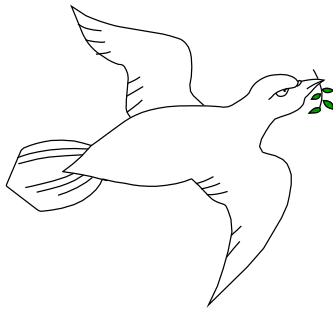


The Gift of Prophecy:

God Speaks to and Through His Church



**A Training Prepared for
Wings of Love Community Church
By Pastor John C. Butler**

PROPHECY: AN INTRODUCTION

While prophecy at times involves foretelling future events, this study deals with prophecy from the point of view that it is the “forth-telling” of the mind of God. The gift of prophecy is available to all Spirit-filled believers. It is one of the ways God speaks to and through His Church. The gift of prophecy has always become more prominent during times of spiritual renewal. Thus, we can expect the exercise of this gift to increase in quality and quantity as the modern-day renewal of the church continues.

Prophecy is vital to healthy church life. The entire body can be helped toward maturity through the balanced exercise of the gift of prophecy. The effect of the exercise of the gift of prophecy is edification, exhortation and consolation for individuals and the larger fellowship during times of corporate worship.

The specific aim of this series is to present Biblical understanding concerning the gift of prophecy while providing practical advice concerning how to minister in the gifts of the Spirit as they reappear in the life of the church.

PROPHECY AND TWO “WORLD VIEWS”

An awareness of the difference between Eastern and Western world views is essential if an individual is to have a practical understanding of spiritual gifts. This study compares and contrasts these two world views and shows the relative receptivity of Eastern and Western man to the supernatural realm. This important insight provides an excellent conceptual framework for understanding the general subject of spiritual gifts.

I. TWO WORLD VIEWS

A. The Western World View

1. Physical Reality
 - a. The physical senses
 - b. The realm of human reason
2. Cosmic Reality
 - a. The realm beyond human reason
 - b. The realm of theology
 - c. The Western view of the supernatural
3. The powerlessness which results from the Western world view

B. The Eastern World View

1. Physical Reality
 - a. The physical senses
 - b. The realm of human reason
2. Supernatural Reality
 - a. The dimension between the physical and cosmic realities

- b. The dimension where physical and cosmic realities merge

- c. The Greek language and the supernatural

3. Cosmic Reality

- a. The realm beyond human reason

- b. The realm of theology

- c. The cosmic intervention into the physical

C. Two levels of knowledge and their implications

- 1. Gnosis

- 2. Epignosis

- 3. The point is power: Missionary illustration

- 4. The impact of immigration from the East

II. THE GIFT OF PROPHECY

A. Definition: The supernatural ability to speak the mind of God by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

B. General observations concerning prophecy

- 1. Prophecy is a gift for all “Spirit-filled” believers

- 2. The problem of “fleshly” prophecy

- 3. Prophecy must be learned by “trial and error”

- 4. The office of prophet and the gift of prophecy

- a. The prophetic office

- b. The prophetic gift

- 5. Old Testament observations concerning prophecy

C. Prophecy in the New Testament

- 1. Prophecy is primarily for believers (1 Co. 14:22)

- 2. Prophecy and its threefold purpose (1 Co. 14:3)

- a. Edification

- b. Exhortation

- c. Consolation

- 3. Prophecy ministers indirectly to unbelievers (1 Co. 14:22-24)

- a. Three kinds of people

- 1) The unbeliever

- 2) The unlearned

- 3) The gifted

- b. Prophecy produces personal conviction

- c. Prophecy discloses private attitudes

4. Prophecy in public meetings
 - a. Prophecy to be orderly
 - b. Prophecy to be weighed
 - c. The importance of small groups
 - 1) A place to learn
 - 2) A loving environment
 - 3) A safe environment for spiritual exercise
5. Prophecy is not to be despised (I Thess. 5:20-21)
6. Prophecy is desirable (1 Co. 14:1)
7. Prophecy begins with the baptism of the Holy Spirit

PROPHECY IN PRACTICE: IN THE CHURCH BODY

Prophecy is the supernatural ability to speak the mind of God. It is a gift of the Holy Spirit given to the Body of Christ and manifested through Spirit-filled believers. Spiritual gifts are given to people regardless of their spiritual maturity. The fact is that people must learn to prophesy, allowing prophecies to flow through their personalities. As a result, prophetic messages are at times presented in public meetings in somewhat “carnal” packages.

