# The Prophetic Calling of Every Believer

1 Thessalonians 5:19-22. Do not quench the Spirit.Do not treat prophecies with contempt but test them all; hold on to what is good, reject every kind of evil.

During my message on Sola Scriptura, the idea that the Christian conscience is to be bound by the word of God alone, I made mention that the office of the prophet as existed in the Old Testament and the early church does not exist in our day. Yet in 1 Thessalonians 5:19-22 Paul warns us not to despise prophecy. In fact, we are to evaluate what is said, discerning between good and evil. Does this mean we have authoritative prophets in our time giving us new revelation from heaven? No. I make the case that prophecy in our day is simply making valid implications and applications of scripture. That being the case, every Christian can prophecy in the sense that they can proclaim authoritative scripture and consequently make valid arguments

1 Corinthians 12:4-11

This is one of the most controversial passages in the Bible Are the gifts for today or have they ended? Charismatics and Pentecostals do believe all these gifts are for today and are still in operation. The classic Reformed view, and in my opinion the correct one, is that the sign gifts (healings, miracles, discerning of Spirits, speaking in tongues) have ceased. These gifts were temporary- they were necessary as the Holy Spirit was giving new revelation. With the completion of the scripture no new revelation is being given so the sign gifts have ceased to operate. For instance, the ability to work miracles on demand was God authenticating his message and his messenger; speaking in tongues was the ability to speak in a human language not previously studied; discerning of spirits was the God-given ability to deceptive and dangerous doctrine. With the completion of the scriptures this gift is rendered moot because we can all compare what the speaker is saying to what the Bible actually says. Prophecy in this context simply means to speak forth. The idea of foretelling only came about in the Middle Ages. Paul himself writes in 1 Corinthians 14:3, But he who prophecies speaks edification, exhortation and comfort. Notice that there is no prediction here. We simply apply the terms of the Bible to the situation at hand. On the other hand, the speaking gifts, highlighted in purple; wisdom, knowledge, faith, prophecy are permanent gifts for all ages. Their purpose is to edify the church and glorify God.

# Reformation teaching and prophecy

The restoration of prophecy for every believer was important to both Martin Luther and John Calvin the alternative was that only Roman Catholic magisterium had authority to prophesy. Calvin rebuked enthusiasts who thought the utterance of spontaneous ideas was prophecy. He said:

In like manner, when Paul says to the Thessalonians, “Quench not the Spirit,” he does not carry them aloft to empty speculation apart from the word; he immediately adds, “Despise not prophesying,” (1 Thess. 5:19, 20). By this, doubtless, he intimates that the light of the Spirit is quenched the moment prophesying falls into contempt. How is this answered by those swelling enthusiasts, in whose idea the only true illumination consists, in carelessly laying aside, and bidding adieu to the Word of God, while, with no less confidence than folly, they fasten upon any dreaming notion which may have casually sprung up in their minds? Surely a very different sobriety becomes the children of God. As they feel that without the Spirit of God they are utterly devoid of the light of truth, so they are not ignorant that the word is the instrument by which the illumination of the Spirit is dispensed. 5

The Reformation view was that prophecy was the teaching of the Word and proclamation of the terms of the gospel. Since every believer has the Holy Spirit, every believer has the “keys of the kingdom” and can authoritatively declare the terms of entrance into the kingdom. All are anointed and all have the authoritative teachings of Christ and His apostles. Therefore, all may prophecy. My daughter Noemi was only about five years old when she came home to me one day and said her teacher told her all religions lead to heaven, they are just different paths to God. Well, that’s not right she went on to say. She must not be reading the Bible. I agree. She judged correctly because she understood the terms of God’s word on this matter. If a 5-year-old can do it, so can you and so should you.

In Matthew Henry’s commentary on 1 Thess 5:20 he had this to say: By prophesyings, here understand the preaching of the word, the interpreting and applying the Scriptures. We must not despise preaching though it is plain, and we are told no more than we knew before.

2 Peter 1:19

We also have the prophetic message as something completely reliable, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.

All the Old Testament was written by true prophets, men who were given the ability to speak for God and foretell the future. Peter also witnessed Jesus’s transfiguration. Yet he says forget about that. We have a more reliable more authoritative permanent record scripture itself.

# The work of the Holy Spirit in prophecy

The ground for teaching that all may prophecy is the work of the Holy Spirit in every believer. In 1 John 2:18 John warns against “Antichrists” and reminds believers that they all have an anointing from the Holy Spirit and need no one to teach them. This implies that every believer has the Holy Spirit. Every believer has the faith once for all delivered to the saints, not delivered exclusively to certain pastors to interpret. That being the case therefore no authoritative teaching exists that can come only from certain people. That is to say there are no new revelations I’ve always said. This does not mean that God has not raised up teachers who labour in the word or doctrine, but every believer can both speak prophetically and judge prophecy as is appropriate in a given setting.

Revelation 19:10b. Worship God! For it is the Spirit of prophecy who bears testimony to Jesus.”

