

WHAT ABOUT PROPHECY?
1 Cor. 14:1-25 & Selected Scriptures

Back to 1 Cor. 14 – one of the most controversial & misused Bible chapters in the Church today. – I hear you had some lively discussions in small groups this week?!

I agree with one veteran pastor who has said, ‘The myth of modern day tongues & prophecy has been one of Satan’s most successful lies in the past century of church history.’

NB, tongues & prophecy used to be a fringe movement, kept mostly inside the walls of Pentecostal churches, and often among marginalised peoples. – Then, since the 1960s, and since about the 70s here in SA, the Charismatic Movmt went mainstream. – It took tongues & prophecy into mainline denominations and to urban professionals.

A headline in a Cape Town newspaper at that time read, “Anglican Bishop Speaks in Tongues!”. – This was huge. – Never, for centuries prior, had Charismaticism been practiced in mainline denominations. –

Ministers & priests began losing their jobs over their new views. – But other congregations welcomed these leaders of a new breed. – Methodists, Baptists, and Roman Catholics began to testify of their charismatic experiences as evidence of revival.

But still, most conservative, reformed & evangelical, Bible-teaching churches were not greatly affected. –

Pentecostals had always been kind of ‘out there’. – Mainline denominations were already turning liberal in their theology, so they were kind of ‘out there’ too. – The Charismatics still didn’t have many theologians & writers yet. – But that too is changing.

In the past 20 years or so, the Charismatic Movmt has continued to burst through boundaries and break barriers. – They now have articulate advocates, the likes of Wayne Grudem and others. –

More and more Baptists and reformed evangelicals testify of their tongues & prophecies, or at least their openness to it. It’s becoming trendy to be ‘reformed & charismatic’, or as I call them, ‘Calvismatics’. (And indeed, many of these are dear brothers in Christ from whom we can learn much.)

Like it or not, the Charismatic ‘Trojan horse’ has now landed on our shores and is inside the camp, and we need to be on the alert.

All the more reason why we’re taking our time in this study of 1 Cor. 12-14. – It’s THE key text in all the Bible for understanding spiritual gifts. – Perhaps never before in history has the need been greater for exercising Christian discernment. – For practicing 14:20...

Never before has the need been greater for Berean Christians, Acts 17:11, who were “examining the Scriptures DAILY to see whether these things were so”. –

It has become a matter of utmost urgency that we obey 1 Thess. 5:21 and “examine everything carefully”.

Now, before reading our text for today, let me answer the one outstanding question about tongues that I didn’t get to last week, a question that always comes up and you should be ready to answer:

If we believe that today’s tongues movement contradicts biblical tongues, i.e., that it is false, then: **HOW do we explain modern tongues (& prophecy)?** – What IS actually happening, especially when it seems to come from some who are very devout, sincere & godly (more than some of us!)?

→I believe today’s tongues movmt is a symptom of a great spiritual hunger among some in the Church. – For too long, people have been fed shallow sermons and slick programs and surface relationships. –

Prov. 27:7 says, “A sated/satisfied man loathes honey, but to a famished man any bitter thing is sweet”. – That’s not just true in marriage; it’s also true in church. –

When the Charismatic Movement came along offering people something new & better, starving souls lapped it up.

By the 1970s, thanks to liberal theology, most mainline churches had already stripped anything supernatural out of the Bible and church life. – All that held them together was empty tradition, a social gospel, and a shell of outward morality & religiosity. –

If all you’ve been doing is playing ‘church-ianity’ for years, don’t be surprised if people ‘up & leave’ for something that seems real instead of pretend. – Once you’ve met people who are spiritually alive, who wants to keep hanging out in the cemetery?

What then about tongues? – Is it real?

Answer: As we said last time, today’s tongues cannot match the biblical purpose or description of NT tongues. – What then is going on? – I see **TWO main explanations**, and it could be a combination of both in some cases:

(a) SUPERNATURAL explanation: Satan is the ‘Father of Lies’, and none better (more effective) than when he counterfeits truth (2 Cor. 11:13-15; 1 Tim. 4:1, etc.), ‘masquerading as an angel of light’.