I. THE GIFT OF PROPHECY AND THE BODY OF CHRIST

A. Spiritual gifts are not bestowed based on maturity, but they are deepened by maturity

1. Gifts are given to those who desire them
2. Gifts are not a reward
3. Giftedness is not the equivalent of spiritual maturity

B. Spiritual gifts flow through human personalities

1. The gifts of God are manifested through individual uniqueness
2. An individual's personality remains distinctive
3. Spiritual and emotional maturity varies between people
4. A full expression of God's personality is revealed within the Body of Christ
5. The problem of immature prophets and carnal prophecies

II. THE GIFT OF PROPHECY AND THE BIBLE

A. Defined: The supernatural ability to speak the mind of God.

1. Prophecy is God speaking His mind at a given occasion
2. Prophecy is God speaking His mind in the language of the people
3. Prophecy is not totally dependent on the skills of the individual prophesying
4. Prophecy is always ratified in the hearts of the hearers

B. The gift of prophecy in the New Testament (1 Cor. 12:14)

1. When you come together as a church (1 Cor. 11:18)
2. The office and role of prophet (1 Cor. 12:28)

C. Practical advice regarding prophecy (1 Cor. 14:3)

1. Prophecy has a threefold purpose
 - a. Edification
 - b. Exhortation
 - c. Consolation
2. Prophecy is primarily for believers (1 Cor. 14:22)
3. Prophecy is an indirect ministry to unbelievers (1 Co. 14:24-25)

4. Prophecy is to be weighed (1 Co. 14:29-32)
 - a. Weigh the prophecy, not the prophet
 - b. Pray for people who are learning to prophesy
 - c. The problem of the immature prophet
5. Prophecy is to be orderly (1 Co. 14:32-40)
6. Prophecy is desirable (1 Co. 14:1, 39-40)

THE PURPOSE OF PROPHECY

While prophecy at times involves foretelling future events, this series deals with prophecy from the point of view that it is the “forth-telling” of the mind of God.

The gift of prophecy is studied from the context of 1 Co12-14. Special attention is given to two Greek words, PNEUMATIKA and CHARIS. In the New Testament both of these words are translated “spiritual gifts”. In addition, an assumption is made based on earlier teaching that every Spirit-filled believer can minister in all the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Thus, it is believed all can prophesy.

The gift of prophecy is discussed using 1 Co14:3 as a foundational text. With this as a starting point the purposes of prophecy are described as being to encourage, correct, inspire, and guide believers.

I. PROPHECY IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

A. Introduction to prophecy

1. The gift of prophecy, not as foretelling but “forth-telling”
2. Prophecy is to be described as it is ministered in the body
3. The aim is to equip the body for a more effective ministry in prophecy

B. 1 Co12-14

1. The transition to the subject (1 Co. 11:18)
 - a. Paul corrects abuses
 - b. Paul does not encourage toward disuse
2. Assumption: Every Spirit-filled believer is capable of ministering in all the gifts
3. Two Greek words
 - a. PNEUMATIKA “Spirituals” (1 Co. 12:1, 14:1)
 - b. CHARIS “Graces” or “Ministries” (1 Co. 12:4, 28, 30, 31), (Romans 12:6, 1 Peter 4:10)
 - c. Assumption: All “ministries” begin by the initial use of “spirituals”
4. The effect of believing this assumption
 - a. Expectation leads to experience
 - b. There is a direct relationship between what we believe, expect and receive
 - c. Every Spirit-filled believer will manifest all the gifts from time to time
5. 1 Co14:1
 - a. Desire spiritual gifts
 - b. The problem of the singular gift interpretation
 - c. The concept of “doorway gifts”
 - 1) All can speak in tongues
 - 2) All can prophesy

- d. The reason for non-use
 - 1) Do not know they can
 - 2) Do not have opportunity
- 6. Prophecy as analogous to speaking in tongues and interpretation
- 7. Prophecy is a natural extension of being Spirit-filled

