and kids left him. While driving from Wisconsin to New

³⁴ Randolph, *User Friendly Prophecy*, 28.

³⁵ Randolph, *User Friendly Prophecy*, 28.

³⁶ Randolph, *User Friendly Prophecy*, 28.

York on his most recent business trip, he heard a man preach the gospel on the radio. Before acting on his decision to take his life, he prayed that God would send someone to speak to him in New York if he were real.

Randolph spoke to this man prophetically that day telling him that God brought a country boy from Arkansas to New York to tell him God loves him and that he should not commit suicide. The man received the Lord and was so touched that he insisted to pay for Randolph's hotel charges and drive him back to the airport. Upon leaving, Randolph realized the man's car was exactly the white car he saw in the vision before he came to New York.³⁷ Stories like this one can be found in the lives of many modern-day prophets or ordinary people who practice prophesying.

Another prominent prophet in the Pentecostal and Charismatic Movement is James Goll. He writes in his book, *The Seer*, that prophets in modern prophetic streams have two functions and are characterized in two groups. Like Randolph said, one group are nabiy' prophets who speak on behalf of God like water bubbling up. They may not see many visions. The other group are seer prophets. Goll, like Randolph, also points out that the words *nabiy'* or *nabi* were used over 300 times to refer to prophets like Abraham and others. The Hebrew words for "seer" are *ra'ah* and *chozeh*. *Ra'ah* means "to see" and *chozeh* means "a beholder in vision." The seer prophets often see visions or have dreams. In 1 Chronicles 29:29, each of these three words are mentioned. That is, Samuel the seer (*ra'ah*), Nathan the prophet (*nabiy'*) and Gad the seer (*chozeh*).³⁸ Goll continues,

One of the differences is that, whereas the prophetic word of a nabiy' is often spontaneous and activated by faith, that of a *ra'ah* or *chozeh* seer is more

³⁷ Randolph, *User Friendly Prophecy*, 6-10.

³⁸ James Goll, *The Seer*, *exp. ed.* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 2012), 23-30.

dependent upon the manifested presence of God. Many seers will see something beforehand.³⁹

Goll states that these two prophetic functions reappeared about 50 years ago in the Pentecostal Movement. Jones represents the seer prophet and Bill Hamon, founder of Christian International Ministries, represents the nabiy' prophet.⁴⁰ These examples support the argument that prophecy consists of both forthtelling and foretelling qualities.

Prophecy in the Modern Charismatic Movement

The gift of prophecy was evident in the beginning of the Pentecostal Movement and it was revived in the Latter Rain Movement. In the healing revivals of the 1950s, Kenneth E. Hagin and others furthered prophesying practices. Hamon says,

Two streams of restoration came forth in 1947-48. One was the Latter Rain Movement, which restored the practice of...the laying on of hands...as well as extensive congregational prophesying...They emphasized moving into the prophetic realm by faith, grace and gifting. The other restoration stream was what was termed "The Healing and Deliverance Movement." Their restorational emphasis was laying on of hands for healing, deliverance and world evangelism by preaching with signs and wonders. Both were of God and were valid ministries.⁴¹

David Pytches writes in his book, *Some Said it Thundered: A Personal Encounter with the Kansas City Prophets*, that the prophetic practice in the Latter Rain Movement contains some practices that are questionable. He says,

The Latter Rain Movement, whatever its merits, was greatly undermined by such unbridled prophetic utterances. Men and women were prophesying all kinds of

³⁹ Goll, *The Seer*, 31.

⁴⁰ Goll, *The Seer*, 31-32.

