

Romans 12:6 "Gift Of Prophecy Part 2"

Rom 12:6 "We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith."

Considering our study of last week we looked at how the scriptures distinguish between O.T. prophecy and the N.T. gift of prophecy. We've seen how the apostles and the O.T. prophets were used by God to record the very words of God, complete in every way; inspired by the Holy Spirit, infallible and inerrant.

And so, today we have in our possession this very word of God which is fully reliable as the Lord has miraculously preserved the scriptures which is the Bible.

As Isaiah the prophet put it under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, "The grass withers, the flower fades, but the Word of our God shall stand forever." (Isa.40:8)

The O.T. prophets and the N.T. apostles were chosen by God to give us His very word with all authority. The scriptures are complete. We are neither to add to, or subtract from God's written word.

This necessarily means that the N.T. gift of prophecy does not carry with it the same authority as the written word of God which we have in our possession.

In contrast the N.T. gift of prophecy fully assumes that men will make mistakes in their attempts to give revelations from God. However, being less than perfect in those attempts, they are never instructed to be put to death, but instead, we are told in 1Thes.5:20-22, those prophecies are to be tested. "Hold on to the good", and exclude those things which do not align with the written word of God, which can be the only true test of any prophetic utterance.

But maybe we're getting a little ahead of ourselves. After all, we're making an assumption that the gift of prophecy is still in effect today in the church. Some would suggest that this gift died out with the apostolic age in the first century, which would make this discussion a moot point.

These folks would quote 1Co 13:8-10 "Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are

tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. 9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part, 10 but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears."

"When that which is perfect comes" or as the NIV puts it "when perfection comes", is what some people point to and conclude that it refers to the completion of the Bible, the perfect word of God.

Without getting into a lengthy discussion it must be pointed out that if the perfect thing referred to in 1Cor.13:10 is the Bible then we must also conclude that those things which will pass away as a result of its completion cannot be limited to prophecies and tongues as noted in 1Cor.13:8, because in that same verse is knowledge, and all knowledge has not passed away.

Others suggest that the "perfect" or "perfection to come" refers to Jesus. And though it would certainly include Him it seems that the word perfect, which can also be translated completion, is more likely to refer to the completion of all things where Jesus has completed His perfect plan once and for all and all things have come to pass according to His plan.

1Co 13:9 "For we know in part and we prophesy in part....." In other words, we know imperfectly because we are imperfect and we live in an imperfect world. We "prophesy in part." In other words, we prophesy imperfectly for the same reasons.

But when all of God's redemptive plan is completed we will no longer need these imperfect means to walk with God. Why? Well, Paul tells us in 1Co 13:12 "Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known."

Today we see things in the reflection of a sin-filled and sin-effected world and so we see, in a spiritual sense, poorly. But there will be a time when we will see face to face. In other words, there will be no more dimness of reflection because we will be completed in glory, God's glory.

1Jo 3:2 "Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is."

When will Jesus appear where we will see Him as He is? At His coming in glory where we will be resurrected and meet Him in the air to be with Him forever more.

And when will that happen? On the last day.

John 6:39 ³⁹ "This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day.

1 Thessalonians 4:16-18 ¹⁶ For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of *the* archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. ¹⁸ Therefore comfort one another with these words.

And so as Paul says in 1Cor.13;12 "Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known."

Our knowledge is partial or imperfect, our wisdom is partial or imperfect, our gifts, such as tongues and prophecy, is partial in that it's imperfect. But when perfection comes or is completed, when we see Christ face to face, we will no longer need the imperfect to commune with our glorious Lord.

Therefore, all which God gave to the church for its edification and its ability to know Him and love and serve Him are very much in need today and are still in effect for precisely the same reasons that they were needed in the first century, albeit though they are imperfect in the sense that they are used in and with imperfect vessels.

The gift of prophecy is with us today because the Spirit of God, who gives good gifts, is with us today. The question is what is the gift of prophecy and how is it to be properly used?

Paul says to seek after the gift of prophecy in 1Co.14:1
"eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy."

