

# OpenTheo

## Gift of Prophecy (Part 2)



### Charisma and Character - Steve Gregg

In this second part of his study on the gift of prophecy, Steve Gregg discusses the different lists of gifts in Ephesians, 1 Corinthians, and Romans. He expresses skepticism about the office of prophet and the difficulty in testing whether someone is an apostle. He clarifies the difference between prophecy and tongues, stating that prophecy is meant to edify the church, while tongues edify the individual. He also emphasizes the importance of discerning whether a prophecy is truly from God or not.

### Transcript

Tonight is the second part of a study that began last time on the gift of prophecy. We're in a larger series which we've called Charisma and Character, the normative work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. We're in the Charisma section of that series at this point.

We're talking about the gifts of the Holy Spirit, after which we'll be talking about Character, which is the fruit of the Spirit. One of the gifts of the Spirit about which the New Testament has most to say is prophecy. We have lists of numerous gifts in various places.

We have, for example, in Romans 12, I believe we have there six gifts listed. 1 Corinthians 12, we have nine gifts listed. And in Ephesians 4, verse 11, there are some, I almost want to say gifts listed, actually gifted persons are listed there, apostles and prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers.

The list in Ephesians is somewhat different than that in 1 Corinthians or Romans in that the list there is of offices, it would appear, people who have the office of apostle or prophet or evangelist or pastor or teacher, whereas it seems that the lists in Romans and 1 Corinthians are talking about abilities that the Holy Spirit gives. That's at least my take on that. But one thing is interesting that when you look at all the lists, they all have one gift in common.

In fact, there's only one gift that is in all the lists of the three lists I mentioned, and that is gift of prophecy. And also, after listing the gifts, Paul generally does not give much

elaboration on what he means by some of the gifts. When he talks about the gift of the word of wisdom or the word of knowledge, he never explains what he means by that.

We're left to deduce from either examples in scripture or contemporary examples that, well, maybe this is what he meant when he said word of wisdom or word of knowledge. When he speaks of gifts of healings, that's an interesting concept because it's plural. Every time he mentions it in 1 Corinthians 12, he talks about the gift of prophecy and the gift of tongues and the gift of interpretation of tongues and the gifts of healings.

And the plural on both of those words, both at the beginning of 1 Corinthians 12 and then later on in chapter 12 of 1 Corinthians where he lists some gifts again, it's plural. He does not explain why. That is, I intend to explore that a little bit in a later study in this series.

But there's not much teaching about the individual gifts of the Spirit. There are, in the places in scripture where they are listed, usually some teaching about gifts in general, what gifts are for. But when it gets down to listing them, very few of them become a sort of, let me talk about this gift for a while and tell you how this gift is used and what it really means and so forth.

However, prophecy and tongues seem to be exceptions to this and that is why we've given more special and prior attention to those gifts. Not because, certainly not because tongues is the most important. It is not the most important.

Paul lists prophecy as certainly among the best gifts. We don't know if it's the most important or not. It's certainly among the best because he indicates that.

But we treat them first and at greater length simply because there's more biblical material for us to work from. I'm a Bible teacher. I'm not a great speculator.

And therefore, I'm much more comfortable saying more when there's more there in the Bible to say about it. And so, there's such a great amount on the gift of prophecy that we've taken two weeks to discuss it. And in our last session, which was the first part, we talked about kind of the office of a prophet.

And if I might just remind you, I expressed some skepticism as to whether the office of prophet, in the sense that it was used in the Old Testament and the Book of Acts, and in the Epistles for that matter, whether that office is still with us. Now, I don't doubt the gift of prophecy. I do not doubt that there are divine oracles given to believers to share with the body of Christ.

I do not doubt that these can reveal the future or that they can be a direct verbatim word from God. I mean, that's what prophecy, I think, is in the Scripture, notwithstanding the non-charismatics who say, well, prophecy just inspired preaching. Well, I don't know if you've ever heard that one.

If you get the Living Bible, for example, and read the list of the gifts, in the place of prophecy, you'll find that the non-charismatic paraphraser of that, I almost said Bible, but it's not exactly a Bible, but the paraphraser of that document is used for inspired preaching because this is more comforting. It makes the passages in 1 Corinthians more relevant to those who don't believe in such a thing as spiritual gifts today, or at least what they would call the sign gifts. And among the things they don't believe are for today are the gift of prophecy.

Or they would say, yes, it's for today, but it's not really like the oracle of the Old Testament or the seer of the Old Testament. It's more like just an inspired preacher. And really, when it gets down to it, you say, well, how do you know then that somebody is a prophet? How do you know that someone is an inspired preacher? Usually it means an inspiring preacher.

If your preacher inspires you, you'll say he's inspired. And if he doesn't inspire you, if you go away from church and you're uninspired, then you might think, well, he's not very inspired. But, of course, inspiration of a preacher is a very specific thing.

To be inspired is to have a word God-breathed. That's what the word inspired means. It's God-breathed.

All scripture is given by inspiration, the King James says, but the Greek says all scripture is God-breathed. The writers of the scripture received words from God, which is why their writings are in our Bible, and other excellent writings by Christians, even contemporary Christians of theirs, like Clement of Rome, who is contemporary with Paul, or Papias, who is contemporary with the apostles or their successors. Their writings are not in our Bible.

They were not God-breathed. It says in 2 Peter 1, verse 20, it says, Knowing this first, that no prophecy of scripture is of any private interpretation, but holy men of God spoke. He said, for no prophecy came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.

An inspiring sermon. This is getting words breathed from God through the mouth and vocal apparatus of people. And I believe in this gift today, but as I said earlier, I'm not sure I believe in the office of prophet for today, and I'm not trying to be overly skeptical.

My reasons I gave last time partly is that in the list of what some people call the five-fold ministry in Ephesians 4, we read of the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. We know there's evangelists, pastors, and teachers, so why wouldn't there be apostles and prophets, we might be asked. And my answer, if I were pressed to give one, would be perhaps because Paul said the apostles and prophets were there to lay the foundation of the church.

And the church that I belong to is the same church they founded back then. I don't

believe every generation of the church has to start all over again. It's an ongoing phenomenon.

The foundation was laid by the apostles and prophets, according to Ephesians 2. And since that time, the foundation doesn't have to be relayed. In fact, Paul said, no other foundation can any man lay than that which is laid. And for that purpose, that's in 1 Corinthians 3, he said that.

And therefore, I'm not sure we need the offices of apostles and prophets today, but I will receive them if God shows me they exist and shows me who they are. But another thing that's made me somewhat skeptical is I've met a lot of people who claim to be apostles and prophets, or about whom that claim is made by their fans. And I've been singularly unimpressed with the validity of their claims.

And so I guess I would say if there are apostles and prophets, I haven't met them yet. That doesn't mean they don't exist. They may exist.

But I have, at least in the past 25 years of ministry, been moving in the locals where they claim to have them. And in a quarter of a century, if I haven't been able to find any that impress me as genuine apostles or prophets, that doesn't mean no one has, but I'd say they must be awfully hard to find, if they exist. And I've certainly met a lot of, as I said last time, I think anyone who claims to be an apostle is one.

And whoever claims to be a prophet is one. They're either a true one or a false one. Once you make the claim, if I don't claim to be an apostle, I can't be a false apostle.

But if I claim to be an apostle, I am. I'm either a false one or a true one. Same thing with prophet.

If I don't claim to be a prophet, I'm neither a false prophet nor any other kind of prophet. If I do make the claim and say, brothers and sisters, I'm a prophet of God, receive me as a prophet, then I am a prophet, either a false prophet or a true prophet. And I'd say the ones I've met, I've met a great number of false apostles and false prophets.

By the way, the last church I left was one I left over that issue because the pastor regarded himself and those who were elevated in positions of leadership in the church were obliged to acknowledge him to be an apostle. And I said, well, brother, I'm open to there being apostles today. I mean, I don't know why we need them, but I've got enough written in from these apostles that it'd take me the rest of my life to process it.

I don't know why I need something more now, but if you're an apostle, it's fine. But where are the signs of apostleship? I mean, Paul could point to in 2 Corinthians, chapter 12 and verse 12, he said, surely the signs of an apostle were done, meaning in his ministry among you and all signs and wonders and so forth. And I haven't seen that in a lot of people who claim to be apostles, though I think there are signs and wonders

happening today.

Most people I know who've done them don't claim to be apostles. But I was thought to be rather, I don't know, I won't say rude because I never was rude with anybody, far be it from me to be rude, straightforward maybe, but rude, never. But I was accused of having an independent spirit, which I thought was a pretty good thing, except in the shepherding movement that's considered a bad thing.