II. THE PURPOSE OF PROPHECY

A. 1 Co14:3

- 1. Articulate summary
- 2. Three aspects of prophecy
 - a. Edification
 - b. Exhortation
 - c. Consolation
- 3. Prophecy can occur in diverse settings
- 4. Prophecy is a supernatural ability

B. Prophecy as encouragement

- 1. Prophecy encourages and strengthens (Acts 15:30-35)
- 2. Prophecy comforts and encourages (Haggai 1:13)
 - a. The Lord comes alongside
 - b. "I am with you"
- 3. Prophecy is often a short statement which reaffirms the fact that God cares for you

C. Prophecy as conviction, admonition, and correction

- 1. The parental dimension to prophecy
 - a. We are urged to move toward a new reality
 - b. Condemnation is not conviction
 - c. Condemnation is common along classical Pentecostals
- 2. II Samuel 12:1-7
 - a. God's message to David
 - b. "You are the man!"

D. Prophecy as inspiration

- 1. Lifts and stirs the heart
- 2. The effect of prophecy is encouragement
- 3. The different modes on inspirational prophecies
 - a. Prophetic tongues
 - b. Prophetic prayers

c. Prophetic songs

E. Prophecy as guidance

1. Prophecy provides specific direction regarding event (Jer. 28:16, Acts 11:27)

2. Prophecy provides specific direction regarding teaching (Eph. 3:5)

III. THE GIFT OF PROPHECY: SUMMARY

A. The general purposes of prophecy

1. Encouragement

2. Conviction

3. Inspiration

4. Guidance

B. Do not resist prophecy

C. Distinguish between the prophecy and the prophet

D. Expect the prophetic ministry in the church to increase

E. Open your hearts to prophecy

SEVEN FORMS OF PROPHECY

The gift of prophecy has always become more prominent during times of spiritual renewal. We can expect this gift, and the exercise of spiritual gifts in general, to increase in quality and quantity as the modern-day renewal of the church continues. Practical advice is needed concerning how to minister in the use of spiritual gifts as they reappear in the life of the church. The problems of the “transient prophet” and “inappropriate models” need to be addressed. In addition, the vital role of small groups as a place to learn to minister is again underscored.

Prophecy is “communication by any means. The aim is getting God’s message through to God’s people. Seven prophetic forms are:

- The Prophetic Oracle
- The Prophetic Exhortation
- The Prophetic Prayer
- The Prophetic Song
- The Personal Prophecy
- The Prophetic Vision
- The Prophetic Action

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Prophecy in historical context

1. The gift of prophecy always reoccurs with a resurgence of church life
2. In times of renewal all gifts are restored
3. Prophecy is one of the most prominent gifts during times of spiritual renewal

B. Prophecy in practice

1. All gifts are imparted in embryonic state
2. We can become more effective with faithful exercise of our gifts
3. We need a place to learn and grow in the expression of gifts
4. Two common problems
 - a. Transient prophets-drop in, drop out
 - b. Inappropriate models-how to release
5. The importance of small groups

C. Purpose of prophecy

1. Encouragement
2. Conviction
3. Inspiration
4. Guidance

II. FORMS OF PROPHECY

A. Introduction to the seven forms of prophecy

1. Prophecy is communication by any means
2. There is no distinction between “holy” and “profane” models of communication
3. Overview of Old Testament prophetic styles-many and varied

B. The prophetic Oracle

1. The most common form in our church
2. Implies that the Lord is speaking through the person to the people
3. We must allow for prophetic ability to grow
4. The typical style of prophetic oracles
5. Beware of inappropriate models
6. Practice may be helpful in developing your gift
7. Acts 13:1-3—for example

C. The Prophetic Exhortation

1. Generally delivered in same form as oracle
2. It is a message of urgent direction for those to whom it is directed (Acts 15:30-35)
3. May 1980: An example of Prophetic Exhortation
 - a. “Where are My messengers?”
 - b. The result was empowered evangelism

D. The Prophetic Prayer

1. Not a “preaching prayer” where people bow their heads to talk to God and talk to man instead
2. The prophetic prayer is inspired by God
3. It is an occasion where we pray more than we know or understand
4. Examples of prophetic prayers
 - a. Luke 1:67-69
 - b. Ezra 9:6-15
 - c. Nehemiah 9:6-37