⁴¹ Ern Baxter, *Prophetic Seminar* (teaching notes) (Mobile AL: Integrity Communications, 1984), quoted in Jim W. Goll, *The Seer: The Prophetic Power of Visions, Dreams, and Open Heavens*, exp. ed. (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image Publishers, Inc., 2012).

words over people but were not operating under authority. Their prophecies went untested. God is not the author of such confusion.⁴²

Although Pytches believes the gift of prophecy was abused during this time, the gift of prophecy was still more evident in operation than it had been. It was even further recovered through the Kansas Prophetic Movement of the 1980s.⁴³ Jones was one of the leading prophets in this movement and another important figure was Bickle. Bickle was just a young pastor and not known by many people until Jones prophesied to him that he would lead a 24-hour worship center which later became true. This is the International House of Prayer (IHOP). According to IHOP's website,

When the two first met, Bob Jones told Mike Bickle that the Lord would use him to pastor a young adult movement of singers and musicians who would pray for Israel and have strong ties to Asia. Mike initially didn't believe Bob, but two weeks later it was confirmed to him that Bob, in fact, had heard from the Lord. Bob, who passed away in 2014, played a pivotal role in encouraging Mike during the early years of the movement and was a great friend to IHOPKC.⁴⁴

IHOP is now famous worldwide and it has influenced many Christians to start other 24-hour worship and prayer centers around the world. Through a connection to IHOP in its early days, many prophets gathered around and visited Kansas City. This group of persons initiated what was later called the Kansas Prophetic Movement.⁴⁵

Michael G. Maudlin, a reporter from *Christianity Today*, recorded some controversies

⁴² David Pytches, *Some Said It Thundered: A Personal Encounter with the Kansas City Prophets* (Nashville, TE: Oliver-Nelson Books, 1991), 13.

⁴³ Mike Bickle, "The History of IHOPKC," International House of Prayer Kansas City, accessed September 17, 2020, <https://www.ihopkc.org/propheticichistory/>.

⁴⁴ Bickle, "The History," 1.

⁴⁵ Mike Bickle, interview by Ask Mike Bickle, "Who are the Kansas City Prophets and are you one of them?" (video), January 9, 2015, accessed September 23, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SD_fa_hdazI.

aroused by this movement. He visited Kansas City and authored a detailed story in 1991.

He says,

These men—pastor Mike Bickle, and prophets such as Bob Jones, John Paul Jackson, and Paul Cain—and their church, Kansas City Fellowship (KCF), are creating a stir in charismatic circles. They claim that the prophetic gift should be restored in the church, that prophecy is a natural, biblical means for God to speak to his people, and that (here’s the apocalyptic part) this increased prophetic activity is a sign of the emergence of the last-days’ victorious church. They practice what they preach.⁴⁶

Even until this day Bickle and others strongly believe God is using them to restore the prophetic gift in the worldwide church and usher in the Apocalypse. Though Jones gave accurate prophecies regarding IHOP and many other things, he remained a controversial figure due to some unfulfilled prophecies.⁴⁷ Pytches also mentions Paul Cain who was known as a gifted person with words of knowledge. Cain gave up marriage to live a celibate life and have intimate fellowship with only Jesus.⁴⁸ His gifts were extraordinary, but it was later revealed that he struggled with a homosexual relationship and alcoholic abuse. Cain first denied these things, but he later acknowledged them with an apologetic letter.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Michael G. Maudlin, “Seers in the Heartland, Hot on the Trail of the Kansas City Prophets,” *Christianity Today*, January 14, 1991, 18, accessed October 15, 2020, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/1991/january-14/seers-in-heartland-hot-on-trail-of-kansas-city-prophets.html>.

⁴⁷ Jones prophesied in 1997 that there would be great earthquakes and six great cities would be destroyed. Among them were Chicago, Morgan City, St. Louis and Memphis. It was stated, “Memphis will become a lake.” Ben, “Bob Jones’ Earthquake Prophecies,” IHOP Network, August 9, 2013, accessed October 15, 2020, <http://www.ihopnetwork.com/index.php/2013/08/09/bob-jones-earthquake-prophecies>.

⁴⁸ Pytches, *Some Said*, 19-44.

⁴⁹ Paul Cain, “A Letter of Confession,” *Pain Cain Ministries*, 2005, accessed October 1, 2020, <https://web.archive.org/web/20050225053035/http://www.paulcain.org/news.html>.

Rick Joyner, a famous Pentecostal prophet, compared Paul Cain to Samson of the Bible. Samson was a person with moral failure yet gifted and used greatly by God.⁵⁰ Due to inaccuracies or moral failures of persons who operated in prophetic giftings, some emerged from these movements with a distaste for the prophetic gift. Many preferred denying the prophetic gift instead of testing the prophecies and the persons delivering them. This kind of rationale marked the gift of prophecy as something to be cautious of rather than something natural to believers.