And this group was into the shepherding movement somewhat. But I pointed out that Jesus commended the Church of Ephesus in Revelation, chapter 2, among other things, because it says in verse 2, Revelation 2, 2, I know your works, your labor, your patience, that you cannot bear those who are evil and those who say they are apostles and are not, and you have found them liars. That's one of the good things about this church.

They had something bad about them, they left their first love, but one of the good things, he said, was that they had tested those who say they are apostles. I got in trouble for testing someone who said he was an apostle, but I thought, well, I think I was correct in my assessment, I can't claim infallibility about it, I don't think he's an apostle, and therefore I can rest in the fact that at least Jesus would commend me for testing him and finding him to be a liar. But the same is true of prophets, I believe.

There may be prophets today, but do you realize what that would mean? A person with the office of prophet speaks directly from God in such a, biblically at least, in such an infallible way, that you might as well write down his words of scripture, and in fact, he might as well write books of scripture. In fact, that's how the books of the Old Testament were written, by prophets. And the reason those books are there, and other books written by contemporary Jews are not there, like the Apocrypha, is because the ones that are there were written by prophets.

A person at the office of prophet spoke officially the inspired words of God. In the New Testament, the writers were not so much prophets as apostles, but apostles and prophets were the writers of scripture, and I'm not willing to concede the right to add any more books to my Bible from any of the people I've met who call themselves apostles and prophets. So if they are, they're not to me.

But that may change if God causes me to meet somebody that makes a different kind of impression on me. So as I said last time, I'm not sure there are apostles and prophets. I don't want in any sense to discourage you from believing in the gift of prophecy, which I think should be operational in the church at all times.

I must confess we haven't heard an awful lot of the gift of prophecy here in our meetings. We haven't heard a lot of tongues interpretation here. And I'm not here to say, you know, I'm not satisfied with things the way they are, but I would like to receive prophetic words from God.

I would be very happy for you to share them with us. But that's what we want to talk about tonight. Last time we talked more about what a prophet was, and I want to talk now just about the use of the gift of prophecy, which may be exercised by people who are not prophets.

Because in 1 Corinthians 12, Paul said, Are all apostles, are all prophets? Implying the answer, no, not all are apostles, not all are prophets. But in 1 Corinthians 14, he said, You may all prophesy, one by one, that the church may receive edification. Now, he might have been speaking just to the group collection of prophets when he said you may all prophesy, but that's not clear.

It occurs to me that people who are not prophets in holding an office like that might yet prophesy after it happened in the Old Testament. Saul, King Saul, when he was pursuing David, was no prophet of God, but the Spirit came upon him at one point as he went to Nebooth, and he fell down and prophesied all day, the rest of the day. And in fact, it was such a joke, it says, A saint went around forever afterwards.

Is Saul also among the prophets? It seems so incongruous. The man was an evil man. He was persecuting the prophets of God, and yet he prophesied.

Likewise, we read the Caiaphas in the New Testament. In John 11, in verse 50 or so, Caiaphas said to the Sanhedrin, It's profitable that one man should die and not the whole nation be destroyed. And John says, And this he said not of himself, but being the high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus must die for the people.

Now, Caiaphas prophesied by the Spirit of God? Yes, inadvertently. Balaam prophesied by the Holy Spirit. We read of the Spirit coming upon him and him giving oracles of God, but prior to that, he was a soothsayer.

The Bible makes it very clear. At prior times, he did sorcery. If you read the story of Balaam, found in Numbers, chapters 22 through 24, it makes it very specific.

Getting oracles was through sorcery and divination. He was not a prophet of God, but God spoke through him on at least one occasion. And so a person might prophesy without being a prophet, and I would suggest that that would apply now today, too.

In fact, the Scripture says, In the last days, saith the Lord, I will pour out of my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy. And your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. And upon my servants and my handmaidens in those days, saith the Lord, I will pour out of my Spirit, and they shall prophesy.

We read in the book of Acts how that in the household of Cornelius, the Spirit fell on all the gathered Gentiles in the room when Peter was preaching. And you know what? Those of the circumcision marveled when they heard them speaking in tongues and

prophesying. Now, we can't assume that everyone among those Gentiles held the office of prophet in the church, but they all prophesied, it would appear.

Or at least some were prophesying and some speaking in tongues. But it would appear that in the Bible, persons who do not hold the office of the prophet might nonetheless prophesy. And just as we might say someone who doesn't hold the office of teacher might on occasions teach someone.

We should hope they would. We should all be able to teach. Our children, at least, and others younger than ourselves.

We should all be prepared to make disciples and to teach them to observe all things whatsoever Jesus commanded. But that doesn't make us all hold the office of teacher. Are all prophets, are all teachers, Paul asked in 1 Corinthians 12? The answer is no.

There's a difference between the office and the activity. Now, I have some doubts about the continuation of the office in our time. I have no question about the continuation of the activity.

I believe that anyone here might prophesy. Now, let me turn your attention to 1 Corinthians 12, if I might. 1 Corinthians 12 is probably the most well-known list, at least among charismatics, the most well-known list.

I think among non-charismatics Romans 12 would be preferable. It has less signs, gifts in it. Romans 12 just has gifts of teaching, administration, exhortation, helps, giving.

Modern preachers like those gifts, whether they're charismatic or not. Turn over to 1 Corinthians, you've got things like working of miracles, prophecy, tongues, interpretation of tongues. That's more of a specifically a charismatically oriented kind of list.

But the point is, Paul says in verse 4, Now, there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are diversities of ministries, but the same Lord. There are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all.

Notice activities, he begins to discuss these activities. These are not offices, these are activities. The activity of the Spirit, not the office that the activity also sometimes belonged with.

Verse 7, Let me just say, for years I took what I guess is probably the party line on this among charismatics. I've been a charismatic for 25 years and I must confess that though I thought that becoming a charismatic, you know, extricated me from the bondage of tradition. Because, you know, when I was growing up as a Baptist all my life, I praised God.

I was not like the Catholics who were bound up in tradition. I was a Baptist, we only went

by the Bible. And then when I got baptized in the Spirit, I realized how many things I'd been taught and believed as a Baptist were more tradition than Scripture.

And I have praised God, I'm no longer like the Catholics or the Baptists. I'm a charismatic, full gospel, no traditions, we're just into the Bible as charismatics. And it's been the last 25 years discovering how many charismatic traditions I picked up in those early years.

And I've had to look at again and question and some of them I've discarded altogether. It's not biblical at all. But in this case, I'll just tell you what I was taught, which I think is the charismatic tradition.

But I'm not sure it's wrong. I'm just going to suggest that it might be wrong. Okay.

And that is this, that to one is given the word of wisdom, to another the word of knowledge means in the body of Christ. This is what I was always taught. In the body of Christ, there might be a person whose gift is the word of wisdom.

And another person whose gift is the word of knowledge. And another person whose gift is prophecy. And another whose gift is the working of miracles.

Another whose gift is healings or whatever. And that each person has one gift of these kinds. And no one would have two because Paul makes it clear to another this gift and to another that gift and to another this gift.

That everyone has basically one gift. And that gift defines what they are likely to contribute at any given time in the church. That's what they always operate in.

Now, I would say that this not only is a tradition that's taught among charismatics. It also has some support from experience. I question whether this is what Paul means now.

But I will say there is some experiential support for this. There certainly are people that I know who prophesy more than other people prophesy. Some who speak in tongues in the church more than others.

Paul himself acknowledges that there are some who actually have the office of an interpreter. He says that in 1 Corinthians 14 where he says let two or three speak in tongues and let one go to the meeting. Then don't let the tongue speakers speak up.

Well, how would anyone know in advance if there is an interpreter? Well, obviously Paul assumes there are people who are recognized as interpreters. If I wanted to speak out in tongues, but I'm not allowed to unless there is an interpreter present. And if there is not one, I'm not supposed to speak out.

How could I ever know whether I could speak out unless there is someone who is known for having this function? It's almost like an office in the church it sounds like as I read it.



So I acknowledge that there are persons who do some things more than others. And it doesn't necessarily, I mean that supports the idea that one person might have a word of wisdom more often than others.

Another might function regularly in a word of knowledge or whatever. But I guess I've just come to wonder whether that's what Paul means in this place. Although all that may be true, I'm not sure that's what he means here.

Because it seems equally possible that what Paul is talking about is in the gathering of the church. Because that's what is the context of chapters 12 through 14 of 1 Corinthians. When the whole church comes together.

In the assembly, he talks about what he does in terms of his private speaking in tongues. But what he does in the church is different. And he's talking about proper conduct of the gifts in the church meeting.