E. The Prophetic Song

1. We are in the midst of a reformation which is producing a new liturgy
2. Songs are imparted in total to writer
3. Songs travel around the world in a few days
4. We can see the mind of God in the music of God
5. An example is Moses’ song (Deuteronomy 32:1-43)

6. The inspiration of prophecy comes from God (II Peter 1:21)
- F. The Personal Prophecy
1. Two basic thrusts of personal prophecy
 - a. Brings conviction (II Samuel 12:1-7)
 - b. Provides specific direction, for a specific purpose, at a specific time (Acts 21:10)
 2. Beware that much “personal prophecy” is invalid
 3. Instructions for giving and receiving
- G. The Prophetic Vision
1. Almost all Old Testament prophets were subject to Visions
 2. An example of a prophetic vision (Rev. 4:1-3)
 3. The definition of “in the Spirit”
 4. To observe someone in an anointed state might be shocking.
- H. The Prophetic Action
1. An Old Testament example of a prophetic action (Jeremiah 27:2-3)
 2. A modern day example of a prophetic action-Agabus
 3. We may be called upon to take unusual courses of action
 4. We need to understand each other and encourage one another to follow God faithfully

PROPHECY: THE IMPORTANCE OF BALANCE

There are four basic purposes of prophecy and seven forms in which prophecy is generally delivered. However, the primary aim of prophecy is always communication. Specifically, the gift of prophecy is communication from God to man. Since the Day of Pentecost believers have always ministered in the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Historically, during times of spiritual renewal, the gift of prophecy has always played an important part in the development of healthy church life.

Four important attitudes and actions are identified and brought more clearly into focus. First, believers are to value prophecy. Second, believers are to seek prophecy more than the other spiritual gifts. Third, believers are to receive the gift of prophecy. Fourth, believers are encouraged to prophesy regularly. These admonitions are aimed at encouraging modern day believers to maintain a balanced view of the value and priority of the gift of prophecy in the life of the church today.

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Basic reminders concerning the gift of prophecy

1. Prophecy is a message to the people from the Lord
2. Communication is the primary aim of prophecy
3. There are four basic purposes for prophecy
4. There are seven basic prophetic forms
5. Prophecy is a gift of the Holy Spirit for every Spirit-filled believer
6. Many do not prophesy because they don't know they can
7. We receive all spiritual gifts in an embryonic state

B. How is prophecy initiated?

1. A single word
2. In a completely revealed form
3. As a concept or general understanding

C. Prophecy through church history

1. After canonization of scripture, prophecy almost disappeared in the practice of the early church
2. From around 400 A.D. to the Reformation, spiritual gifts were generally absent
3. Small groups of believers have always exercised gifts even in periods of relative spiritual impotence
4. The use of spiritual gifts is on the increase today at an overwhelming rate

II. FOUR IMPORTANT ATTITUDES AND ACTIONS RELATING TO THE GIFT OF PROPHECY

A. Believers are to value the gift of prophecy

1. Observations from I Thessalonians 5:12-22
2. The ministry of the Holy Spirit is necessary
3. The ministry of the Holy Spirit can be quenched
4. The ministry of the Holy Spirit cannot be fully controlled or explained
5. People learning to minister in the Spirit cannot be controlled
6. People can learn to minister in an orderly manner
7. Large public meetings are not the place to practice prophesying
8. Two extremes:
 - a. Prophecy in the flesh
 - b. Don't prophesy at all
9. We are to seek balance for the benefit of the Body

B. Believers are to seek prophecy more than the other gifts of the Spirit

1. Advice from 1 Co. 14:1
2. A prominent view of gifts is that we only receive one. This view develops through misunderstanding of Scripture
 - a. 1 Co. 12:8-10
 - b. 1 Co. 12:28-30
3. Eleven times in 1 Co. 14 we are encouraged to seek multiple gifts
4. Prophecy is to be a common tool for believers
5. Tongues and prophecy are essential for the balanced growth of a fellowship

C. Believers are to receive the gift of prophecy

1. Advice from Acts 19:1-7
2. We receive spiritual gifts by the laying on of hands
3. Many Spirit-filled believers do not prophesy because they don't know they can
4. Prophecy is essential

D. Believers are encouraged to prophesy regularly

1. The early Christian church prophesied regularly (1 Co. 11:4-5)
2. Multiple people prophesied regularly in the early church (1 Co. 14:3, 1 Co. 14:23-31)
3. Prophecy is important even though we have the written Word
 - a. Provides fresh insight
 - b. Provides fresh priorities
4. A firsthand example of the effect of prophecy-drunk visitors!