The Biblical Way to Prophecy

The fundamental difference between OT and NT prophecy is that the Holy Spirit no longer possesses a person from the outside to prophesy, but rather abides on the inside. The modern-day prophet Graham Cooke labels this difference as “visitational” versus “habitational.”⁵¹ Cooke explains in one of his Facebook posts,

The tragedy for many churchgoers today is that we are trying to live in Christ with a visitational mindset, and we actually have people preaching that if you sin, God lifts off you. Not possible, because He is living inside you! Jesus said, “We will make our abode with you,” so we are changing the rules. We are changing everything from a visitational encounter to a habitational one. That means you take God with you EVERYWHERE.⁵²

In the OT, when the Spirit of God fell upon a prophet, there was no room for mistakes. The Holy Spirit spoke clearly and directly. If a prophecy did not come true, the

⁵⁰ Rick Joyner, “Paul Cain Story #RicksRant,” (YOUTUBE video), *MorningStar Ministries*, February 19, 2019, accessed October 11, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2qErzorYs68>.

⁵¹ Teagan Russell, “Prophecy Is For Everyone, Says Graham Cooke,” *Eternity News*, April 6, 2017, accessed November 2, 2020, <https://www.eternitynews.com.au/in-depth/prophecy-is-for-everyone-says-graham-cooke/>.

⁵² Graham Cooke, Facebook post, May 15, 2013, accessed March 15, 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/GrahamCookeBBH/posts/10151450945723918/>.

person who prophesied would be considered a false prophet. Many kinds of false prophets existed in the OT and were commanded to be stoned or removed from among the people (Deut. 13:1–18). Mostly, these false prophets were those who acted in pretense. They claimed to serve God, but their hearts were filled with malice or pride. That is, they either spoke before consulting with the Lord, spoke arrogantly from their own agenda, or did not know God and tried to purposely lead Israel astray.⁵³ Both Jesus and Paul warn believers to be aware of such false prophets nowadays.⁵⁴

Now that the Holy Spirit dwells in the believer, God’s Spirit may speak clearly and directly to that person, but it depends on the Christian to hear and discern what God is saying. Eager and sincere believers of Christ who move in the gift of prophecy are different than those who claim to operate in the office of a prophet but purposely try to deceive the flock. Often, one may hear something from God but not listen to it in their mind nor receive it into their heart. To get the attention of others or make communication successful, one must get in touch with their spiritual man. Nee says,

As we extend ourselves deeper and take root downward, we will discover that “deep calls unto deep.” When we can bring forth riches from the depths of our inner life, we will find that other lives will be deeply affected. The minute our inner being is touched, others will receive help and be enlightened. They will know that there is something beyond their knowledge. When deep touches deep, deep will respond to deep. If our life has no depth, our superficial work will only affect other lives superficially. We repeat yet again—only “deep calls unto deep.”⁵⁵

⁵³ Bob Deffinbaugh, “False Prophets, Part 1,” *Bible.org*, August 24, 2004, accessed October 16, 2020, <https://bible.org/seriespage/3-false-prophets-part-i#:~:text=In%20the%20Old%20Testament%2C%20we%20find%20prophets%20in,led%20by%20>.

⁵⁴ Matt. 7:15, 24:24; 2 Pet. 2:1-3; John 4:1.

⁵⁵ Watchman Nee, *Deep Calls unto Deep*, chap. 1, sec. 5 in Living Stream Ministry, accessed March 8, 2020, <https://www.ministrybooks.org/SearchMinBooksDsp.cfm?id=0B06C811D6>.