And when he says, to one is given this and to one is given that and to another is given that and another that. It seems to me at least not impossible that he could mean that in any gathering of Christians, any person might be given by the Holy Spirit a word of knowledge or another person a word of wisdom. Even if in the next meeting a different person was given the word of knowledge and a different person the word of wisdom.

This is the manifestation of the spirit among his people. And the manifestation of the spirit is given to each one for the profit of all. And it says in verse 11, these are all worked by the same spirit who distributes each one individually as he wills.

This could speak of a resident gift or it could speak of a gift. It's not so much resident like I have this gift and you have that gift. If Christ, anyone might exhibit any gift because because of Christ's presence here in the Holy Spirit manifesting himself anyway he wishes, which would allow the possibility that you might you might share a prophecy this week and give a you know operating some other kind of gift next week.

This is at least a possibility and it opens up the possibility for us not to confine our thinking that we only have one gift and this is our gift and this is all that we have to offer. It may be that God can work through any individual any gift that he chooses at any given time. I know that I do not have, for example, a gift in the work of miracles or in working healings.

That's not a gift of mine. But there have been times when I prayed for the sick and they've been healed. There have been other times they weren't healed.

I don't claim to have some special anointing in healing or in miracles. I certainly I know for a fact I don't. But that doesn't mean God can't on some occasions let me pray for the sick and see them get healed.

You might not have the gift of teaching but that doesn't mean that in a given meeting especially if there is not someone present who has that gift or even if there is that God might not use you to stand up and you've never done it before but he gives you the insight to something that everyone's puzzling over and you clarify it. You know I mean this happens. That God can in any gathering of Christians manifest any gift even through persons who don't regularly operate on that gift seems to me likely and that being the case sort of prefaces what I have to say about the question of prophecy.

When Paul says in 1 Corinthians 14, you may all prophesy one by one that is in verse 31, 1 Corinthians 14, 31. You can all prophesy one by one that all may learn and all may be encouraged. Again he may be speaking only to the prophets of the church in that verse but it's not at all clear.

And it seems to me like he's suggesting that prophecy might come from anyone in the church but when it does then those who are recognized prophets need to kind of stand in judgment of it and declare whether they acknowledge it or not. I think that's what that context is saying. We talked about that on a previous occasion but not all are prophets.

So you don't have to be a prophet for this teaching to apply to you. You might prophesy and if you don't prophesy you're supposed to pray that you do. That's an interesting thing too.

It suggests that although not all are prophets yet nonetheless all are supposed to pray that they may prophesy. It says in 1 Corinthians 14, 1. Pursue love and desire spiritual gifts but especially that you may prophesy. So I pray that I might prophesy.

I know I'm not a prophet. Even if there are prophets I'm not one of them. That's not my thing, not my office in the body of Christ.

But I do pray that I might prophesy just because it seems like the biblical thing to desire. And I think everyone ought to desire that because it seems to be a general thing that Paul exhorts Christians to do. Now in the exercise of prophecy I'd like to talk a little bit about what prophecy is for, how it apparently operates, how would you know if you have a prophecy to utter.

And how is the church supposed to benefit from this. We're going to get a lot of our information from Paul in 1 Corinthians 14. But frankly that's the only chapter in the Bible where any kind of real teaching directed to that subject is found.

Prophecy can be gleaned from statements here and there in scripture. But as far as a concentrated teaching on the gift of prophecy, 1 Corinthians 14 is all you've got. It's mentioned elsewhere but it's not taught about elsewhere.

Let me turn your attention there then. And he says, as we read verse 1 of chapter 14, Pursue love and desire spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy. For he who

speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God.

For no one understands him. However in the spirit he speaks mysteries, but he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men. He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church.

I wish you all spoke with tongues, but even more, that you prophesied. For he who prophesies is greater than he who speaks with tongues unless, indeed, he interprets, that the church may receive edification. Now obviously Paul's kind of got one string on his guitar here he keeps strumming on.

And that's the church should be edified, the church should be edified. The best gifts are those that cause the church to be edified. And he says specifically in verse 3, he who prophesies speaks edification, so that the church be edified, and exhortation and comfort to men.

These three things, I think, would be one of the ways that we would judge whether a prophecy is genuine or not. Does it accomplish these things? A true prophetic utterance, we would expect to do one or all of these things. It would edify, it would exhort, or comfort.

Now edify is a word that means literally to build up. And I might as well just clarify this because some of you I'm sure know, some of you may not know, the way some people pray about asking God to be edified or whatever. You know, God we just pray that you'll be edified in this meeting.

I've heard people pray and this is not too uncommon. It indicates there's a misunderstanding of what the word means. The word edify is not to be confused with glorify.

I think it may be this reason that some people are critical of tongues when Paul says, well he that speaks in tongues edifies himself. Oh, we shouldn't edify ourselves. We're not here to edify ourselves, we're here to edify God.

No, we're not here to edify God. God doesn't have to be built up. God doesn't have to be glorified, that's what we're to do.

But glorification, Paul never talks about the need to edify God, but he always talks about the need to edify Christians, to edify the body, to edify the church. In fact, in Ephesians 4, where he lists apostles and prophets and evangelists and pastors and teachers, he says that God gave these things, says in Ephesians 4, 13, for the, well actually verse 12 and 14, for the equipping of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edification of the body of Christ. Edification to be built up until we all come in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God into a mature man.

So the body of Christ has to grow up, it has to be built up. Remember the body of Christ, the church is likened metaphorically in the Bible to a temple under construction, and to a body, and Paul kind of mixes those things together in that passage. The body of Christ has to be built up like a temple that's being built on its foundation, like stones in a wall being assembled.

It grows into a holy temple in the Lord, it says in Ephesians chapter 2. And Peter says that we're like living stones built into a spiritual house in 1 Peter 2, 5. So the church is a building under construction. It's also a body growing up into maturity, into Christ. It's also a field of grain ripening.

Jesus used that parable, or that figure in a number of parables, and so did Paul. So that Paul said to the church in 1 Corinthians 3, you are God's field, you are God's building. And talking about the field, he says, I planted seed, and Apollos watered, and God gives the increase.

Switching the metaphor to a building, he says, the foundation is a wise master builder according to the grace that was given to me, and another comes and builds on that foundation. Again, Apollos and others after him. So the church is being built up like a building.

And the prophetic ministry and all gifts of any value for public expression are for the edification of the body of Christ, that we be built up. Now, the church is built up corporately, when the church is growing in quantity. I don't mean growing in size, though that's happening at the same time, but church growth, as it's spoken of today, is not really anything that Paul showed a direct interest in.

Of course, he wanted all men to be saved, and if that would happen, then the church would get bigger. But whenever Paul talked about building up the church, he never was talking about adding more pew space. He was talking about building them up spiritually, more into the image of Christ.

And so the prophetic ministry is to edify the church corporately and as individuals. Now, when you speak in tongues, you edify yourself. Now, there's nothing wrong with that.

Just do it when you're alone. Church meeting time, I mean, time is valuable. A bunch of people gather together, they don't need to be, you know, waiting five minutes while you just build yourself up.

Everyone can get built up with the same five minutes if you're prophesying, or if there's an interpretation. If there's no interpreter present, Paul says, speak to yourself and to God, and fine, you'll be edified. Nothing wrong with getting edified.

But the church meeting is for edifying everybody at once, not just one person who's having a good time. So, edification is the first thing prophecy is for. Does it build

someone up spiritually? Does it help the church grow into a holy temple in the Lord? Does its content construct the walls or grow the church up into maturity? That's edification.

It's also for exhortation, and sometimes we think of exhortation as sort of another form of rebuke, almost like a synonym of rebuke. At least a lot of people, when they want to rebuke, they say, I'd like to exhort you. And so we come to think of exhort and rebuke as the same thing.

The fact is, the word exhort literally means in the Greek, to encourage. And while a rebuke may in fact be encouraging, depending on the spirit in which it's delivered, it is not particularly rebuke that Paul has to the exhortation of the church. Exhortation is synonymous with encouragement.

If you look it up in a lexicon, the prophet encourages the church. And comfort. Edification, exhortation, and comfort.

Now, edification can sometimes require rebuke, and encouragement might even involve rebuke. But prophetic mystery in the body of Christ apparently is not, strictly speaking, rebuke. The Lord might need to rebuke the saints, but if it's a true word from Jesus, it'll be followed on or given in such a way as to encourage the believers in their walk with God.

And even comfort them. You know, sometimes God must wound and then heal. Sometimes he may slap you around a little bit and then say, here, let me smooth this out a little now with something encouraging or comforting.