And again, keep in mind that Paul is not addressing apostles but an entire congregation of believers in Corinth, which assumes that all Christians within that congregation were to consider how God might be gifting any one of them in that church with this gift.

And unless there is a clear teaching on such gifts being abrogated this same message goes out to all churches in all ages.

The gift of prophecy is a wonderful way of how God personally enters into our lives with a word of encouragement and edification from His throne, but it is conveyed through His people by merely human words revealing a spiritual message from God, which is why they must be tested.

The gift of prophecy is one of those gifts that lets us personally experience the reality of how Jesus is truly in our midst. Our Lord may give a word to lift us up, to inform us of His working in our lives and to direct us as we seek Him. But when we look at the gift of prophecy we must recognize its main function in the Body of Christ which also answers how it is to be used.

Paul makes it abundantly clear in 1CO 14:3 "But everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort. Or as the NAS puts it: "But one who prophesies speaks to men for edification and exhortation and consolation."

If the gift of prophecy is being used in a way which violates these distinctives then we must question and test to see what we can recognize as coming from God.

For example someone may say they have heard a word from God and that in a short amount of time someone in your family will meet a tragic end and it will disrupt the whole church.

Question: Does this alleged prophecy edify the church? Does it exhort and console the Body? No! Therefore the test would have to question the validity of such a word as being prophetic in nature.

This brings up another important point. If anyone prophesies, they will have to submit to the scrutiny of such testing. Such testing will take into account as to whether this prophecy is edifying, exhorting or consoling. It must also take into account if what is said contradicts the written word of God.

The question is who does this testing? Well, one obvious answer would be the Pastor and elders who have been chosen by God to lead the church. But it would also include others who have the gift of prophecy who are familiar with God's prompting and have the spiritual sensitivity to distinguish the proper function of the gift.

But it could also include anyone in the church who is spiritual and knowledgeable of the scriptures. It may not necessarily be limited to the most mature in the faith. God may gift a babe in Christ with the gift of discernment, for example, and may use that gift to test such prophecies.

My point is that everyone in the church needs to be spiritually aware and alert and discerning. This gives everyone a real motivation for growing in Christ and being in His word so that nothing will slip through for prophecy when in fact it may be something which is not.

Now someone might say, how does someone know if they receive a prophecy from God? Good question. And this brings up two points I mentioned in question form last week. Can a prophet prophesy at will? How do we know if someone has the gift of prophecy?

Can a prophet prophesy at will? The gift of prophecy is somewhat unique along with a couple of other gifts in that it is one of those gifts you cannot practice unless God gives you a revelation or an illumination.

Unlike the gift of teaching or the gift of mercy or the gift of hospitality, which we can practice any time the occasion calls for the practice of such a gift, the gift of prophecy is entirely up to the will of God to share something with someone before it can be used.

So how do we know if someone has this gift? Only if God reveals it as such. It is different from simply pondering a bible verse or having insight into spiritual truths which our own minds can do as we study the word of God to show ourselves approved.

The gift of prophecy is supernatural and you will know if God places an illumination in your heart and mind because it will be something you didn't consider. In a sense, it would be as though someone had whispered something in your ear that you weren't looking for.

It will clearly be a voice outside of yourself in the sense that your inner man will recognize it as the touch of God. It probably won't be a literal voice from God. But your spirit will recognize it as something unique.

So what do you do if you get such a prompting? You share it. Does that mean you get up in the middle of a worship service or in the middle of the Pastors sermon and blurt out this message from God?

Here we need to be careful. First we must realize that God may give a prophecy to someone wherever they are. It doesn't have to be in the context of a worship service. It may be in a bible study. It may be when you're in prayer. It may be while you're driving down the road.

Paul's exhortation to the Corinthian church was in the context of how they were using the gift of prophecy in an unbiblical way in a

worship setting. And therefore the instruction was directed towards the worship setting.

However, we must never forget that all that God does is according to order not chaos. And so Paul instructs the Corinthians.

1Co 14:29-33 "Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said. 30 And if a revelation comes to someone who is sitting down, the first speaker should stop. 31 For you can all prophesy in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged. 32 The spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets. (In other words the prophet is in control of this gift) 33 For God is not a God of disorder but of peace."

