

THE PROPHETIC COMMUNITY

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Charismatic gifts work *together* in the *community of faith*. In fact, the *number one concern* of 1 Corinthians 12-14 is to consider how the charismatic gifts work *together* among believers. The Apostle Paul uses the physical body as a metaphor for the body of Christ, indicating that “God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be.”¹

The Most Excellent Way

After presenting this truth in the imagery of the human body, Paul then teaches about love, “the most excellent way” or the most excellent manner in which the gifts should operate. He is *not* speaking of a *gift* that is more excellent than those noted in chapter twelve. He is speaking of a *manner* or *way* of functioning in those gifts that is more excellent than a manner characterized by disregard for one another in the body.²

Mutual Honor

In the corporate gathering, everyone has something to contribute, and all of it is necessary.³ When the members have a motivation of love and a mutual regard for one another’s gifts, the result is the strengthening of the church.

Mutual honor between a prophetic minister and leaders functioning in a different equipping gift is vital. The significance of the five-fold equipping gifts is noted in Ephesians 4:

It was he [Jesus] who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.⁴

The five equipping or leadership gifts that contribute to the church’s maturity, unity and readiness for ministry are apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. In 1 Corinthians 12, three of these gifts are prioritized:

¹ 1 Corinthians 12:12-27.

² 1 Corinthians 13:1-13.

³ 1 Corinthians 14:26.

⁴ Ephesians 4:11-13.

And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues.⁵

The flow of authority follows this order: apostles are first; prophets are second; teachers are third. Apostles are sent by God as emissaries of His kingdom to establish the culture of that kingdom in the earth. Prophets serve that apostolic mission by perceiving and acting upon revelations of the heart and mind of God. Following the lead of the apostolic and the prophetic, teachers then align their teaching with the leadership established by the apostolic and prophetic leaders.

Ephesians 2 further demonstrates the need for honoring the place that apostles and prophets hold in God's household:

Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.⁶

The contribution of the apostolic and the prophetic is foundational to everything else involved in the building up of the church.

A relationship of mutual honor, submission and deference is required for this to work properly. No single Christian carries the full deposit. The natural inclination of any individual is for that person to think that he or she is always right; however, the corporate nature of charismatic gifts requires the preferring of one another.

How Prophecy Builds Up the Church

Prophecy equips and builds up the church by joining people's lives together.⁷ Floyd McClung suggests the following line of thought that demonstrates the practical outworking of this truth:

1. A revelation comes to one person.
2. Church leaders discern the accuracy of the revelation and introduce that person to others who have received a similar revelation.
3. Connections are made, the church is built up, and kingdom life advances.⁸

⁵ 1 Corinthians 12:28.

⁶ Ephesians 2:19-22.

⁷ Floyd McClung, Jr., "The Prophetic Journey," a prophetic ministry conference, Westmore Church of God, Cleveland, Tennessee, 2005.

⁸ Ibid.

According to Ephesians 4:12, the edifying role of the prophet is also about *equipping* or *perfecting* the saints so that they become effective in their life and work together. Expanding upon the meaning of the Greek word translated “equipping” or “perfecting,” it could be said that when the prophetic functions together with the other four equipping gifts, the result is multi-faceted:

- i. The saints are completed; they are made into what they ought to be.
- ii. They are mended or repaired.
- iii. They are adjusted or arranged into order.
- iv. They are strengthened.

Participation in the Faith Community

Due to the relational way in which the five-fold equipping gifts function, the prophetic minister must resist the tendency to become a loner. Prophetic ministers are validated by their involvement with the faith community, not by their separateness. They are catalysts to the community to learn to hear God together, and they serve within the church to help it fulfill its prophetic function. Bruce Yocum states, “In his service to the Lord, the prophet is subject to the community. But in its service to God, the community is subject to the authority of the word which the prophet brings.”⁹

The Normative Life of the Faith Community

Acts 2:42-47 provides a detailed picture of the faith community’s life:

- i. They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching (2:42).
- ii. They devoted themselves to fellowship (2:42).
- iii. They devoted themselves to having meals together—the breaking of bread (2:42).
- iv. They devoted themselves to prayer (2:42).
- v. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles (2:43).
- vi. All the believers were together and had everything in common (2:44).
- vii. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need (2:45).
- viii. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts (2:46).
- ix. They shared meals together in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God (2:46-47).

⁹ Yocum, 59.

- x. They enjoyed the favor of all the people (2:47).
- xi. They welcomed newcomers into the faith community. The Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved (2:47).

Nothing in this description sounds very prophetic, so why consider it in our discussion? It is important to remember that New Testament prophetic ministry takes place in the context of normal everyday Christian living. The prophetic is not an anomaly in that divine culture. It flows as part of a corporate life characterized by devotion to teaching, fellowship, prayer, miracles, gladness, sincerity, worship, favor with outsiders, mutual concern for one another and a desire to be inclusive—welcoming new people into the family of faith. Those qualities are not pushed aside when the operation of the prophetic is taking place.