And in the Old Testament, now you might say, well, in the Old Testament, the prophets rebuked a lot and a lot of times they were very harsh. Yes, and that is perhaps one difference between the Old Testament people of God and what they needed and the New Testament people of God. Because the New Testament people of God are not to be identified with simply the visible institutional church.

If that was the people of God, there should be some slapping around going on from the mouth of the prophets. But the true people of God are those who have the law written in their hearts in the New Covenant. They are the people who want to do the will of God.

They may be fumbling around, doing it wrong sometimes, but Christians have a new heart. And it makes them want to do what's right. And God doesn't come and just cut at them, you know, and slice them up with his words.

He may operate with a sharp knife, but he doesn't just come and dice and slice. God wants his prophets to build and encourage because the people who are truly his people are the ones who have it in their heart to serve. You should be one of God's people, just having a Jewish mother.

And you can have a Jewish mother and a demonic heart. And be of your father the devil, because the desires of your father you wanted to do. And that being so, the prophets came and rebuked, especially those who didn't have their hearts circumcised and told them to circumcise their hearts.

Jeremiah 4.4, he commands them to circumcise their hearts. But see, all Christians have circumcised hearts. That's part of what makes them Christians.

We are the true circumcision, who worship God in the spirit and rejoice in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh. We have that circumcision and the prophets today don't have to come and be harsh. But sometimes, you know, there is such a thing, I suppose, as tough love.

The Bible doesn't use the term, but if Dobson uses it, it must be scriptural, right? No, not exactly. Self-esteem is not scriptural, and he uses that too. But anyway, the fact of the matter is there is a place for love to be momentarily, like a surgeon comes and he cuts out the cancer.

But he always stitches it back up. And he always wants to make sure that healing is the result, not further damage. So, you know, a lot of times people think they are a prophet, and by that, what they are doing is trying to spiritualize their cantankerous spirit.

There is a lot of people in the body of Christ, at least in the visible body of Christ, who are rather loveless sorts. They have very high standards, which can be good. I hope I have a high standard as well.

But they are very intolerant of persons who fall short of that standard, and they are very outspoken about it. And they think this is not really a very spiritual attitude unless it is a prophetic gift. And so, even though the Bible would indicate that love is meek, and love is gentle and kind and humble and so forth, and so is the spirit.

The fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, gentleness, meekness, self-control, goodness, and so forth. Yet these people wish to, I think, sanctify their bad spirit by calling it a prophetic anointing. And you may not have ever encountered such people, and that is okay.

I hope you may never. But I have. And in fact, there are even people who encourage this, because they talk about the motivational gift of a prophet, and a motivational gift of mercy, and a motivational gift of this and that and the other thing.

And they say, you know, if you find someone who is always trying to set you right and always critical, probably they just have a prophetic motivation. Well, maybe they are just baby Christians too, and haven't really gotten very sanctified yet. The fact is, Jesus was the greatest prophet there ever was.

Now, John the Baptist was a great prophet too, and he was pretty nasty to people sometimes, but he was an Old Testament prophet. He never lived to see the New Testament. That's why Jesus said, among the prophets born among women, there is not arisen a greater prophet than John the Baptist, but the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

And we do not read of that kind of harshness in the New Testament church from prophets. Paul even, who was about as harsh as anyone to the Corinthians and to some others and to the Galatians, he still spoke lovingly, he still spoke encouragement, and by the way, as well as an apostle, he definitely operated prophetically. So, true prophecy is going to have that feature.

It's going to encourage, it's going to comfort, if it's really a word from Jesus. It may have some rebuke involved, but the rebuke will be tempered with comfort and exhortation. And so that is what true prophecy will be.

If someone has a word and it's a genuine word of prophecy, we should be able to find those elements present. If those elements are absent, that's one of the indicators I have that we're probably not really hearing a real word from the Lord at this moment. Another thing that prophecy accomplishes is the conviction of unbelievers.

According to 1 Corinthians 14, verses 24 and 25, Paul said, but if all prophets, we've got to read a verse before that or so, verse 23, therefore, if the whole church comes together in one place and all speak with tongues, and there come in one who is uninformed or unbelievers, will they not say that you are out of your mind? But if all prophesy and an unbeliever or an uninformed person comes in, he is convinced by all, he is judged by all, and thus the secrets of his heart are revealed. And so, falling down on his face, he will worship God and report that God is truly among you. I'll tell you what, it's been a long time since I've been in a meeting where a prophecy was given and all the unbelievers fell on their face and confessed that God was among us.

As a matter of fact, most of the prophecies I have heard are pretty mamby-pamby, unimpressive, untestable kinds of things that are not very risky and don't reveal the secrets of anyone's hearts. I hate to be critical, but I will say I believe in that kind of prophecy today. I was once in a church in Santa Cruz, a group probably no larger than this, it was a very small church, and everyone was sitting around in this church service and there was a prayer time and it was quiet and someone spoke up a prophetic word.

By this time I was already, although this was years ago, I had already heard enough hokey prophecies to be skeptical, or at least initially skeptical when someone says, Thus saith the Lord. I mean, I hate to be too skeptical because I don't want to despise priests. Paul warns against that.

But this person began to speak and although I tended to be a little skeptical when people

said, Thus saith the Lord, as I listened to this lady speak, it just bore witness with my spirit. I mean, that's sort of a subjective thing to say and, you know, I can't prove anything by what I feel in my spirit, but I can prove it to myself. I mean, in a sense, I sensed, well, this is a word from the Lord.

I just, an anointing, you know, it's not, I mean, I've heard a lot of goofy prophecies, but this sounded like a word from God. And what was really fascinating is there was an unbeliever who was present. And as soon as this prophet stopped speaking, the unbeliever began to pray and said, Oh God, I know you are in this place.

And I thought instantly, this verse, that wow, if all prophesied, then the unbeliever will fall down and say, God is in your midst. You know, and I guess that is a real prophecy. It certainly sounded like it to me before that reaction.

That was a very biblical reaction. It seems to me that unless a prophecy is going to reveal something that we wouldn't have known otherwise, in other words, unless there's something really indisputably supernatural about it, there's not an awful lot of reason to call it a prophecy. Now, I think that a prophecy might contain information that we already knew, but it seems like where the spirit of the prophecy is operating in the body of Christ, there should be utterances that are so obviously directly from God that we don't have to wonder.

In fact, even unbelievers don't have to wonder. I mean, their own hearts are laid bare. I don't know why that lady's prophecy affected that unbeliever that way.

I don't know what was going on in that unbeliever's life, but God did. And that word that was given, you know, just had an impact on that unbeliever, as on myself also. So I certainly believe that what Paul said about prophecy is still functional and can be expected in the body of Christ today.

But I don't believe everything goes by that name is now. I want to talk about people who this is a very hard thing for me to know how to talk about this, not because because I'm not sure what I think about. I mentioned at the beginning of the study, I'm not sure I understand everything about this.

It's kind of hard to get up and teach and try to give the definitive explanation what the Bible says about something when you're not really sure you've got it right. But as I said earlier, I don't think there's people in the office of a prophet who seem to be more prophetic. I mean, if that sounds kind of, I realize that sounds kind of double-minded, doesn't it? You know, I mean, here's this person's prophetic, but he doesn't have the office of a prophet.

Well, how do you know the difference? I don't know. It's just kind of fits my categories, you know. In my understanding, I'm not sure I'd see the office of a prophet today, but I



certainly know people who I would describe as more, you know, seem to be prophetic.

They hear from God in ways that I don't very often. I've heard from God. By the way, I suppose at one time or another, I've heard from God in almost every way that anyone has except an angel.

I've never had an angel come and tell me anything. But I've had dreams that were prophetic. I've had God speak to me, not with an audible voice, but with a voice that was so clear in my spirit that I could have quoted word for word what he said.

I mean, it was not just an impression. I've had a lot of things happen that, I mean, I'm not a prophet, but I know that God still speaks to people, but there are people who seem to hear from God a lot more that way than I do. I don't know if they're just pretending or if it's real, but some of the people I've met seem to be real.

They really seem to discern things and have prophetic insights into other people. And this comes out more often from them than others. There was a time when I really envied people like that.

It seems to be a gift of prophecy. I mean, I think. And such people sometimes prophesy more often than others.

We had a guy like that in another church I was in, in Santa Cruz, in the Calvary Chapel we had there in Santa Cruz, where as an elder there was a young man who didn't prophesy every meeting, but he did pray. We never would have called him a prophet, but I began to have a tremendous amount of confidence in the words he gave, because I never heard him give a word that I thought sounded goofy or that I judged to be there's something wrong, there's a flaw there. I mean, I don't, like I said, I don't receive everything that calls itself a prophet.