5. Some people are over-educated and under-formed in their behavior
6. We must do what we already know to do

HOW TO TEST PROPHECY

The primary purpose of the teaching is to provide insight into the important area of how to test prophecy. How can we know that a particular prophecy really is from God?

A person learns to prophesy. Those hearing a prophecy must remain open to the prophetic gift while being aware of the imperfections which accompany the learning process. Prophetic messages are sometimes affected by the emotion of the moment or the carnal motives of an immature believer who is learning to prophesy. People in the fellowship need to learn how true prophecies are discerned. Active listening is required.

Seven ways to test a prophecy are discussed here. Applying these tests individually or in combination with one another will enable the listeners to benefit from God's message to the church while, at the same time, encouraging young prophets to mature. The result: The entire body is helped by the balanced exercise of the gift of prophecy to move toward maturity.

I. BEGINNING TO DISCERN GOD'S VOICE

A. An overview of the gift of prophecy

1. The purpose of prophecy
2. The forms of prophecy
3. The distinction between tongues and prophecy

B. Beginning to test prophecies

1. "Non-believing believers" are quick to "discern" truth
2. "Anything different is not of God"
3. God graciously teaches us in small stages
4. Move slowly when testing prophecy

C. Three sources of prophecy

1. Through an anointed, Spirit-filled believer
2. Through an instrument of Satan
3. Through the soul of the prophet
 - a. Due to emotion
 - b. In anticipation of the moment
 - c. Out of a desire for visibility
 - d. Moved by excitement rather than the Spirit

D. Managing the mistakes in the ministry

1. Prophets occasionally prophesy in the flesh
2. Mistakes are a real possibility

3. Prophets should explore their own personal motivations
4. Fleshly prophecy is generally activated by sincerity
5. The Pastor's role in a learning congregation
 - a. Look at the prophet's heart
 - b. Approach them if malice is discerned

II. SEVEN WAYS TO TEST PROPHECY

A. Test the content of the prophecy

1. Does something need to be omitted?
2. It may be God speaking but be tainted by the prophet's soul
3. Not necessary to recall every word
4. The prophecy will connect with what is happening at the moment

B. Test to determine if the prophecy confirms what God is already doing

1. What is the flow of scriptural teaching in the fellowship?
2. What is God saying to individuals in the fellowship?
3. What is the momentum of the fellowship?

C. Test the prophecy against the scripture

1. Prophecy adds focus and perspective to scripture
2. Beware that you are not drawn away from scripture by prophecy
3. Understand that at times you may hear prophecy that does not correspond to your particular interpretation of scripture

D. Test the prophecy by determining its benefit

1. With the passage of time ask, "Has this been a blessing?"
2. What has it done for the fellowship?
3. Prophets who are not a blessing over an extended period should be asked to cease prophesying publicly
4. Understand that in order to develop, immature prophets must be allowed to prophesy

E. Test the prophet

1. Prophets should live exemplary lives
2. Do they live a pure life?
3. Do they have a heart for God?
4. Are they growing or regularly falling back?
5. Advice from Matthew 7:15-23 and Luke 6:43-45
6. How does the prophet respond to correction?

F. Test the accuracy of the prophecy

1. Do not just look to scriptural accuracy
2. Look for scriptural authority in the life of the prophet
3. Those desiring to prophesy should be strong in the Word
4. The immature teach the truths of scripture without the words of scripture
5. The test: Does what they say happen?
6. A true prophet can prophesy inaccurately
 - a. Moved by his flesh
 - b. Out of frustration and fear of the moment
7. True prophets meet false prophets in the Old Testament
 - a. I Kings 22:1-40
 - b. Jeremiah 28:1-17

III. IMPORTANT ATTITUDES WHEN TESTING PROPHECY

- A. Test prophecy with sincerity
- B. Test prophecy with love
- C. Test prophecy with a gracious heart
- D. Beware of pruning the plant too soon

PUTTING PROPHECY IN PERSPECTIVE

Throughout church history someone has always been ministering in the gifts of the Spirit. Even so, the church has largely ignored them or discouraged their use. However, there has been renewed interest in Spiritual Gifts since the turn of the century. This interest has increased with the rapid growth of the Charismatic movement that began in the sixties.

