

What is Prophecy?

(1 Corinthians 14: 1-5)

I said last week that 1 Corinthians 13 concentrates on the Fruit of the Spirit, which at its heart is love. It is to be the primary aim of the Christian life. We are to walk in love as it is defined for us in chapter 13. As we turn this week to chapter fourteen Paul moves from talking about the pre-eminent fruit, which is love, to a discussion of the pre-eminent gift, which is prophecy.

Please look at verses 1-5 of chapter 14"

"Pursue love and strive for the spiritual gifts, and especially that you may prophesy. 2 For those who speak in a tongue do not speak to other people but to God; for nobody understands them, since they are speaking mysteries in the Spirit. 3 On the other hand, those who prophesy speak to other people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation. 4 Those who speak in a tongue build up themselves, but those who prophesy build up the church. 5 Now I would like all of you to speak in tongues, but even more to prophesy. One who prophesies is greater than one who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets, so that the church may be built up.

In these verses Paul is comparing prophecy with tongues. He does this because in Corinth they were giving priority to tongues, not prophecy. However Paul says that we are to desire prophecy above tongues in the church because tongues is a language of prayer, whereas prophecy is the language of proclamation. Therefore the former is intended to aid us in communicating with God, whereas the latter aids us in communicating with each other. This is what verses 2 and 3 emphasize: "For those who speak in a tongue do not speak to other people but to God; for nobody understands them, since they are speaking mysteries in the Spirit. On the other hand, those who prophesy speak to other people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation."

Prophesying is basically the explaining and expounding of the mind of God. Jean Calvin called it "the peculiar gift of explaining revelation." It is applying the world view of God to the circumstances of people so that they begin to see what is happening in their lives in terms of what God understands them to be, as different from the illusions and fantasies and mistaken concepts of the world around them. That

is the business of prophesying. It is a very needed gift in our day as well, because it has, as Paul says, a threefold effect:

First, it builds people up. The word is oikodomen in the Greek, oiko means "house," and domen means "to build." To build a house on a solid foundation is the idea; and the work of prophesying then gives people a foundation.

One of the major problems among Christians today is the struggle they have with the sense of their true identity. Many people are emotionally torn apart because they do not understand the revelation of the Word of God that they are new creatures in Christ Jesus; they are no longer what they once were. Because they still get feelings of being what they once were, they believe those feelings, and they react accordingly. There is an up-and-down experience that they can never get away from. But prophesying corrects that. It teaches us who we are in Christ. That is why it is so needed in our day, as it was needed here in Corinth.

We also face the problem of living in a country and being part of a larger church that is choosing to order its life apart from God's word and God's will. I believe the Anglican Church of Canada is an institution that could care less about God's world view. At such a time, prophecy is need to build up those who truly desire to live according to His will when the Church has turned to following other gods and thus become apostate. I will say more about this when we meet on Wednesday evening to talk more about General Synod.

The second thing prophesying does is strengthen people. This is the word from which we get the word paraclete, one of the titles of the Holy Spirit. He is the strengthener of God's people. It means to support and encourage; it is "one called alongside," that is the literal meaning of the term, to support you and steady you and strengthen you.

The third ministry of prophesying is that of comforting; it comforts. Still a third Greek word is used here, paramuthian, which means, basically, to empathize, to put yourself in the place of others, to understand the pressures they are under. It means to be able to feel with them and be able, then, to encourage them with the fact that you know how they feel, you have been there, but God is working it out with them as he worked it out with you. That is what the word of prophesying is inclined to do. We have all had the experience of listening to a text of Scripture expounded, and it seemed to speak right to our basic problem. That is what prophesying does. You can see,

therefore, how useful and how important it is to have this exercised in the church.

Well then, how does God build up the church, strengthen and comfort his church by manifesting his presence through the gift of prophecy:

Prophecy allows us the opportunity to see God's plan for us in a focused way. It is akin to the focus lens on a pair of binoculars. That which is hazy, becomes clear as the lens is adjusted. The same thing happens with the prophetic word.