He would speak frequently, and it seemed to me like he really had it right. When he spoke it seemed to be a word that was truly what the Lord would say. Being an elder in the church myself, I knew some of the things going on in the church, and I could often tell that this word from this man who knew nothing about what I knew going on in the church, that was an appropriate word that such as God might give.

So I began to view this man as somewhat prophetic. And once God, I may have told this story earlier in this series, bear with me if I did, but I'm sure I did in fact, but this is the same guy who called me once. I was at an elders meeting, and he called me up.

And he said, I have a prophecy for you and a scripture for you. The Lord has a word for you. And I said, well, okay.

And he said, well, I have a scripture for you first. And when he said that, I remember I told this a few weeks ago probably, this particular reference came to my mind. He just

said, I have a scripture for you.

And a reference, a specific reference came to my mind. It was clear as a bell. I almost spoke it out myself.

I thought, well, I'll just wait. I don't want to give him any hints, you know. Because, I mean, if he was a phony, I might say, is it such and such a scripture? He'd say, yeah, that's it, you know.

So I didn't say anything about it. I just, this scripture came to my mind. And it took him a while fumbling through his Bible to find it.

But when he found the scripture, it was the very same scripture, the very same verse that had come to my mind. So, I mean, that's one way that God overcame my skepticism in this particular case. And then he gave me a word which was very true.

In fact, it was a word that he gave me just before I moved to Oregon. He didn't see me anymore after I moved to Oregon. In fact, a couple of years later, I went down to visit.

He called me again while I was visiting Santa Cruz. And he says, I've got another word for you. And the first part of it was, has not the word I gave you before come to pass? And, you know, the guy had not been keeping track of my activities.

And, in fact, what he had predicted had come to pass. So, I mean, this guy I would call a prophetic guy. You know, I don't call him a prophet.

I'd call him prophetic. There's a well-known, most of you, anyone who's been charismatic circles very long has probably heard at least in the last few years of a man named Paul Cain. I am not a follower of Paul Cain.

A lot of his theology I don't agree with. In fact, it really disappointed me when I found out I didn't agree with his theology because I used to hear his testimony, how that, you know, he just had this tremendous prophetic thing operating in him. Word of knowledge and prophecy and so forth.

I heard his testimony. I won't go into it now because I'm not trying to make followers of this man. But when I heard about the man, I thought, man, I can't wait to hear this man speak.

And someone had a tape of his teaching. I thought, wow, I can't wait to hear this guy. I played the tape.

I was so disappointed. The guy did nothing but tell bad jokes, misquote scriptures, misinterpret passages, according to some faulty theology that went out of vogue 40 years ago that I was familiar with. And, you know, it was kind of a semi-cultic thing that came through 40 years ago in the latter rain movement.

And I mean, the guy didn't have anything really authoritative to say when he was teaching. I thought, well, I guess that proves a person can be prophetic and not be a teacher, you know. And that's maybe why not all are prophets and not all are teachers.

You know, he's prophetic. And, you know, I was disappointed with him as a teacher. And even those who call him a prophet have said, well, he's about 95 percent accurate.

Now, of course, the people who call him a prophet are the people who say you don't have to be 100 percent accurate to be a prophet. I disagree with that. I can't find anything in the Bible that says you don't have to be 100 percent accurate to be a prophet.

But you don't have to be 100 percent accurate to be prophetic, to be a person who gives prophecies sometimes. And I would certainly understand that man to be in that category. He certainly has a gift of prophecy operating in him.

Unless it's a false one, I don't consider that to be the case. I think he probably has a genuine gift of prophecy from the Holy Spirit. I just don't want to canonize him.

I don't want to, you know, make him a prophet in my estimation because he's very much fallible, I've found. But when I became aware many years ago that there were prophetic people who had prophetic anointings like this, I remember wishing that I were one of them. And I began to disdain, actually, my own gift at the time.

I'm a teacher. I'm not a prophet. I'm just a teacher.

And I used to think, well, teachers, they're no good. I mean, all they can give is man's opinion. I mean, they're just a man.

I mean, I read the Bible. All I can do is give my opinion. I can say, okay, I thought it through.

I compared that scripture to that scripture. I think it means that. And I give my opinion.

What good is that? I'm just a man. It's no good, I thought. I thought, you know, I began to put down the gift of teaching.

I used to say, you know, I just wish, you know, we had more authoritative preachers who could just say, thus saith the Lord, not say, well, it might be this or it might be that or it might be this. Which, as you know, if you're familiar with the teachings, that's what I do. It might be this.

It might be that. It might be that. That's about 30 percent of my teaching is that kind of stuff.

And I just think, you know, that's just that's what the scribes did. Jesus, when he

preached, you know, he didn't preach like the scribes. He preaches one having authority.

I thought, well, that's the only way you should preach. There's one having authority, not like the scribes. Didn't realize Jesus did that partly because he was a prophet.

I mean, he was prophetic. He was also a teacher, but he was. I found later on.

Well, in those days, I used to make a sharp distinction in my mind between a scribe and a prophet. And I and anyone who taught the way I teach, as far as I was concerned, was just a scribe. And the Bible hardly had anything good to say about scribes.

Well, and you scribes, you know, and, you know, anyone who is worth his salt was a prophet, I thought, or at least prophetic. Well, then I found that Jesus sent both scribes and prophets. And that comes a little bit because I'm certainly a scribe, not a prophet.

But if you'll look with me at some scribes, I'd like to show how this where I got this. In Matthew 13, Matthew 13, verse 52, Jesus said to his disciples, Therefore, every scribe instructed concerning him is like a householder who brings out of his treasure things new and old. Now, Jesus doesn't say much more to make that more clear, but strikes me as a positive statement.

That a scribe who is instructed and well informed about the issues of the kingdom of heaven, he can bring out treasures, new things, old things. And and that's not a negative statement. It's not he's not a prophet, but he's not something bad either.

He's a householder. He's got treasures to bring out both new and old. And when I turned over to Matthew 23, verse 34, found that Jesus said to the Pharisees, Therefore, indeed, I send you prophets, wise men and scribes.

Some of them you'll kill and crucify. Some of them you'll scourge in your synagogues. He's talking about his disciples and how they were treated in the early days in the book of Acts.

Jesus sent prophets. He also sent wise men. Probably Stephen would be one of those.

They couldn't refute the wisdom with which he spoke. The Bible says and scribes. Imagine that Jesus sending scribes to the church.

Well, that's what he said he did. And Paul said, you know, there's some prophets, some teachers. A teacher, I suppose, is more like one of those scribes instructed in the kingdom of God.

A prophet is something else. But both have their place in the body of Christ. Nonetheless, even a scribe, even a scribe can at times speak with something of a prophetic anointing.

And there are prophets who teach, it appears to me. Now, it requires that we read a verse a certain way instead of another way. And I could be getting it wrong.

But in Acts chapter 13, Acts chapter 13, verse 1, says, Now in the church there were certain prophets and teachers, named some of them Barnabas, Simon, or that is Simeon, who is called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manan, who had been brought up with Herod the Tetrarch, and Saul. Now, these five men are called prophets and teachers. Now, of course, it is possible that some of them were prophets and others of them were teachers.

But it's also possible that this is saying that these five men were prophets and teachers. That they were teachers who also had, you know, they also were prophets. If some were teachers and some were prophets, it does not distinguish which were which.

It's interesting that Barnabas is at the top of the list and Saul at the bottom. And yet those men both had apostolic calling later on. We don't know whether one of them was a prophet and one was a teacher.

We know that Paul prophesied and taught. So my impression is that since Saul is an example and Barnabas, these men were teachers and prophets. Though it could be taken another way.

It could be that some of them were teachers and some were prophets. But I believe there are times where there is a mixture between a teacher who speaks prophetically. In the Old Testament, I'd like to suggest that there are some evidences of this.

If you look at Isaiah chapter 50, this is actually a messianic prophecy. It's about Jesus, not about gifted men. But nonetheless, it sort of illustrates the point.

In Isaiah chapter 50 and verse 4, this is Jesus speaking. It is also Isaiah speaking, though he's speaking as a type of Christ, as he does sometimes. Even in chapter 8 when he said, I and the children whom God has given me.

That's Isaiah speaking about him and his children. But in Hebrews, it's quoted as Jesus speaking about him and his children. Isaiah sometimes, like the psalmist, Isaiah sometimes speaks in the person of Christ.

