

12. Building Relationships and the Gift of Prophecy

In our last topic, we introduced the idea of “Building Relationships for Evangelism Through Spiritual Gifts.” In our next seven topics, we will be taking the gifts listed in Romans 12:6-8, list the gift, define the gift and then show how each gift can be used to build relationships with non-Christians for the purpose of evangelism. Since Romans 12:3-8 tells us that each Christian has one or more of the gifts listed in that passage, one or more of the seven gifts listed in that chapter will be a gift that you have and that the Lord wants to use to help you minister both to other Christians and to reach out to those who have not yet placed their trust in Christ. As we explain the gifts that you do not have, it will help you to understand why other Christians do not evangelize in the same way you feel most comfortable.

Today, we will be talking about the gift of prophecy. Romans 12:6 says, “Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, *let us use them*: if prophecy, *let us prophesy* in proportion to our faith;” The first thing to notice is that we have two words that have only one difference. One is spelled with a “c” and the other is spelled with an “s”. Although there is only one letter that is different in these two words, it is very important to understand that they are two different words and that it is important to understand their meanings.

The word “prophesy” when telling us how to use our spiritual gifts means to speak forth what has already been written down. That is why 1 Corinthians 14:31 tells us, “For you can all prophesy one by one, that all may learn and all may be encouraged.” This verse is talking about the context of a public worship service and points out the fact that many can read different portions of Scripture during a public service of the church. Since the early church services were patterned after the services of the synagogues, you might find it interesting to know that in a synagogue service there would be seven to nine readings from the Old Testament. That meant that from seven to nine people had the opportunity to read the Scripture in each service.

The word “prophecy” is used in the New Testament of the utterance of the Old Testament prophets. As a result, we could give the following definition: “To quote the Word of God to edify, to exhort and to comfort, to announce the grace which is provided by salvation and to warn of judgment for ungodly deeds” - 1 Corinthians 14:3; 1 Peter 1:10; Jude 14-15. Since the prophets gave us the completed written Word of God, the gift of prophecy does not speak about giving new revelation since that is clearly forbidden in Revelation 22:18-19. Instead, the one with the gift of prophecy is to prophesy what has already been written down in the Word of God. The person with the gift of prophecy will often quote Scripture without explaining it as Peter did in his sermon in Acts 2.

Since the person with the gift of prophecy emphasizes the grace provided in salvation and warns of judgment for ungodly deeds, 1 Corinthians 13:2 gives a particular warning about this gift, “And though I have *the gift of prophecy*, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.” In warning both the Christian and the non-Christian about ungodly deeds, it is very easy to sound condemning and harsh rather than communicating the love and concern that we have for a person. As a result, it is especially important that we ask the Lord to give us His strength and wisdom to “speak the truth

in love” (Ephesians 4:15) whenever we warn about ungodly deeds both when speaking to the Christian and to the non-Christian.

The person who has the gift of prophecy will be most effective in sharing the Gospel with those who are not yet Christians if he or she will show great love and compassion when building relationships with non-Christians. Some key principles for one with the gift of prophecy to assist them as they build relationships and show love to non-Christians include:

1. Seek them where they are - Luke 19:10. Christ illustrated this by finding Zacchaeus where he was (up in a tree) and going with him to his house for dinner. We show that we care for people by going to them where they are instead of expecting them to come to us.

2. Spend time with them - Luke 5:27-32. Christ illustrated this by going to Levi (Matthew) where he was, by going to his house with him and by spending time with Matthew and his friends in the home of Matthew where they felt comfortable. We need to spend time with people where they live, work and spend their free time.

3. Show compassion to them - Matthew 9:36-38. Christ illustrated this by having such a compassion that it caused Him to see that the people were faint and were scattered like sheep having no shepherd. Since sheep tend to scatter rather than stay together in a group, this means that Christ saw them as individuals having individual needs. The way we show compassion is to see people as individuals, not just groups, with individual needs and reach out to minister to the needs of those individuals in love.

4. Share with them about repentance - Luke 5:31-32. Christ called people to repent and turn from their sins. 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10 help us to understand what it means to repent. In those two verses, we see that repentance includes three key thoughts:

- a. turning to God from idols
- b. serving the living and true God
- c. waiting for His Son from heaven

5. Share with them about forgiveness - John 8:1-11; Acts 26:18. Christ told those who recognized Him as Lord that He did not condemn them. Instead, He would give them the strength to go and sin no more (live a changed life). As we share the message of forgiveness and model it in our own lives by forgiving others, we offer hope to those who have no hope.

6. Share the answer to fear - Jude 20-23; Hebrews 2:14-15. Ever since Adam and Eve, people have been controlled by fear. Jude tells us that we use compassion to save some and we use fear to bring others to Christ. We need to pray that the Lord will cause us to be sensitive to each person so that we know when to use compassion and when to use fear. Hebrews helps us to understand that the real fear that people have is the fear of death and Satan uses that fear to hold them in bondage. That is why it is so important to share the grace provided by salvation at the same time that we warn of judgment for sin.

Since those of you who have the gift of prophecy may sometimes be viewed as being judgmental, because you do focus on judgment for ungodly deeds, it is especially important that you continually pray that the Lord will give you a real heart of love so that you reflect the love of Christ even as you warn of the consequences of sin. May the Lord greatly use those of you who have the gift of prophecy as you help people to see the choices that they make (either good or bad) will produce consequences that are eternal. May the Lord also give you His strength to share those warnings in love.