To illustrate this for us today, I have asked Peter Lillington to share with us a prophecy that the Lord gave to him back in January. This is a word that has been weighed by the Vestry and we believe God wants this to be heard by the congregation. Please here God speak to us through this word:

The spirit of the age
January 2004

This prophecy is not going to be easy to hear.
Neither is it any easier to speak.
However, the spirit of the age will be addressed.
You have all heard the Lamb. Now hear the Lion of Judah!

This is the message that the Lord is bringing to the Church:

I am the Lord your God. I see all hearts and discern all purposes. Nothing is hidden from Me. I know your ways and all your plans. I Love you. You bear My Name. You are the people of My pasture. And behold, I am doing a new thing.

I see this land, this culture. It is rich, fat and bloated. You lack nothing! Everything is provided for, and yes, in abundance! I see the gods of money, of avarice, of greed and lust stretching their tentacles throughout this land. New temples to other gods are raised, and people worship in them. I know the evil that dwells here. You think you are rich! But your eyes are blind! Foolish people - look again and see what I see.

Yes - you are part of this! You live both in it, and of it. And I call you out! You must not live this way. You are temples of the Holy Spirit, so why then do you worship in the temples of Babylon? Do you not see it? Well then, I the Lord will declare it for

you. The land is corrupt and evil, there is no knowledge or love of God. Each person goes their own way, and they do what pleases them. They will reap what they have sown! I the Lord have spoken!

But yet I am not willing that any should perish. So, wake up. Listen, for I have called you into a new way. I have called you out, and my word will not return to me empty. You are a Holy and a Royal people. Do you not know it? You bear my Name, on your heads and in your hearts, and I am not willing that any one of you should perish.

Listen! For a new wave will flood across this land. I the Lord your God have spoken! A new harvest awaits, as My Spirit washes anew throughout this land. But look, the ground is rough, rocky and unprepared. Where can I plant My harvest? Where is the soil ready for it? Precious few places are ready. So then, make haste, lest the Day of the Lord come and take you unaware.

You must have love, one for another, the true image of My love. Why do I see shallow life amongst you? Do you doubt? Do you not truly believe? Do you think the Lords arm is too short? Can He not provide all your needs, yes, and more? What do you say? Will you contend with Me?

I command you, grow in love and fellowship with Me and one another. Build a true community of believers. One that will withstand the coming storm, one that will pass the test of the Rock of Ages. Come! Will you not trust in Me?

I tell you the truth, nothing will change until you are transformed into my image. Nothing will change until you are removed from the company of the harlot. But if you are willing, I will work such a change amongst you, that you will be left awed in My power. Do you think I cannot do it? Test me, and see, for the Lord is good.

You have insurance, you have wealth. Many indeed are your barns. But they will not save you in the Day of the Lord. Trust in the One who can save.

Can you have any gods before Me? Can anything stand in My presence? Foolish people! Do you think you can claim God and mammon both? Have you not read, do you not understand? You cannot serve both Gods. I the Lord your God am a jealous God and I will stand no other. I will tolerate no idols in my presence. Does light have fellowship with darkness? No!

You ask, so what are our gods? You know, and I know. There is no change, unless it be that you are 'richer' still. How many coats must you have? Two are no longer enough, you must have yet more. Rid yourself of these! Put out all greed, lust, avarice and the wicked love of money. See, I call you to a new thing!

Repent! For I know your sins, the unregenerate places in your hearts. I know what lies cold and dead. I am the Lord who can still make dry bones live! So arise! Put these things out of your hearts, and repent. Am I not the Lord who saved you, who died for you? I can and will rescue you from the miry pit. I will set your feet on solid rock, and I will give you a hope and future.

What must you do? Trust and obey me. Leave behind your old life, and turn to the new that I will give you.

So then my people, I call you out. I set before you two paths. The broad, gentle, easy path that leads to destruction. Or the narrow path, the hard path, the rocky mountainous path that leads to the city of God. Do not be deceived! It is not easy. It was never intended to be easy. It is not a path you can follow in your own strength. But you will have all that you need for the journey. My Spirit Himself will nurture you.

Now is the day of the Lord! Now are my purposes and plans come to fruition. I will move upon this land again and my elect will hear My call.

I the Lord your God have spoken and I call you out!