And that is what Isaiah 50 and verse 4. The Lord God has given me the tongue of the learned, like a scribe, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him who is weary. He awakens me morning by morning. He awakens my ear to hear as the learned.

The Lord God has opened my ear and I was not rebellious, nor did I turn away. I gave my back to those who struck me in my cheeks, those who plucked out the hair and so forth. But notice, this is actually Jesus, but I think it applies to Isaiah also.

Isaiah first, but Christ more importantly is the antitype. But the point here is that here's a person who's instructed. He has the ear of the learned and he can speak a word in season to him that is weary.

A word in season is the timely utterance. As a teacher, I have always wished that I could always give a word in season. I don't, though.

I don't always have a word in season. At least if I do, I'm not aware of it. When I'm teaching through this school, for example, we go through a book of the Bible chapter by chapter.

I can't guarantee that the material that falls to me to teach on that particular class that's scheduled to cover that material, I can't be sure that that passage is going to contain a word in season to everybody present. But I have to teach it anyway, and there's nothing wrong with establishing biblical truth through teaching. But I like it so much better if there's a word in season.

There are many times when people will say, you know, what you said was exactly what I'm going through. What you said is exactly what we needed to hear. And there have been times I've enjoyed that phenomenon.

I've always wished I could do it all the time, but I can't. That's where there's almost a prophetic coloration to the teaching where a person is teaching. Really, they've got a word that's seasonal.

It's timely. There's a statement made in the Old Testament about a certain group of men called the sons of Isiah. In First Chronicles, rather interesting statement.

It's just a passing reference. We read nothing more about them. But what we find here, but what we do find here is intriguing.

And I think speaks to the point I'm making right now. In First Chronicles, 12 and verse 32, it says in First Chronicles, 12, 32 of the children of Isiah, who had understanding of the times to know what Israel ought to do. Their chiefs were 200 and all their brethren were at their command.

One of the functions, I think, of a prophet is not just to tell the future, but to understand the times and to know what the people of God ought to do. Now, a person can know that as a teacher if they just read the Bible. Well, the Bible says do that.

You ought to do that. But also, I mean, to know what the people of God ought to do generically is what a scribe or a teacher could know. To know specifically what they ought to do at this time, to have knowledge of the times, to know what is appropriate for them to do right now is more of a prophetic kind of a function.

A. W. Tozer was a very unconventional preacher. Anybody who knows who A. W. Tozer was probably would be not unwilling to call him a prophet. In fact, one of his biographers called him a prophet.

There was a biographer of Tozer. The biography is called A. W. Tozer, 20th Century Prophet. Even the president of the Udi Bible Institute, I think it was, a non-charismatic organization, wrote an introduction to one of Tozer's books in which he said, this man is a prophet.

Now, I'm not sure exactly what a non-charismatic means when they say this man is a prophet, but I would just say that this man was recognized across the board by people of all denominations and all persuasions as if anyone is a prophet, this man is, this A. W. Tozer. Now, I've read everything over the years. I'm a great fan of A. W. Tozer.

To my knowledge, he never wrote down any predictions of the future. He does hint about it from time to time that he regarded his ministry to be prophetic, but he doesn't make an outright claim to be a prophet anywhere. My family and I were listening to a tape of him recently, and he actually did make a prediction, which I thought was interesting because, frankly, I thought it hit the mark pretty good.

I wrote it down, at least part of it. He never wrote this anywhere, but this was on a tape of a sermon he gave called Sources of Danger. Let me just read it to you because, I mean, this sounds so much like a man who is self-consciously prophesying, and yet he never claimed, I am a prophet or anything like that.

And, by the way, he was a pastor of an ordinary church, a Christian Missionary Alliance church in Chicago in his day. He died in 1963, so this prophecy is probably about 40 years old. But he said, let me just read these words that came off the tape from him.

This is an example of a man who I would say, if anyone is prophetic or has been in recent years, this man, to my mind, is indisputably so. He said, I'd like to prophesy a little. This is in the middle of a sermon.

He just broke off his preaching about something or another. He said, he just kind of broke off onto this little tangent. He said, I'd like to prophesy a little.

I foresee it, the man whose eyes God has opened. I see the time coming when worldly evangelicalism will be deserted, one by one, by all the holy men whose eyes are opened, and their house will be left desolate, and they'll not have a man of God, nor a man in whom the Holy Ghost dwells left among them. And watch it, my brethren, the day is going to come when the holy and the separated and the envisioned shall walk out of worldly fundamentalism and form a group of their own and get off the sinking ship and let her go down into the brackish, cruel waters of worldliness while we form a new ark and ride out the storm.

Now, if these words came from a cult leader, I would not be surprised. Although Tozer, no one would call him a cult leader. He was strictly orthodox.

He didn't start a new denomination or group. He just remained a pastor in a very normal denomination to the day of his death. He was very highly admired throughout very normal churches.

I mean, cult leaders often say this kind of stuff. You know, it's all going down but our group. We're going to start our own group and we'll be the ark and we'll survive the flood and so forth.

I've known so many people who made that claim for their group. And I'd certainly never make it for this group. But when I heard this man, it was just, to me, it was stunning because he must have given this utterance 40 years ago.

And since that time, there's been so much fulfilling. It's not fulfilled completely, but it seems to me like he got it right. And 40 years ago, I don't think that was obvious.

I was in the evangelical church 35 years ago and 40 years ago, and I don't remember there being much talk about worldliness and evangelicalism and people going off and starting their own groups apart from the worldly evangelical groups. But since that time, there's been a number of independent churches and church movements that have come up, as well as para-church groups, home churches, and so forth. I mean, there's so many untraditional churches that have come out in the last 25 years or so because of this very thing, because there's so much worldly tradition, so much worldly compromise in the established evangelical circles that the people who just wanted to live holy and wanted to be true to the scriptures just had to get out and start something new.

And this has happened many, many times. And I don't think there's any one group that is the fulfillment of this. But I think he was right.

I think he was speaking prophetically and got it right. Now, Tozer most of the time did not predict the future. That's the only case I found in all that he's written or all the tapes of his I've had a chance to hear where he actually made a prediction about anything.

But you always sense when you read him that you're reading someone who's prophetic. In fact, he himself defined a prophet in one of his editorials not as a person who knows the future, but as a person who understood. In one of his books, he said, Church historians, 30 years from now, will be able to look back and tell us what was going on in the body of Christ in this our time.

And it was in retrospect. He says, but we need people who can tell us now what God's doing in our time. And he said, that's the difference between a prophet and a non-prophet.



The church has been for a long time a non-profit organization. But he says the presence of a prophet will give the church information as to what God is doing now. And I don't think he was wrong.

Because when you read the Old Testament prophets, although they do predict the future, most of what they had to say was relevant to what God wanted the church of the time, the people of God to know now. What he thought of their actions now. What he wanted them to do about it now.

Someone who could give an interpretation from God's point of view of what's really going on. And this, I think, we should expect if the gift of prophecy operates in our midst, if somebody prophesies, one of the greatest values of it is that it helps us to see now from God's perspective. And not only the future, although of course I believe the gift of prophecy still involves predicting future.

But just having knowledge of the times, knowing what Israel should do, like the sons of Issachar knew, is a function of the prophetic ministry, I believe. There are also in the New Testament the phenomenon of individual prophecy, personal prophecy given to individuals. And I've heard people when they talk about prophecy, sometimes some people have kind of disparaged the idea of a personal prophecy or individual prophecy.

But actually, I think there's actually more examples of individual personal prophecy given in the Bible, both in the Gospels and Acts, than there is of public utterance of prophecy, though both are acknowledged to be. We do have a public utterance of prophecy in Acts chapter 11 where Agabus got up and prophesied there was going to be a famine. And Luke tells us that famine came in the days of Claudius the Emperor and that was a public utterance and it actually motivated the church to action.

They took up a collection in the church of Antioch to send relief to the church in Jerusalem, whom they knew would be hit hardest by this famine. That's one thing too we need to understand, that if God does reveal the future, it's not just to satisfy our curiosity about the future. It's because there's something about the future we need to know about so we can take action about it.

And that's what was the case at that time. But later Agabus gives a personal prophecy. Jeff referred to it earlier when he was up here talking that Agabus took Paul's girdle and bound himself with it, his belt, and said, Thus shall the man whose belt this is be bound by the Jews when he comes to Jerusalem.

And that happened. That was a personal prophecy to him. Others gave personal prophecies to Paul.

And there are other personal prophecies given to other people as well. Timothy had personal prophecies uttered over him. If you look with me over at 1 Timothy 1. 1 Timothy

1, verse 18, says, This charge I commit to you, son Timothy, according to the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them, apparently by those prophecies made to him, you may wage the good warfare.