→Beloved, never forget: all gifts are not from God, all experiences are not from God. – Only way you can know is by being a Berean, measuring all things by Scripture.

(b) NATURAL explanations: ‘GroupThink’, peer pressure, not wanting to be left out, the herd-mentality. – Prov. 29:25... Don’t be an approval-junkie, a people-pleaser...

~ George Gardiner, an ex-Pentecostal minister who spent twenty-two years in the Charismatic Movement, said this about tongues:

Give me any group of people,' he boldly declares, 'who will do what I say, who will go through the ritual and do it with sincerity, and, in a matter of time, I will have them all speaking in ecstatic speech.

~ John Kildahl, in an interesting book entitled *The Psychology of Speaking in Tongues*, explains it this way:

When I hypnotize someone, I begin by saying 'Lie back ... Shut your eyes ... Relax ... Breathe deeply ... And listen to the sounds of your breathing as you relax, you can feel yourself getting tired and drowsy.'

A sample of a tongues leader teaching someone to speak in tongues is, 'The Lord is in your presence ... He is with you now ... Open yourself to Him ... Let all your anxieties flow out of you ... The Lord wants to give you the gift of His Holy Spirit ... Open your mouth, and He will give you utterance.'

The hypnotist has essentially a two-pronged strategy: that of [depriving the senses] and of developing a special kind of relationship, in other words, a relationship of dependence and trust.

→One of the diseases of our day: FOMO, 'Fear Of Missing Out'. – A paranoia that you might ever miss out on a life experience that could benefit you. – In every age, there are -spiritual thrill-seekers, religious addicts who puff on one Jesus-cig after the next, to see which gives you the biggest high or buzz.

So watch for both supernatural & natural causes behind the tongues & prophecy trends of today...

SO THEN – WHAT ABOUT PROPHECY?...

Read 14:1-6, 22-25 & Pray:

***TWO QUESTIONS about prophecy** – so that we can be discerning and loving and mature as a body in our use of our gifts and can help others do the same:

(We'll spend most our time on this 1st question.)

1. WHAT is the gift of prophecy?

Now, for starters, we know this gift of "prophecy" is real important to Paul. – Recall: 12:28...

The silver medallist, ranking 2nd only to apostles. – And as I showed you while we were there in chp. 12, the NT is clear that Paul was the last who had the gift of apostleship, that there were no more official apostles of Christ to be expected after Paul.

So in a sense, "prophecy" in the early church, like at Corinth, jumped to top of the list, the gold medallist. – When the Apostle Paul planted a church like Corinth, but

then had to leave, the best possible successor to leave behind where gifted prophets who could continue building the church upon God's word, God's revelation.

WHAT THEN is "prophecy"?

+ Today just about anything in the Church gets called "prophecy": Moses (our intern) was telling me how in Nigeria, and I think much of Africa, the title "pastor" is reaching its 'sell-by' date, starting to fade & expire.

Now, if you want a more punchy, powerful-sounding title? Call yourself, "Prophet Tim", not just "Pastor Tim". –

Pastors just run Sunday services and keep church programs going. – Prophets are the true visionaries and spokesmen for God!

Pastors just prepare sermons and write things down and use notes. – Prophets just stand up & speak while God is supposedly speaking straight to them. – Why go listen to plain Bible teaching when you can hear fresh, brand-new revelation coming from Heaven to the platform?! – Why listen to something prepared, when you can hear something spontaneous?!

+ Prophecy has become like a new fad or a spiritual hobby amongst many Christians: Want to help a brother & sister in Christ? Want to show real compassion and help them with their problems? – Don't just do old-fashioned biblical counselling with them. – No, give them a personal revelation, a specific word from the Lord for their life!

You hear of people being told, presumably from well-meaning Christians: 'The Lord told me that you will: conceive a child; get this job; buy this house; go to this church; pursue this medical treatment; relocate to this place, etc.

All in the name of a "prophecy" from God.

I've heard people claim that God told them to: divorce their spouse; break the law; leave a good church and join a bad one; lie, cheat, steal. – All in the name of 'God told me'!