And so I would say that the gift of prophecy may be used within the context of a worship service, but it should never be used to replace or interrupt the teaching of the infallible, living word of God. In other words, to interrupt the Pastor who is feeding the Sheep, which Christ Himself has instructed His shepherds to do, would be disorderly and bring chaos to a time of order.

I believe there are appropriate times to share a prophecy in a worship setting. It may be before or after the message of God's word being delivered in a sermon. It may be in a worship setting like on a Thursday night or during a worship time as the men or ladies come together for their times of worship and study.

It may be in the context of a church fellowship which we have once a month. That doesn't mean you can only receive such a revelation at church or in the fellowship of other believers. We can't put God in a box. As I said, God may touch you anywhere. But the sharing of such revelations must be in the context of the Body or at least a portion of the body so that it may be tested.

It's very easy for any of us to embellish something God has shared with us. It's also tempting to try and fill in some of the blanks. What I mean by that is that often times prophecy is like a jigsaw puzzle. The Lord may give us a glimpse into something and not give us every detail.

If your revelation is general in nature then share it as a general revelation. If you're tempted to try and interpret such a prompting you could be adding your own wisdom and giving information that God didn't share with you. Again, this is why we test such prophecies.

Do we have examples of such prophecies in scripture that we can look at and get an idea of how God has prompted others? Sure. Timothy is an example of how one can be on the receiving end of a prophecy.

1Ti 4:14-16 "Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through a prophetic message when the body of elders laid their hands on you. 15 Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress. 16 Watch your life and doctrine closely."

Notice here that the prophetic utterance was not delivered by an apostle, but through ordinary elders in a local congregation.

The NAS puts verse 16 as "pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching."

Evidently, as Timothy was being sent out to Pastor the Ephesian church, the elders, (probably of the Corinthian church as we see in Acts 18:1), prayed for him and in the time of prayer the Lord spoke to one or more of them and shared how the Lord was going to gift Timothy in a way so as to be an effective Pastor.

We're not told what gift was given to him, but it could have been any number of gifts including the gift of discernment, since he had to deal with many false teachers. I suspect it was not the gift of teaching since that gift was a prerequisite for being sent out, since an elder must be able to teach. If Timothy was being sent out then he must have been an apt teacher who these elders felt was able to instruct the church.

However, according to Eph 4:11, Pastor was a gift just as apostle or evangelist was a gift. He may have received the gift of Pastor at that time. One can be a gifted teacher and not have the gift of Pastor.

We have another example in the book of Acts that is sometime used to describe the gift of prophecy in action as Agabus the prophet has received a revelation from the Holy Spirit.

Act 21:10-13 "After we had been there a number of days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. 11 Coming over to us, he took Paul's belt, tied his own hands and feet with it and said, "The Holy Spirit says, 'In this way the Jews of Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt and will hand him over to the Gentiles.'" 12 When we heard this, we and the people there pleaded with Paul not to go up to Jerusalem. 13 Then Paul answered, "Why are you

weeping and breaking my heart? I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus."

In this instance the prophet Agabus reveals something that he asserts was from the Lord which would bring his revelation into question if in fact this is the gift of prophecy being practiced.

The first thing is that it begs the question of whether or not this revelation meets those three requirements mentioned in 1CO 14:3 "But everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their ***strengthening, encouragement and comfort.***"

Was Paul being strengthened, encouraged and comforted by this word? It doesn't appear so. In fact in Acts 21:13 he says, "Why are you weeping and breaking my heart?"

Agabus may certainly have received something from the Lord, but it may have been a word of knowledge rather than a prophecy. I'm not suggesting that Agabus delivered this as a prophecy, but it's interesting to note that Agabus is conspicuously called a prophet.

But again, simply because he is identified as a prophet, which assumes he had the gift of prophecy, does not deny that he had other gifts. And as I just alluded to he may have been practicing the gift of knowledge which is for another study.

But assuming this is the gift of knowledge we can see how the wisdom of the prophet might get in the way of the details which were not given by the Spirit and which Agabus seems to fill in himself.