That's interesting. By the prophecies, the personal prophecies given to him, he was to wage the good warfare. For a long time, my father called me on the phone and gave that personal prophecy to me that I mentioned.

And since that time, that prophecy has helped me a great deal to wage the good warfare. It was a very encouraging prophecy. It gave me some vision for what God was doing in my life, the direction He was taking me, and what kind of opposition I might receive and what I could expect as a result of that opposition and so forth.

Fifteen or so since that time, whenever there's been opposition or problems, I've remembered that prophecy. It's encouraged me. At least when my heart was clean and my conscience clear and I knew that sometimes when I receive opposition, I deserve it because I'm not always right.

But at times when I knew I was right before God and I was just receiving unfair opposition, the prophecy gave me strength and encouragement to continue in the battle, knowing that God had told me this would happen and that I shouldn't be discouraged when His prophecies came true. And Timothy, apparently, had prophecies given to him by which he was to become a more effective warrior. You know, in the Scriptures where it says, take the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, the Word of God we always think of as the Bible, and rightly so, it is the Word of God.

But a genuine prophecy is also the Word of God and is also a sword from the Spirit. Now, I hope that all of us are very cautious about any prophecy that someone gives us as seriously as we take the Scripture. But not because a genuine prophecy has less authority than Scripture.

A genuine prophecy, because it's from God, has the same authority as Scripture. The problem is knowing whether it's genuine or not. Because the Scripture is.

The Scripture is the Word of God. Anyone who comes up and says, let's say if the Lord, blah, blah, blah, may or may not have the Word of the Lord, you have to test it by Scripture. But where you have a genuine word from God given to you, it becomes part of your armaments, just like the Bible itself does, just like the written Word does.

It's a word from the Lord. And it becomes part of the way by which you wage a good warfare. Likewise, in 1 Timothy 4.14, 1 Timothy 4.14, Paul said, Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery.

Now, we don't know what the gift was that was in Timothy, but it was given to him when

the presbytery, that's the eldership of the church, had laid hands on Timothy, set up the sight over him. So we see the phenomenon of individual prophecy. Jesus prophesied to individuals.

He told Peter, you know, before the cock crows twice, you'll deny me three times. That's a personal prophecy. Not a very encouraging one, but still living in the Old Covenant, I guess, at that time.

But the point is that public prophecy or personal prophecy are both legitimate. Public prophecy particularly is for the edification of the church. I would imagine that private prophecy is also for the edification of, in that case, of the individual.

Now, there's a couple of questions I want to answer real quickly because we're running out of time. It may not seem like it, but every once in a while I look at my watch and I do keep some vague notion of how much time has elapsed. There's two questions I want to rapidly cover.

One is, how does one judge whether prophecy is genuine or not? How can we know? The other question is, how do I know if what I'm thinking I want to say is a prophecy from God or not? I might feel like I have something from the Lord, but how do I know? I don't want to thus say it's the Lord and get it wrong. Bad stuff happens to people who do that in the Bible. And so, how do I know? So there's two questions here.

How do I know if a prophecy someone else is giving is a real prophecy? And the second question is, how do I know if the utterance I'm thinking about giving is a real prophecy? How do you recognize a real prophecy? Well, in terms of the first question, I want to make it clear the Bible does say that Christians are supposed to judge prophecies. I shouldn't have to say it. I think that would be obvious, but I have met people, actually, who think it irreverent to be critical of an utterance given in a church that is professed to be a prophecy.

I've actually heard people rebuke, not me, but friends of mine, because they judged a prophecy and didn't consider it to be legitimate. They said, no, that's the Word of God. You don't judge that.

Well, wait a minute. You say it's the Word of God. That's what we judge it for.

True, we don't judge the Word of God, but we have to judge an utterance that professes to be the Word of God to see if it is so. If it is, then we don't judge it. It judges us, but we have to decide.

Now, fortunately, we've already conducted, I hope, all those tests on the written Word, and we know that it's the Word of God. We don't have to judge it any further, but when somebody utters something that professes to be from God, sure, we've got to judge it. And there's many things in the Bible that say so.

We know that Paul said in 1 Corinthians 14, verses 29-33, Paul said, Let two or three prophets speak and let the others judge. But if anything is revealed to another who sits by, let the first keep silent. For you can all prophesy one by one that all may learn and all may be encouraged and the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets.

For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all the churches of the same. Now, we talked about these verses last time. I won't go into my own understanding of these at the moment, but certainly one thing is clear.

Prophecy is to be judged. Now, it is possible in this passage that Paul is recommending that the other prophets judge. It's not clear.

Let the prophets speak, two or three, and let the others, does that mean the other prophets who aren't speaking, or the other people in the congregation, let them judge. Could be read either way. But even if Paul here is suggesting that the other prophets must judge the individual prophecies in the church, it is nonetheless incumbent on every Christian to judge anything that represents itself as a word from God.

It's not irreverent. It's the height of reverence. It's the height of taking seriously the expression, Thus saith the Lord.

Unfortunately, not all who say, Thus saith the Lord, are as God-fearing as they should be. People use it very loosely in some circles, and that's very, very skimpy. In Jeremiah 23, some words about people like that.

Jeremiah 23, verses 21 and 22, God says, I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran. I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied. But if they had stood in my counsel and had caused my people to hear my words, then they would have turned them from their evil way and from the evil of their doings.

That's what prophets would do if they had the mind of God in that situation. But in the same chapter, Jeremiah 23, verse 30, says, Therefore, behold, I am against the prophets, says the Lord, who steal my words, everyone from his neighbor. Behold, I am against the prophets, says the Lord, who use their tongues and say, He says.

Behold, I am against those who prophesy false dreams, says the Lord, and tell them and cause my people to err by their lies and by their recklessness. Boy, I've seen some real recklessness. Among those that profess to be giving a word from the Lord.

Yet I did not send them or command them. Therefore, they cause people at all, says the Lord. So, I mean, just because someone says, Thus saith the Lord, or He says, doesn't mean He says anything of the sort.

How do I know? Well, look over at 1 Thessalonians 5, verses 20 and 21. These two verses, I believe, actually, verses 19 through 21, they belong close together. They are

individual verses, the way our Bible has been broken up into verses, but I think they are a flow of thought.

1 Thessalonians 5, Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies. Test all things.

Hold fast what is good. Now, we're not supposed to quench the Spirit. We should not, in any sense, forbid people to prophesy.

We should not despise prophecies. We should not take them lightly. However, we should test them.

We should test all things. That which passes the test, that which is good. When you test a prophecy, it will turn out to either be good or bad.

You hold fast to the good and you don't hold fast to the bad. But the only way you can make that distinction is if you put the test to it. But how do we test it? That's what I want to discuss right now, if we can, rather briefly.

How can we test prophecy? Well, one way, in the Bible, is by revelation. By personal revelation. This we read a moment ago in 1 Corinthians 14.

Let the others judge. Let the prophet speak and the others judge. And if something is revealed, the one who sits by.

That is one of those who's judging. Something is revealed to them. Let the first be quiet.

Now, what I understand this to mean is while people are sitting in judgment, listening to the prophetic speaker speaking, and they're judging, God might reveal to one of them, hey, this is not from me. Now, I don't claim to be a prophet, as you know, but I've been in meetings where it was revealed to me. I mean, you just knew in your spirit that this is not a word from God.

This is not what God would do. This just stinks in the spirit. It's just dark.

There's just a spiritual discernment that you get about that. It's not of God. That is, I think, as I said in our previous lesson, perhaps even what is meant by the gift of discerning of spirits.

Though many people apply discerning of spirits to the perception that demons are active in a person's life or something like that, Paul always puts discerning of spirits in connection with the gift of prophecy like the gift of interpretation of tongues is connected to tongues. These work together. And when Paul says, let the others judge, he uses the very same Greek word that he used in discerning of spirits, the same word for discern.

And so I think by revelation, by a gift of the Holy Spirit, God can let you know that this

prophecy is not of him. You might not have any solid objective ground to go on. You just, in your spirit, you know this is not of God.

Now, you know, unfortunately, you know, if it's that subjective, how do you know if what you're feeling is real or not? I guess there's a time when you just have to trust God that if in your spirit you sense it's not of God, then God can't expect you to accept the thing as a word from God. If you can't accept it in your spirit, then I don't think you should. I don't think you should force yourself to.

I have done this too many times, wishing to be nonjudgmental, wishing to be so charitable in all my judgments. Someone speaking as if from God, I think, well, I don't know. And I always want to give them the benefit of the doubt, but I just feel rotten about it sometimes.