Since Lee was greatly influenced by Nee, he also stresses ministering from Spirit to Spirit. He even coined the term “exercising the [human] spirit.”⁵⁶ Lee and Nee stressed the importance of activating the spirit-man within a person to stay connected with God. Some ways of doing this includes calling on the name of the Lord repetitively or mediating on the Word of God (pray reading). When one ministers out of their spirit, there will be less contamination from their soul. The Word of God is like a pure spring of water which flows directly from the Spirit of God, but believers must be diligent to keep clear channels. The British author and teacher, Bruce Yocum, says,

Prophecy can be impure — our own thoughts or ideas can get mixed into the message we receive — whether we receive all the words directly or only receive a sense of the message.⁵⁷

Grudem has influenced many Protestants, Pentecostals, and Charismatics with his writing. He explains that Paul was convinced that prophecy in the NT carried less authority than written Scripture. Grudem comments,

If prophecy had equaled God’s word in authority, he [Paul] would never have had to tell them not to despise it, for they had “received” and “accepted” God’s word “with joy from the Holy Spirit” (1 Thess. 1:6; 2:13; cf. 4:15). But when Paul tells them to “test everything,” it must include the prophecies mentioned in the previous phrase. He implies that prophecies contain some things that are good and some that are not when he encourages them to “hold fast to that which is good.” This could never have been said of the words of an Old Testament prophet, or the authoritative teachings of a New Testament apostle.⁵⁸

Grudem does not clearly explain why he believes the prophecies in the NT were not equal in authority to the Scriptures, but he does highlight a good point that Paul

⁵⁶ Witness Lee, *Lessons on Prayer*, chap. 5 (1981) in Living Stream Ministry, accessed March 8, 2020, <https://www.ministrybooks.org/books.cfm>.

⁵⁷ Bruce Yocum, *Prophecy: Exercising the Prophetic Gifts of the Spirit in the Church Today* (Cincinnati, OH: Servant Books, 1993), 79.

⁵⁸ Grudem, “Why Christians,” 30–31.

advocates: prophecies should be tested. The inaccuracies of some prophecies may not lie in the gift of prophecy itself but in the immaturity of the believer to hear and deliver the word(s) accurately. Denying the gift of prophecy just because someone does not prophesy perfectly is the equivalent of eliminating all tests at schools simply because some students do not score well all the time. These tests can act as tools that help students grow as they practice. Likewise, the gift of prophecy may reveal areas of growth for the Christians who practice it.

One of Cooke's prophetic testimonies demonstrates the ability of prophecy to mature the believer and its purpose as a tool to demonstrate love. One day God showed Cooke that a friend was struggling with pornography. Though Cooke received this revelation, Cooke carried some lingering offenses against this friend. When Cooke considered sharing the latest information he received, he approached it thinking in his heart, "See, you are in sin and God told me as a prophet of God." Cooke says that God immediately rebuked him for not having the love of God. Cooke came to understand that God showed him the situation of the brother as a symptom of a patient toward a doctor. The purpose was to heal this patient instead of condemning him.

Cooke felt greatly ashamed before God and started to cry. Afterward, God instructed Cooke to tell his friend about his sin, but Cooke refused. God eventually commanded Cooke to go to his friend a second time. Cooke decided to obey. He drove to his house but could not speak a word; he just cried. The brother was puzzled and asked

why. Cooke told him the whole story. Upon hearing, the friend also cried and repented for his sin. The friendship between them was restored.⁵⁹

This is a great picture of the relationship between prophecy and love. The gift of prophecy not only caused Cooke to grow in love for God and his friend, but it also edified and corrected the friend receiving the word. God’s intention in revealing information to Cooke was for the purpose of repentance, restoration, and reconciliation—foundational pieces to love. Cooke makes the point that many prophets can get information from God, but these are not necessarily revelations from the heart of God.

Since Christians can be subject to pitfalls in prophesying, Vallotton offers some guidelines for interpreting and applying the revelations one receives from God. He divides prophecy into three steps to avoid error: 1) Revelation; 2) Interpretation; 3) Application. He gives an illustration of a wrong interpretation for a correct revelation. Sometimes, it is simply that one may not understand the revelation they got from God. Vallotton states,

Some time ago several of us traveled to a Morning Star conference where they were training people how to prophecy. With about 70 people in the room, we were all prophesying to a woman in the front of the room. We completed the ten prophecies allowed in a prophetic exercise, and then began to judge the words given to the woman. Suddenly, a man in the back of the room stood to his feet and said, “You have a yellow shirt on!” Immediately, the woman fell to the ground, crying hysterically.