Look closely at the revelation. "The Holy Spirit says, 'In this way the Jews of Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt and will hand him over to the Gentiles.'"

Now if the Holy Spirit had in fact given these very details then we would expect them to be 100% correct. Are they? Well, the fulfillment of this word that Agabus received is found in the same chapter of Acts.

Act 21:27-33 "When the seven days were nearly over, some Jews from the province of Asia saw Paul at the temple. They stirred up the whole crowd and seized him, 28 shouting, "Men of Israel, help us! This is the man who teaches all men everywhere against our people and our law and this place. And besides, he has brought Greeks into the temple area and defiled this holy place." 29 (They had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian in the city with Paul

and assumed that Paul had brought him into the temple area.) 30 The whole city was aroused, and the people came running from all directions. Seizing Paul, they dragged him from the temple, and immediately the gates were shut. 31 While they were trying to kill him, news reached the commander of the Roman troops that the whole city of Jerusalem was in an uproar. 32 He at once took some officers and soldiers and ran down to the crowd. When the rioters saw the commander and his soldiers, they stopped beating Paul. 33 The commander came up and arrested him and ordered him to be bound with two chains. Then he asked who he was and what he had done."

Paul had in fact gone to Jerusalem which was part of Agabus' utterance from God. So far so good. But instead of the Jews binding Paul and then delivering him over to the Gentiles, the Jews are trying to kill Paul. Instead, it was the Gentiles who bound Paul saving his life from the Jews in the process.

Is this not nit-picking? Of course. But it illustrates that even if we get a word from the Lord we need to be careful not to add our own interpretation in the process which again takes us back to why all revelations and promptings must be tested by the word of God.

Suppose Agabus had said that, 'you will be bound in Jerusalem Paul', but then felt to add, reasoning that this would be a great opportunity for Paul, 'but a great conversion will take place among the Jews because of your presence.'

That's not what happened. How disheartening it would have been had that been what Paul was looking forward to. With every gift from God comes the responsibility to use it responsibly. I'm not suggesting that Agabus did this when he gave his revelation in Acts or that he was not a true prophet. I'm simply suggesting that each person in the Body of Christ has gifts and Agabus was using his. Could he have added something which God didn't reveal? If he's a human being, certainly.

I brought up two other questions last week which I'll quickly address. Is teaching in the church the same as prophecy? Why are women allowed to prophesy but not to have authority over the church?

As to the gift of prophecy being a form of teaching from the pulpit this simply isn't the case precisely because women are not only allowed to prophesy but are encouraged to do so.

^{NAU} **1 Corinthians 11:5** But *every woman* who has her head uncovered *while praying or prophesying* disgraces her head, for she is one and the same as the woman whose head is shaved.

And yet we are told when it comes to having authority over men, as would be the case in a pastoral setting where preaching and teaching the body is central, women would be excluded from that type of authority.

1 Timothy 2:11-12 ¹¹ A woman must quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness. ¹² But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet.

By the way, this restriction of authority to women seems to be implied in a section in 1Corinthians that is obviously in the context of prophecy.

1 Corinthians 14:34-35 ³⁴ The women are to keep silent in the churches; for they are not permitted to speak, but are to subject themselves, just as the Law also says. ³⁵ If they desire to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is improper for a woman to speak in church.

A woman cannot keep silent in every sense if she is allowed to prophesy according to the word of God. Therefore, whatever type of speech that is implied in 1Corinthians 14:34-35 must necessarily be attached to a speech that restricts the authority reserved only for men in the church.

This might include teaching in the sense that in the testing of the prophecy a woman may be restricted since the testing itself would be a form of authority over the prophet which could certainly include a man.

There are many instances in the word of God where teaching and preaching are addressed and they are not in the context of the gift of prophecy being employed.

Again, this shows that the gift of prophecy is not the designed gift and tool used by God to govern and instruct the church. Instruction is primarily through the teaching of the word of God and when I teach on the gift of teaching we'll see this more clearly.

You need only go to the Pastoral epistles, which are 1st and 2nd Timothy and Titus and see the myriad of references to the great responsibility of how the Pastor must be teaching and instructing

from the word of God so that the church may be built up. They were not to rely on the gift of prophecy for such feeding of the sheep.