And then later on, I realized that I should have trusted those instincts. Not so much instincts in the sense of natural instincts, but more, I guess we'd say, judgments, discernments about it. You can know by instinct or discernment or by judgment that it's not of God, by direct revelation.

That's one way. If something is revealed to one who sits by, let the first be quiet. As we're sitting by, we're making judgment of his prophecy.

Something might be revealed to them that disqualifies him to keep speaking. Another thing is that we read in Scripture in Revelation 19 and verse 10, that the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy. The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.

Now, this can either mean that when a person is prophesying by the spirit, it is Jesus testifying through his spirit, or that the prophetic subject matter will testify of Jesus. This second suggestion seems to agree best with what Paul said on the subject in 1 Corinthians 12, right at the outset of his discussion on the gifts. He said in verse 3, 1 Corinthians 12, 3, Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the spirit of God calls Jesus accursed, and no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.

Now, technically, a person can say the words Jesus is Lord, even a demon possessed person, I think, can say that. I believe I've witnessed that. But what he's saying is no one can genuinely exalt the Lordship of Jesus sincerely unless the spirit is operating in that person and speaking through that person.

I mean, when you genuinely praise Jesus and say Jesus is Lord, you actually are inspired. It might not be prophetically, but the Holy Spirit is glorifying Jesus through your lips. But if somebody's words are derogatory toward Jesus or tear down Jesus in your sight in some way, then obviously those words can't be genuine prophecy.

I myself must say I've never heard a prophecy however hokey that has torn down Jesus verbally, but I've heard of people who have heard them. And so, I mean, we need to

remember that. Certainly there would be nothing the Holy Spirit would ever say that would be, in any sense, putting Jesus down.

To me, one of the most important tests when I hear prophecy that I would apply is that which is found in Isaiah 8. In Isaiah 8, it rebukes people or warns people, I should say, about the danger of receiving allegedly revealed information from sources other than true prophets. In this case, it's talking about wizards and people like that. And it says in Isaiah 8, verses 19 and 20, When they say to you, Seek those who are mediums and wizards, who whisper and mutter.

Should not a people seek their God? Should seek that of the living? To the law and the testimony. If they do not speak according to this word, meaning the law and the testimony, the written word of God, it is because there is no light in them. This, to me, is the most universally applicable test.

If something is not speaking according to this word, I don't care how much of a reputation a person has as a prophet and how many people honor him as such, if he speaks not according to this word, there's no light in him. I simply will not receive any word professedly inspired or otherwise that is not agreeable with scripture. And that is because Isaiah the prophet, a real prophet, said that.

He said that you shouldn't give these people credit for being enlightened if they're not speaking according to the word that God's already given. So obviously it's testing by scripture. Now there are sometimes when a prophecy is so vague it doesn't really cross over any boundaries.

It might be a false prophecy but it doesn't say anything unscriptural just because it doesn't... You know, it's risk-free. It's a prophecy that... An awful lot of things that profess to be prophecies are simply restatements of Bible verses from the Old Testament usually. Even in their original King James English in the church, I've heard people in King James English give alleged prophetic utterances which are really just quotations of a string of scriptures.

Well, that's obviously very scriptural but that doesn't mean it's always prophetic. I mean, good verses. The verses are good but whether this is a word in season is another question.

The person might just be quoting verses from memory. There are other tests that have to be applied as well. One is the test of the fruit.

The fruit of the Spirit. If the Spirit gives an utterance the fruit of that utterance will be as Galatians 5, 22 and 23 says patience, love, joy, peace, gentleness, goodness, patience, self-control. These are the kind things that will result in the church if it is a genuine word from the Spirit because that's the fruit that the Spirit produces.

And then a final test and we've got to run these down real quick. The final test that I find for testing prophecy is what would be maybe the first thing that comes to some people's minds. I listed it last but it's not the last.

It's the filament test. If a prophecy actually contains a prediction about something then it's very easy to test at least after the fact not always before the fact but it says in Deuteronomy 18 verses 21 and 22 Deuteronomy 18, 21 and 22 and if you say in your heart how shall we know the word which the Lord has not spoken then he answers when a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord if the thing does not happen or come to pass that is the thing which the Lord has not spoken the prophet has spoken it presumptuously you should not be afraid of him. So that's easy enough if the prophet predicts something that doesn't happen then that's a word that wasn't spoken from God.

That's a false prophecy. Now see this is where some of the modern day prophetic movement advocates seem to deviate from scripture quite a bit because they say well you can be a baby prophet and be only 10% accurate to start but if you exercise your gift and develop it then you might become 20% accurate and eventually if you really work hard and are faithful maybe you'll be given a better gift of prophecy at 50% and these people have actually said I've read their literature they say our best prophets in our movement are 95% accurate. I think well then that's not a prophet.

They may on occasions give prophetic words but that's not a prophet. A prophet in the Old Testament could not get it wrong. He's a false prophet if it didn't come to pass what he said and he'd be stoned to death he didn't get a chance to develop his gift.

Baby prophets never grew up in that society because their babyish ways was not to get him killed. So if a prophecy doesn't come true that person should be skeptical of anything else they say prophetically and you certainly can disregard what they said in that case. There is in Deuteronomy even if they predict it does come true they could still be a false prophet.

In Deuteronomy 13 verses 1-3 it says if there arises among you a prophet or a dreamer of dreams and he gives you a sign or a wonder and the sign or the wonder comes to pass of which he spoke to you saying let us go after other gods which you have not known and let us serve them you shall not listen to that the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams for the Lord your God is testing you to know whether you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul. Now here's a case the prophet gives a sign or wonder and it does come to pass. Now in Deuteronomy 18 if it doesn't you know they're false.

Here it does and they're still false. What's the problem here? Their prophecy came true yes but it was it's not a matter of it coming true it was false in its very essence. It was a prophecy advocating the departure from God.



And again this would be where the scripture test has to be advocated. If the theology of the prophecy is wrong if it advocates a different God than that of the Bible or a different understanding of God or a different way of pursuing God than that which is given in the Bible then that can't be trusted. That's not of God.

Now about how do I know if I have a prophetic word from God? Well you know that's very hard for me personally to answer not being one who prophesies. I mean I can never I've never stood to thus saith the Lord and given a prophetic utterance. There have been times that I either felt at the time or later learned from talking to someone that I had you know something had apparently been a prophecy to somebody.

I wasn't aware of it in some cases. Sometimes I did feel like this must I feel like this is something that God has to say to me. But I've never gone and said thus saith the Lord here's a prophecy and so forth.

Never done that. And because of that I've never taken the kind of risks that a person takes and says thus saith the Lord. And part of it is because although there have been times I've thought maybe I had something from God to say I just wasn't sure and I didn't want to take the risk of doing it and saying thus saith God when it wasn't God.

But I think if you really have something from the Lord he has ways of letting you know that it's from him. There just isn't some kind of an objective test I mean except all these other tests we just talked about obviously if it doesn't pass these tests then it's not of God. But if it if in some other if it seems to pass these tests and you're still not sure let me just share with you something the Bible teaches about the subjective experience of the prophet in giving his word.

In Amos chapter 3 and this we'll have to do real quick because we're about out of time three minutes in Amos chapter 3 I don't know if I can find Amos in three minutes there we go in the last lesson we read verse 7 I want to read that again and verse 8 in verse 7 it says Surely the Lord God does nothing unless he reveals his secret to his servants the prophets. A lion has roared who will not hear the Lord God has spoken who can but prophesy. What this suggests is if God speaks a word who could hold it in who can but prophesy certainly Jeremiah indicated that he was not one who could but prophesy if God gave him a word he tried not to prophesy on one occasion in Jeremiah chapter 20 we read this Jeremiah chapter 20 and verse 9 he got a lot of persecution for what he said and once he decided to stop doing it then I said I will not make mention of him nor speak any more in his name Jeremiah said but his word was in my heart like a burning fire shut up in my bones I was weary with holding it back and I could not I couldn't hold it back now I thought the spirit of the prophet was subject to the prophet it means the prophet can hold it back I don't know then Jeremiah must not have been a real prophet because he couldn't hold it back he said actually I gave a different meaning a suggestion meaning in our last lecture about what it means the spirit of the prophet is subject to the prophet

but it seems to me if God gives you a word you will know it it will be so strong burning in you that you cannot very well hold it back I mean if you hold it back you will about burst and I just want you to know that we welcome people who have that in their breast that they speak it out in these meetings although we will judge it but we will be not harsh we may if we