Church history records excesses and misunderstandings related to the use of prophecy in the church. This puts prophecy in perspective by addressing two recurring questions regarding the prophetic ministry: First, “Is Prophecy The Word of God?” Second, “Is Prophecy Primarily For The Ministry of Leading?”

I. IS PROPHECY THE WORD OF GOD?

A. Weighing Prophecy ... I Thessalonians 5:19-21

- a. “Do not quench the Spirit” vs. 19
- b. “Let all things be done decently and in order” 1 Co. 14:40
- c. “Do not despise prophetic utterances” vs. 20 d. “Examine everything” vs. 21

B. Examining the prophet. . 1 Co. 14:29-32

- a. Prophecy comes in bunches to be tested, vs. 29
- b. All prophesy one by one, vs. 31
- c. Prophecy is not uncontrollable, vs. 32

C. The content as well as the prophet must be weighed.

- a. “Test the spirits” 1 John 4:1
- b. Real testing occurs in a context of continued exposure
- c. Different people are gifted in each fellowship
- d. The ministry of prophecy follows the gift of prophecy. The office of prophet follows the ministry of prophecy
- e. The office of prophet is limited to a few whom the Lord raises up
- f. Prophetic content is weighed in accordance with the range and focus of the prophet’s gift
- g. If a prophecy is given to the larger body it must certainly be weighed.

II. IS PROPHECY FOR THE MINISTRY OF LEADING?

A. Elitism is the initial error in prophetic leading

- a. The prophet begins to see himself as above the rest of the Body of Christ.
- b. He feels exempt from the rules and above the Body’s approval
- c. He ministers from a position of superiority
- d. He begins collecting his own prophecies which become “scripture” to him.

- e. An erroneous sect evolves around him, separated from God's word
- B. God's Word is the plumbline
 - a. The canon of scripture evolved and authenticated itself
 - b. Jesus, the apostles, and the early church all testified to the scripture's authenticity
 - c. The Bible has long been established as the inspired and infallible Word of God
- C. Prophecy is a word "from" God, not the word "of" God
 - a. Prophecy is for exhortation, edification, and consolation
 - b. Appropriately declared, prophecy will give encouragement and direction to the Body of Christ
- D. Our goal is to grow in our ability to prophesy while not departing from a rational Biblical base

SOME GUIDELINES IN LEARNING TO PROPHECY

The following suggestions will be of some help to those who desire to prophesy--remembering all the while that the most effective means of 'learning it' is 'doing it'.

1. Recognize the value of the Gift of Prophecy.

1 Co. 14:1-5 “. . . desire earnestly spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy.”

2. Ask God for the gift.

1 Co. 14:39 (“... every perfect gift is from above...”; and “He will give you the desires of your heart”).

3. Ask your leader to lay hands on you to receive the gift. Romans 1:11 “. . . that I may impart some spiritual gift to you.. I Timothy 4:14 “.. . which was bestowed on you.., with the laying on of hands..

II Timothy 1:6 the gift of God is in you through the laying on of my hands.”

4. Meditate on the Word.

Psalm 1:1-3 and in His law he meditate day and night.” Joshua 1:8 this book of the law shall not depart from your mouth. .

5. Identify with a small group.

1 Co. 14:26 each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue...

6. Weigh the content of your prophecies.

Yourself, Through others. 1 Co. 14:26” ... and let the others pass judgment.”

7. Don't be discouraged by imperfection.

1 Co. 13:9 “For we know in part and we prophesy in part.” Proverbs 24:16 “For a righteous man falls seven times and rises again.

PROPHECY: A GUIDE FOR PERSONAL STUDY

1. Scripture Reference:
2. What was the setting (context) of the prophecy?
3. By whom was the prophecy delivered?
4. What were the important elements (content) of the prophecy?
5. What was the immediate result of the prophecy?
6. What was the long-term fulfillment or effect of the prophecy?
7. What observations can be made concerning prophecy from this particular passage?
8. Related scripture references?