

**New Life Vineyard Church**  
**Understanding the Gift of Prophecy: A Brief Summary**

We believe God speaks today through His Word, Spirit and prophetic voice. In Thessalonians 5:20, Paul writes "...Do not treat prophecies with contempt..." Paul recognized the gift of prophecy as a major source of blessing for the church and, therefore, should be encouraged. The question is how do we pastor the use of this valuable gift?

**1. New Testament Prophecy and Biblical Revelation**

Understanding the relationship and the difference between these two concepts is crucial in avoiding errors regarding prophecy. Almost every Christian cult began as a result of ignoring the distinction between the New Testament gift of prophecy and the written Word of God. Joseph Smith and the Mormons are a notable example. His "prophetic insight" was not subordinated to written revelation. The NT gift of prophecy was never intended to be written down and placed in the back of our Bibles. The NT gift of prophecy is of a decidedly different Character than the revelation in the written scriptures. This may seem too basic to mention but keep in mind much of the evangelical church disdains or waters down the gift of prophecy because they think it undermines biblical authority. Wayne Grudem, in his excellent book, "The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today" (Crossway Books) uses the following language for differentiating between the NT gift of prophecy and the Bible.

Old Testament prophets and New Testament apostles spoke and wrote "the very words of the very God." That is, biblical revelation is unique, inerrant, and protected even though it comes through a human agency (Proverbs 30:5, 6). God said through Jeremiah, "I have put my words in your mouth" (Jer. 1:9) and Paul points out that all scripture is "God breathed" (2 Tim. 3:16). **Because of the level of revelation, the written words of God, carries overriding authority for all believers in every age** (Isa. 40:8).

The NT gift of prophecy, on the other hand, is stirred by God's Spirit, but can be less clear and sure. Dr. Grudem describes it correctly as "speaking merely human words to report something that God brings to mind." The NT gift of prophecy is, therefore, subject to error, human manipulation and even demonic distortion. Hence, the gift must be tested (**1Cor. 14:29, 1 Thess. 5:19-22**) and pastored.

**2. What is the Purpose of New Testament Prophecy?**

Revelation 19:10 says all prophetic revelation is to 'promote the testimony of Jesus.' How does the gift of prophecy do this? Paul tells us that 'everyone who prophecies speak to men for their strengthening, encouragement, and comfort (1Cor. 14:3). So prophecy is, like the other spiritual gifts, for the building up of the church in love.

**3. How is Prophecy Tested?**

1 John 4:1-3 indicates that doctrinal content is paramount and that all prophetic words should be tested against written revelation. John Wimber also has a practical list of criterion that we find very helpful.

**Content:** Is the prophecy scriptural?

**Track Record:** What is the accuracy of the 'prophetic person'? What is the effect? That is, do the words bring blessing, encouragement, and strengthening?

**Maturity:** How is the prophetic person's character? (Do they pay their bills?) Is the prophetic person teachable? (Can they receive correction?) Are they operating in humility?

**Context:** Is the prophetic person confirming what God is already doing in the person's life or the life of the church, or are they coming from left field?

**4. Suggested Ground Rules for Prophecy in the Public Assembly**

In 1 Cor. 14 Paul lays out the ground rules for how prophecy was to operate in Corinth. Keep in mind his purpose in this section is probably not to prescribe exactly how prophecy is to be pastored in every church setting for all time but simply that prophecy ( and all spiritual gifts in the public body) should be pastored. The letter to the Corinthians was corrective. The gifts were being abused and there was disorder, so Paul takes

the appropriate measures. Pastors must also prayerfully decide how spiritual gifts are to be regulated in various church related situations. In doing this, several issues should be considered.

**The Size of the Meeting.** Paul wrote his instructions about spiritual gifts to the church in Corinth, the average size of the assemblies would probably have been fairly small. History tells us that there was not a formal church structure built until about the third century. Most early Christian meetings, henceforth, took place in homes. Here at New Life Vineyard, we require all prophetic words be submitted to one of the church pastors and that no prophecy comes directly from the floor. This is especially important as our church continues to grow and those in attendance are not known on a personal basis. This procedure can preserve the freedom to share for the prophetic person but allows the pastors to protect the group from confusion or false prophecy. On the other hand, small groups where people are building trust and there is time for each one to speak are wonderful [places to nurture the gift of prophecy].

**The Purpose of the Meeting.** Many are recognizing that America Sunday mornings are a prime time for evangelism as well as worship and building up the church through teaching. When seekers are checking out God, they may be more likely to come to a Sunday morning worship service than a small group or by simply reading the Bible. The larger group helps them remain anonymous and wait and listen and learn at their own pace. Since Paul lays out the principle that neither should be forbidden, but rather regulated (1 Cor. 14:39-40; 1 Thess. 4:19-20) we are open and willing to allow prophetic insights when handled appropriately, we believe that spiritual giftings such as prophecy must be nurtured for the building up of the body of Christ.

## **5. Pastoring Different Kinds of Prophetic Words**

Categorizing prophetic words by type is attempting to facilitate greater effectiveness and a way to begin to learn how to handle them. The following categories, not enunciated in the scriptures, are in harmony with Paul's teaching and are functional, though it is specifically inferred.

**Heart Prophecy:** This is where God speaks directly to you in thoughts, impressions, and inner inclinations. This is most often the birthing of a needed truth or guidance from the Holy Spirit. It can be during prayer, worship, or reading of His word. It is where His loving voice is made alive in you, where God whispers to your soul.

**Simple Prophecy:** This is a timely word of encouragement stirred by God and delivered in a congregation or to an individual. It is not confrontational or directive. Words such as 'I think God is saying to us right now the He wants to gather us to Himself as a hen gathers her chicks' may not sound too profound, but when God stirs such a message and it comes at the right time, it can build up the church in penetrating ways.

**Directive Prophecy:** This is prophecy that expects a response or directs the individual or church to do something. This obviously must be handled more carefully than simple prophecy because of its potential to manipulate or mislead. A word such as 'I think God is saying we should discontinue Sunday celebrations and go to strictly house church model' must be privately considered by the elders and should not be uttered in any public setting.

**Personal Words:** These are words delivered from one individual to another and can be simple or directive. It is important to point out that NT examples of personal words are very limited. However, it is almost certain that believers have always encouraged one another through personal words. If these words are directive, they should never be acted upon without biblical confirmation and the counsel of those in the church leadership. Personal prophecy can be a tremendous source of blessing or damage depending upon how it is submitted and tested.

## **6. Ideas for Nurturing the New Testament Gift of Prophecy**

**Training in the Scriptures.** One of the requirements for those being mentored by the prophets of the Old Testament was a thorough knowledge of the Law of Moses. The same requirement for budding New Testament prophets is crucial. Biblical knowledge prevents doctrinal error and ensures balance.

### **Frequent Teaching on Spiritual Gifts.**

**Submission to Authority.** Develop an open atmosphere for the prophetic in our small group settings. Small groups are the place to learn about and experience first hand the operation of spiritual gifts. That is why we have strong, experienced leaders at each of our connect groups.