The man continued to prophesy, saying things like, “The sun is yellow...the moon is yellow,” and so on. When the woman finally regained her composure, the leader of the class asked her what the word meant to her. She explained, “I have a son who is autistic, and I told the Lord today, ‘If you are going to heal my son, have someone tell me that I have a yellow shirt.’” The man who delivered this prophetic word stepped out of bounds and tried to give the woman an

⁵⁹ Graham Cooke, “Approaching the Heart of Prophecy,” The Heart of Prophecy (MP3 podcast), accessed October 11, 2020, <https://www.brilliantbookhouse.com/products/approaching-the-heart-of-prophecy-cd>.

interpretation of the color yellow. Although the Holy Spirit used the word powerfully in the woman's life, the entire prophetic word was simply, "You have a yellow shirt on."⁶⁰

In Charismatic churches nowadays, people often give prophetic words using phrases like, "I have a feeling" or "I felt the Lord impress me to say this." These are safer ways to give a prophetic word. In the case of the woman with the yellow shirt, the best way would be to say something like, "I have a word for you. You have a yellow shirt on. Does this make sense to you?" By sharing the word this way, one can avoid the errors of receiving the wrong revelation or misinterpreting the revelation.

By acknowledging that one's speaking could be mixed with the words of the Lord and one's own feelings, these phrases leave room for error. Indicating that something is not necessarily 100% from God also supports Paul's exhortation when he preaches against pride during his instruction to the Corinthian believers. Claiming one has an impression is a humbler way to convey a prophetic message from God to others. This is also a way to ensure that one is speaking from a place of love.

Conclusion

Although the gift of prophecy seemed inactive for a prolonged period of Christianity, God never purposed its extinction nor desired it. God raised believers to repossess the prophetic gift and he set forth times that the gifts of the Spirit would be restored. In these movements, some made errors. The Montanists even violated Scripture with some of their claims and this gave the church the impression that the spiritual gifts

⁶⁰ Kris Vallotton, *Basic Training for the Prophetic Ministry* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image Publishers, Inc., 2014), 34-35.

were false or harmful to practice. Cessationist agendas still provoke believers to avoid and rebuke the spiritual gifts.

While it is true that misuses of the gifts exist, improper use is not biblical justification for why they should not be practiced. Error does not equal permission to dismiss the prophetic. Wrong conclusions and a lack of proper use and understanding of Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 12–14 have caused the body of Christ to forego the genuine gifts of the Holy Spirit, especially the gift of prophecy.

This paper serves as a theological foundation supporting the assertion that God still desires that the body of Christ practice prophecy corporately today. This does not mean, however, that Christians should only pursue the gifts and neglect pursuing individual and corporate holiness. As Nee and Lee taught, God requires believers to have an intimate relationship with Him and from this place the gifts can flow. Pursuing holiness and intimacy with God helps develop the gift of prophecy in the believer's life. Living a holy life keeps the believer clear of things that may contaminate the channel with which God speaks to and through. These practices help the believer become more accurate in their prophesying.

God wishes that believers grow in their gifts and be faithful in using them. Regardless of how one utters prophecy, Christians must learn to minister and practice prophesying from a place of love, since this is the measuring stick for using the gifts. In Bob Jones' death to life experience, Jones saw Christ asking everyone in heaven one

question: “Did you learn to love?” When it was his turn, the Lord told him that he still had not learned to love, so God sent Jones back to earth.⁶¹

God’s Spirit is eager to share his gifts with the body of Christ so that it may grow in love and unity. The gift of prophecy will be a necessary tool to strengthen the body in these coming times. Concluding, Paul states in 2 Timothy 1:6–7, “For this reason I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands.” The time is now for the gifts to be rekindled among the body so that each may prophesy until all have reached the maturity or full stature of Christ. When perfection has been reached, then there shall be no need for prophecy. Until then, let us pursue it earnestly like Paul charges us to (1 Cor. 14:1).

⁶¹ Bob Jones, interview by Patricia King, “Bob Jones died- God sent him back from heaven's door-1,” *theglorychannel*, June 27, 2007, accessed March 15, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3MRJ3wA5neU>.

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