

34. Learning Why it Is Important to Prophecy

In our last topic, we saw that love is eternal. We saw that spiritual gifts are not eternal because they will not be needed in heaven. We also saw that we walk by faith because we have not yet reached heaven where we will see Christ face to face. We also walk in hope as we wait for the return of Christ to take us to heaven so we will not need hope any longer once we are present with Christ. However, love is the character of God so love is eternal and we will enjoy the blessings of His love forever. This is the message that we want to help our children learn to share with others. For that reason, it is important to help our children understand why it is important to prophecy.

In 1 Corinthians 14:1, we read, “Pursue love, and desire spiritual *gifts*, but especially that you may prophecy.” The word that is translated “pursue” means *persecute or to seek after eagerly*. The second meaning of the word is the meaning that is used in this verse. This is the same way the word is used in 1 Timothy 6:11 where we read, “But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness.” Since we want our children to become men and women of God, we also want to encourage them to pursue love and the other good things mentioned in this verse.

We are also told to desire spiritual gifts. 1 Corinthians 12:31 says, “But earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way.” In our last two topics, we saw that the more excellent way that is greater than spiritual gifts is love. However, if we understand the purpose of spiritual gifts and carry out that purpose, we also should desire them. 1 Peter 4:10-11 says, “As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If anyone speaks, *let him speak* as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, *let him do it* as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.” Here, we see that we are to use our spiritual gifts to serve one another. If we have a speaking gift, we are to speak the Word of God. If we have a serving gift, we are to serve with the ability that God supplies.

However, we see that we are to especially desire that we may prophecy. We saw in an earlier topic that when “prophecy” is spelled with an “s” that it means *to speak what is already written down in the Word of God*. In 1 Corinthians 14:31, we read, “For you can all prophecy one by one, that all may learn and all may be encouraged.” As we share the Word of God with others, the Word of God causes people both to learn what God wants them to do and also gives them encouragement in their lives. Hebrews 4:12 tells us why we should help our physical and spiritual children learn to share the Word of God. That verse says, “For the Word of God *is* living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” The Word of God is able to accomplish the work of God because the Word is living and powerful.

We also see that as we speak the Word of God we are to speak in a language that the people to can understand. 1 Corinthians 14:2 says, “For he who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God, for no one understands *him*; however, in the spirit he speaks mysteries.” God can understand any language so if we speak in a different language God will still understand. However,

the people to whom we are speaking will not understand us and the Word of God will remain like a mystery to them. In fact, there was a period of about 1,000 years where the people in Europe only heard the Word of God when it was spoken to them in Latin, which most of the people could not understand. As a result, that period was known in Europe as the Dark Ages.

In contrast, 1 Corinthians 14:3 says, “But he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men.” Here, we see that we do at least three things when we share the Word of God with others. First, the word that is translated “edification” means *the act of building up*. That is why Romans 14:19 says, “Therefore let us pursue the things *which make* for peace and the things by which one may edify another.” We see that we are to make it our goal to build up other Christians. Ephesians 4:15-16 tell us how we build up other Christians when those verses say, “But, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head--Christ--from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.” As we speak the Word of God in love, we are building up other Christians and equipping them to serve the Lord also.

Second, the word translated “exhortation” means *instruction from the Word of God that provides encouragement or comfort*. In 1 Timothy 4:13, Paul told Timothy, “Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.” Here, we see that Timothy was to read the Word, encourage or comfort from the Word and give instruction from the Word. The word is used 6 times in 2 Corinthians 1:3-7 and is translated by the words “comfort” and “consolation.” 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 says, “Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.” Here, we see that we are able to comfort and encourage others with the same Word that God has used to bring comfort in our own lives.

Third, the word translated “comfort” means *to speak for the purpose of persuading, stimulating or comforting*. In 1 Thessalonians 2:10-12, we read, “You *are* witnesses, and God *also*, how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behaved ourselves among you who believe; as you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father *does* his own children, that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.” In these verses, another form of the word is translated “comforted” as Paul described how he, Silvanus, and Timothy shared the Word of God with the Thessalonians to help them in their spiritual growth. He said that they had been spiritual parents and had shared with the Thessalonians in the same way that a father shares with his children. These three words show that as we help our children to learn to share the Word of God with others the Lord will use their ministry so that they become spiritual parents to others.

In contrast, the Corinthian Christians were speaking to build up themselves instead of speaking to build up other Christians. 1 Corinthians 14:4 says, “He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church.” Since we have seen that the Corinthian Christians were talking and acting like spiritual toddlers (like children that are only one or two years old), this

verse indicates that the Corinthian Christians were controlled by pride by speaking in a childish tongue (This was the singular use of the word.) instead of speaking in known languages. Their desire was not to help other Christians. Instead, their desire was to make themselves look good. That is not ministry. Instead, it is personal pride.

That is why Paul goes on to say in 1 Corinthians 14:5, “I wish you all spoke with tongues, but even more that you prophesied; for he who prophesies *is* greater than he who speaks with tongues, unless indeed he interprets, that the church may receive edification.” Here, we see that Paul used the word “tongues” or known languages instead of a tongue that could not be understood. The word that is translated “tongues” used in the plural form means *a language or dialect used by a particular people distinct from that of other nations*. This is the way the word is used in Acts 2:3-11 where we see a whole variety of known languages mentioned. Acts 2:11 concludes a whole list of languages by saying, “Cretans and Arabs--we hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God.” Since Corinth was a seaport where people who came there often spoke different languages, Paul said that it would be good if they would share the Word of God with these people from other countries in their own language.

However, Paul said that it would be much better if they spoke the Word of God when they spoke to the people of the church at Corinth. The Word of God spoken in their own language would build up the Christians in the church in that city so that they would be equipped to share the Word of God with others, including the visitors to the seaport of Corinth. He said that if they were going to speak in another language that what they said should be interpreted. Paul explains this further in 1 Corinthians 14:27-28 when he said, “If anyone speaks in a tongue, *let there be* two or at the most three, *each* in turn, and let one interpret. But if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in church, and let him speak to himself and to God.” Here, we see that if there was not a person that could interpret what was said into the language of the congregation the person was to keep silent. There was also a limitation on how many could speak in another language.

Paul said that the person who prophesies is greater than the person that speaks in another language because everyone would understand the language of Corinth. Here, we see another important lesson. We are not to try and impress people with our ability to speak big words. Instead, our concern is to speak and explain the Word of God simply and clearly so that everyone can understand. This is especially important in a church where part of the people have a limited education. As we mentioned in a previous topic, about half of the people in the Roman Empire were slaves and many had a limited education. We want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to explain the Word of God simply and clearly so that even children or people with a limited education can understand. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn to speak the Word of God so that others can understand what they teach.