Prophecy testifies about the work and person of Jesus Christ, that is its central theme. Jesus makes this clear: when the helper comes, whom I will send to you from the father, that is the spirit of truth who proceeds from the father, he will testify about me (John 15:26). Since the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy and Jesus said the Holy Spirit will testify about him then valid prophecy in the church should be gospel-centric. We all prophesy when we gather together in prayer, open up God’s word, and explore together the glories of our mutual salvation, while proclaiming the terms of the gospel with authority and power.

1 Corinthians 14: 24-25

But if an unbeliever or an inquirer comes in while everyone is prophesying, they are convicted of sin and are brought under judgment by all, as the secrets of their hearts are laid bare. So they will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, “God is really among you!”

Paul is not saying here that true prophecy will reveal the secrets of a person’s heart to the congregation. True prophecy, preaching of the Gospel convicts the sinner of his need for God and shows him the secrets of his heart are laid bare before God. Via the preaching of the Word the Holy Spirit will convict him of sin, righteousness and judgment.

## Prophecy Must Be Judged

1 Corinthians 14:29-31

Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said. And if a revelation comes to someone who is sitting down, the first speaker should stop. For you can all prophesy in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged.

In this passage Paul says if anything is revealed we must judge. At first glance it may seem that Paul is suggesting the Corinthians may be getting new revelation from God and others were to judge. This is unlikely because he had already warned them not to go beyond what was written in 1 Corinthians 4:6. Remember this was a problematic church and he had to write to them twice. Can you imagine what would have happened if he gave them over to subjective revelations from God? Absolute chaos! What Paul is getting at here is that they may be given insight, a deeper understanding of what has already been taught. In such case one speaker at a time (the prophet) can share his insight with the others and the whole congregation would be blessed. This mirrors what Paul wrote to the Ephesians 1:17-18

I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people,

Paul’s prayer for the Ephesians here is that they have a deeper, more comprehensive insight into the hope and inheritance we have in Christ Jesus. It is not a call for new, direct revelation from heaven.

## Gospel Preaching as Prophecy

The proclamation of the gospel is prophecy in its most important form. Let me illustrate. If I say to someone, “According to the Law of God, everyone is a sinner and stands condemned as a law-breaker. The penalty for all lawbreakers is eternity in hell. Since you, like everyone else, have broken God’s law, you stand condemned. God is perfectly just and cannot lie. God said that the soul that sins must die. But God is also loving and merciful. So God’s own Son, Jesus Christ, came into human history through the virgin birth, lived a sinless life, and shed His blood on the cross to avert God’s wrath against sin, and was bodily raised from the dead and appeared to many witnesses. If you repent of living for self, trusting self, and spurning God’s Word and put your faith in Jesus Christ, you will be saved. But if you neglect God’s offer of salvation through the finished work of Christ, you will face God’s wrath in eternity and there will be no escape.” – I have truly prophesied in a most powerful and true way. Those words are not inspired Scripture, but they are valid implications from Scripture. They have the authority of God not because I uttered them, but because they correctly describe the certainty of the consequences of either faith or unbelief. When they are applied to a given sinner, they constitute a valid and authoritative application.

Martin Luther prophesied:

What schools! What faculties! What theologians! What bilge! What newfangled rubbish! So much for your understanding of the words of God, namely, captivity to the obedience of Christ. (It is captivity to the obedience of your own understanding.) By divine authority we confidently conclude and boldly declare: “Thus says the Lord of Hosts, monastic vows made and kept apart from faith are sins, and therefore such vows are pointless and blameworthy.”

These are valid prophecies if they contain valid implications from Scripture. Any Christian can judge these by examining the Biblical arguments and evidence that Luther gave that led to these prophesies. If they reflect valid implications from Scripture, they are true prophecies. Since every believer is called to discipleship and every disciple is called to preach the gospel, every believer has a profound prophetic calling. We can all “bind and loose.” We can use the keys of the kingdom, declare with prophetic authority the terms of entrance, the terms for forgiveness, and show from Scriptural implications the binding terms of the New Covenant.

## Conclusion

1 Thessalonians 5:19-22 Do not quench the Spirit.Do not treat prophecies with contempt but test them all; hold on to what is good, reject every kind of evil.

Despising prophecy happens when we refuse to allow the authority of scripture to bear and be the final arbiter on matters of church life and doctrine. Consider, for example the issue of homosexuality in the church. The Methodist Church have formally accepted same sex marriages despite biblical injunctions against this. The argument for this is after all they love each other, how can you be so hateful, Jesus never said anything about homosexuality and so on. What does God have to say about it? Think it matters to them?

In our time we do not have the office of the prophet but all may prophecy in the sense that we can preach the word and draw valid implications and applications of the same. Anything beyond this is speculation.

I close by reminding you all never to go beyond what is written. This is not my idea; it is a command from God himself (1 Cor 4:6). We shouldn’t really have to labour that. Amen.

### REFERENCES

* Critical Issues Commentary, Issue number 95, July/August 2006. Bob DeWaay
* The MacArthur Study Bible 1 Corinthians 12:4-11
* Matthew Henry Bible Commentary 1 Thessalonians 5:20.
* All quotations from The NIV unless otherwise stated