The word of God makes it plain that women play a vital role in the church. They are given the privilege and responsibility to use their gifts in the Body of Christ. But with any gift it is to be used in the context of their role.

When I was in leadership at Calvary Chapel Fort Lauderdale I was given the privilege to use the gift of teaching which God has given me. But since my role did not include Pastor I was not given that privilege.

In a similar way women's roles in the church do not include the authority to rule over the church. In the context of their role, within the Body of Christ, they are still to use their gifts which could include any gift which is not given for the sole purpose of authoritative rule such as Pastor, or elder.

We might include in that list Deacon, but only to the extent that ruling over the church is involved in that capacity. And so women may be deacons according to the role of their service.

Three words in the Greek describe deacon with two of them coming from the one word *Diakonos*. It literally means to serve or be a servant. To suggest that women can't serve is to miss the point of how they too must exercise their gifts.

But to have the office of Deacon, which is to rule, in a sense, over such ministry, is reserved for men. In fact, when the apostles were trying to resolve a problem in the early church concerning the serving of food to widows of both Greek and Hebrew background, they instructed that seven men be chosen to rule over the organization of such a task.

Now to suggest that these seven men were the only ones who actually served tables in that instance is short-sighted. Surely these men employed women to help with the job of meeting the need.

But, since the gift of prophecy is not a gift used primarily in an authoritative ruling capacity it's a gift women can and should use, providing God has gifted them as we see in the case of the daughters of Phillip the evangelist in the book of Acts.

Acts 21:8-9 ⁸ On the next day we left and came to Caesarea, and entering the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the

seven, we stayed with him. ⁹ Now this man had *four virgin daughters who were prophetesses*.

And of course the prophet Joel prophesied this very thing.

Joe 2:28-29 "And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and *daughters* will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. ²⁹ Even on my servants, *both men and women*, I will pour out my Spirit in those days."

The gift of prophecy is a wonderful way in which God blesses us and encourages, exhorts and comforts us. If you think you have the gift of prophecy let me know and I'll share with you how you might use it here.

But, we should be praying that any gift be used in love and not for our own glory or status as Paul describes in 1Cor.13. Along with seeking this gift there should be the attitude that we would be content with any gift God gives us and that we should be growing and maturing in our walk with God if we are to utilize any of His gifts effectively in His power.

Are you studying His written word and growing in His knowledge and grace to be used for the building up of the body today, or are you waiting for a bolt from heaven to strike you and show you with letters engraved in the clouds before you begin to serve and glorify Christ in your daily life?

If you're not sure what gifts you have from God ask others what they see in your life which might indicate how God is using you. This, by the way, is one reason it's so important to be plugged into a local body. The rest of the Body is able to utilize their gifts to often times encourage you in yours.

If you seem to receive very pronounced promptings from God which you didn't dream up on your own, it may be God prompting you to share something He desires this body to hear, and you may in fact have the gift of prophecy, which will be put to the test from God's written word.

But that same kind of attitude should be applied to any gift which is used to build up the Body of Christ. We should always apply discernment that checks teachings or any other gifts which may be used, against God's word.

Our entire lives should be tested according to the word of God and should come into conformity with His word and with the life of Jesus Christ who is the One we should be imitating in all things.

Paul told Timothy, "don't neglect the spiritual gift within you (1Tim.4:14) and God tells us today not to neglect the spiritual gift within us, the greatest gift being the gift of eternal life which we should be sharing with the world through our words and deeds.

But, we are called to be one body with one Spirit, one Father, and one Savior, Jesus Christ whom we serve as we serve one another.

GAL 5:13 "You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love."

And as we serve one another in love we will fulfill the greatest commandment which is to love God with all our heart, souls and minds as we reach out to each other and apply biblical principles and guidelines for all of life.

I'll end with the words the Lord gave James in his epistle. It's encouraging and practical.

JAM 1:17-18 "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. 18 He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.

Be a blessing and be blessed in the process. Give glory to God and bless His name in your life all of your days, as you rely on His power and His Spirit to be the servant He wants you to be.