+ Ask one of the 15 million Zionists or ZCC members in this country: 'In your church, what is a prophet?'

They will often say: 'O, prophets are very powerful. They see what sickness is troubling you, what is causing it, and how to heal it. Even before you tell them, they know, they know! You don't even need to tell him. He will tell you!'

See, the prophet is the Christian version of a sangoma, a witchdoctor. – Just take away his muti & charms and replace it with a Bible & some holy water, and wa-la, a prophet!

Yet many Zionists & others today will say that, without their prophets, they would have no guidance from the Holy Spirit for our lives today.

And if you are in a church service and one of the prophets starts shaking or snorting or panting or jerking, and then heads straight for you?....Brace yourself. –

Whatever he or she claims God is telling you, you must submit to and accept, whether it has any validity or truth whatsoever. – All you do is obey. – They may accuse you or others of something totally false and unverified; doesn't matter. All you do is obey.

+ Others today, who are otherwise much more sound theologically, will say that "prophecy" is now preaching, whenever we expound this Book of Prophecy, Scripture. –

Puritan classic, *The Art of Prophesying*, but actually about preaching. – In practice, our views very similar. – But technically speaking, to say that prophecy = preaching is to *weaken* the actual, biblical definition of the word. – HOW does the Bible define "prophecy"?...

Get your fingers ready. – We're going to do a quick Bible survey/overview to answer this question, 'What is prophecy', so that you can see the answer for yourself straight from Scripture:

Deut. 18 gives us a great definition of a prophet:

Deut. 18:18 – Two men could stand up and speak, but only the word with God's words in His mouth was the true prophet. – Prophecy meant speaking the very words that God was commanding or predicting. – Prophecy was when you could begin by saying, "Thus saith the Lord", and you could end by saying, "For the mouth of the Lord has spoken". –

As was the case with Moses & Elijah, Isaiah & Ezekiel, and every true prophet. – Time & again throughout Scripture we read, "And the word of the Lord came to him, saying...." –

That's because they were prophets. – Their message was not their own. – It didn't come from their own heart or mind; it originated in Heaven's throne room. (Sometimes they were called "seers" because of the visions from God that they saw which inspired their prophecies.)

One more example: Jer. 1:9, "Then the LORD stretched out His hand and touched my mouth, and the LORD said to me, 'Behold, I have put My words in your mouth.'" – 'Your mouth, my words,' God said.

(Cf. Amos 3:8, "A lion has roared! Who will not fear? The Lord GOD has spoken! Who can but prophesy?")

That's prophecy = *Speaking God's infallible word*.

BUT in every age there are many who claim to be prophets. – In OT Israel, many claimed to speak for God. – So how did you know the difference between a true prophet and a false one?

The test was quite simple:

Deut. 13:1-5 – *Test #1: Is it doctrinally true?*

Even if his prophecy comes true, but is against Scripture, he must be executed. – *Do not claim divine authority while you contradict divine revelation.*

Deut. 18:21-22 – *Test #2: Did it come true?*

Two tests: 100% infallibly accurate in doctrine and fulfillment

+ E.G., the prophet, Samuel: 1 Sam. 3:19 – “Thus Samuel grew and the LORD was with him and let none of his words fail. All Israel from Dan even to Beersheba knew that Samuel was confirmed as a prophet of the LORD.”

1 Sam. 9:6, As Saul was looking for Samuel: “Behold now, there is a man of God in this city, and the man is held in honor; ALL that he says surely comes true....”

Jer. 28:9, “The prophet who prophecies of peace, WHEN the word of the prophet comes to pass, THEN that prophet will be known as one whom the LORD has truly sent.”

Prophecy = *speaking Gods infallible word.*

What about when we come into the NT. – Any sign of this definition of prophecy changing?

+ It is popular today to say that NT prophecy in the church is fallible, inferior, sub-par to the prophets of the Bible whose words were recorded as Holy Scripture. – 1 Cor. 14 is the favourite text they use to say that prophecy today can be inner impressions and subjective hunches you have about what you think the Lord is saying to this or that person.

YET, coming to the NT, there is NO SIGN of this definition of prophecy changing:

Turn to: Acts 11:27-28 – 100% accurate in content & fulfillment...

Acts 21:11, 27, 33 – 100% accurate in content & fulfillment...

Eph. 2:20 – Better be infallible & flawless if the whole Christian for past 2,000 yrs is built upon it!

→ Everything begins here in the Church. – The Church has to be built upon God’s Word, whether *then* through living apostles & prophets or *now* through their living words, written & preserved for us in the Bible.

Eph. 3:4-5 – God’s perfect revelation of His New Covenant mysteries in Christ to Paul and the other 12 apostles and their associates in those foundational days of the Church.

Eph. 4:11 – Again, the risen & ascended Christ first gave the foundation-layers (apostles & prophets), and then the wall & roof builders ever since then...

1 Thess. 5:20 – Prophecy obviously still functioning in the NT church, as we'll also see in 1 Cor. 14...

2 Pet. 1:19-21 – One of the most important verses in all the Bible *about* the Bible! – One of the most crucial things that Scripture says about itself.

WHAT is a prophet? – v. 21b...!

→ There is no doubt in my mind that there IS prophecy in the Church today.... You're holding it in your hand, the Bible!...

1 John 4:1 – warning of MANY false prophets...

Same as in Matt. 7: “Many will say on that day, ‘Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name?...”

Rev. 1:3 – John’s inspired writings = “prophecy”

Rev. 11 – During the 7-year Great Tribulation: vv. 3-6 – Seems pretty safe to say these 2 witnesses speak for God and are infallible and accurate in what they say!

Rev. 16:13-14 – Satan also has prophetic abilities – all prophesies are not from God, they could also be from Satan. – HOW do you know? – Back to the two tests of Deut. 13 & 18: content & fulfillment...

Rev. 22:6-7, 10, 18-19 – John knew (as we hear him say in 1 Jn. 4) that false prophets were multiplying all around him, so he (or Christ speaking here?!) wanted to end with a stern warning:

I.e., ‘God takes prophecy very, very seriously. Do not tamper with His truth; Scripture is sacred.’

Is it any surprise then that, not long after this, early church writers tell of the decline of this gift of prophecy and the disappearance of true prophets in the Church?

Repeat Question #1.... Answer: *Prophecy is speaking an infallible word from God.* – And the gift of prophecy must then be to do this, as some were gifted to do at Corinth.

NO WONDER then that Paul ranked prophecy so highly at Corinth. – No wonder Paul spends most of 1 Cor. 14 showing them how uninterpreted tongues is inferior and sub-par to the riches of prophecy, of hearing God speak!

+ And what a contrast to the countless false prophecies of our day. – Think of just a few of the more notorious ones:

Joseph Smith, Mormon's founder & great prophet: in 1833, he predicted that the town of Zion, Missouri, "cannot fall or be moved out of her place". – Yet it was later revealed that 2 wks prior to this, the town of Zion was moved & relocated, their printing presses were destroyed, and the Mormon officials had already been run out of town. – Oops.

David Wilkerson in NY predicted in 1973 that "within a few years" an earthquake would wipe out 1/3 of the USA; he said, "there is not the slightest doubt in my mind about this forthcoming massive earthquake on our continent" – Americans are still waiting, 39 yrs. later.

Pat Robertson of the 700 Club TV program, in 1969 predicted that the stock market was about to crash. – Didn't happen either.

+ We've lost count of the # of Benny Hinn's false prophecies:

That Fidel Castro would die in the 1990s; that a major earthquake ; that the gay community would be destroyed by fire by 1995; that a major earthquake would wreak havoc on the East Coast before 2000; that in 2000 Jesus was going to appear physically on the stage of one of his crusades.

NONE of these happened. – ALL false prophecies.

Or Benny's most bizarre of all: That if TBN viewers will put their dead loved ones' caskets in front of television set and touch the dead person's hand to the screen, people will "be raised from the dead . . . by the *thousands*." – What a snake.

2. HOW is prophecy (or for us today, Scriptural prophecy) superior to tongues?

v. 3 – What is it that most builds up, challenges, and comforts us? – Not some uninterpreted foreign language. – No, a clear word from God, that will nourish my soul like nothing else can!

→How precious is v. 3! – What can soothe a trouble heart like God's Word? – What can arrest a rebel and halt him in his tracks like God's Word? – What can revive a weak church and strengthen a weak soul like God's Word?!...

v. 4b – Yes! – v. 6b, yes!..., v. 19c, yes!

I.e., Matt. 4:4 – How did Jesus fight temptation (as we were reading in family worship this week)? – By this one sword.

Eph. 6, our only offensive weapon, the "sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God"!...

v. 24a – Can't mean literally everyone, cf.: 12:29... Must mean, 'All who have the gift of prophecy'.

v. 24bc – Here’s what can happen when an unsaved visitor hears God’s word clearly proclaimed. – *FOUR things can happen, in consecutive order:*

(1) CONVICTED – NB, this may have been the last thing he or she expected when she walked in. – By nature, we walk in darkness, we are ignorant of our sin, oblivious to our true condition. – I know of people who walked into church one day whistling away, happy as a lark, thinking they were just fine. –

UNTIL the Word was preached and the Holy Spirit grabbed hold of them...

Just as Jesus promised He would send His Holy Spirit to do, Jn. 16:8.... Just as we now have the Scriptures to do: 2 Tim. 3:16...

Rom. 3 – “for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin” – Gal. 3, the Law as our tutor, our schoolmaster, to lead us to Christ. – The Law is the mirror that exposes us, the salt that makes us thirsty for the living water of the Gospel!...

(2) JUDGED: Before, they were giving themselves full marks, top score, UNTIL...

They are called to account = i.e., God’s word has judged him and left him hanging his head in condemnation, ‘guilty as charged’. – Calvin, “it summons the consciences before the tribunal of God”.

(3) EXPOSED: Before, they thought they could hide everything, ‘nobody will know’...UNTIL:

v. 25a = NB, not just some private info or inside-scoop about your life or your future that makes the prophet look clever or powerful. – No, this is your SIN being uncovered, the idols of your heart being unveiled....

It’s exactly what is described in Heb. 4:12-13... Nothing strips you open & lays you bare before the living God like His Word.

Like Luther said, ‘I’ve read many books, but this Book reads me.’

+ Before, you were your best defense attorney, you always had an excuse & the best & smoothest arguments. – Now, God’s Word has turned you into a self-prosecutor. – Now your conscience bears witness against you and throws you on your knees begging God for mercy!...

(4) PROSTRATE: Before, God was boring to them, and they were indifferent to Him – ‘yawn, yawn’, check the watch, etc... You stood tall & straight, self-assured & confident... ‘No fear of God before their eyes’.

UNTIL: v. 25bc... i.e., ‘Woe is me, I am ruined... O wretched man that I am, who will deliver me? Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!’...

[→Preach GOSPEL here...]

→HOW does this visitor know that God is among you? – Isn’t God everywhere? – Sure.

BUT: In some places God's presence is especially known & felt, His power is especially manifested? – In which places? – Those places where His revealed Word is central, the explaining of His message.

→WHAT MORE could want than this from our worship services? – What more charismatic experience could you ask for than this – true worship, absolute surrender – man abased, God exalted!...

When you come to church and God's Word transforms you like this, you'll care little about the style of the music, the convenience of the parking, the colour of the carpet, etc.!

Repeat: v. 25...!

→If this happened more often in our churches, some people would be less tempted to look elsewhere for divine encounters (and false power).... Do we come expectant & prayerful, every Sunday, for God to do this in our midst?...

Once you've tasted this kind of real, biblical worship & power, you're less impressed with the cheap substitutes and quick fixes and emotionalism...

→This is hardly the effect of today's prophecy movement in the Church. – Today's so-called prophecies make unsaved visitors scoff; it merely supplies more fuel for their mocking....

What a world of difference between v. 23c, "you are mad!" to v. 25c, "God is among you"!...

CONCL. – Repeat 2 points....

BUT a 3rd question must also be answered, 'What about prophecy today? Does God still speak today, or has He gone silent??' – For next time...