

Introduction:**What is meant by “Prophecy”**

- **Current debate** about charismatic gifts and the place of the Holy Spirit - also within Reformed circles
- In our day, prophecies are **usually related to eschatology** or **predictions of future event**
- **Scriptural prophecy** did primarily two things: (1.) **comfort** to the faithful in the midst of difficulty and (2.) **warn** the disobedient regarding the consequences of their sin
- All agree it essentially means to be **a mouthpiece of God**, communicating a His message to people
- These were often connected with things they **couldn't presently see**, or things in **the future**

Cessationist – since the closing of the NT canon, there are no continuing offices of apostles and prophets; there are also no continuing gifts of tongues and prophecy

- **Prophecy – always/only means directly inspired/infallible communication from God then to others**
- Tests of a prophet Dt13:1-5 18:20-22; from a cessationist position, no longer ongoing
- Potential problems – (1.) Denial of the reality of the **ongoing work of the Holy Spirit** in speaking to the church (2.) less **anticipation and desperation** for the help of the Holy Spirit

Continuist - there are continuing offices of apostles and prophets and/or there are continuing gifts of tongues and prophecy

- **Prophecy - frequently means this, but also the communication of God's truth to people, but with possible mixture of truth and error which needs discernment and wisdom**
- this is more like “Spirit empowered preaching” – I would include communication of any sort by any believer
- Some of the **Puritans** and **commentators** (cessationist) use this terminology to describe preaching
- Potential problems (1.) undermining the **sufficiency of Scripture**, (2.) speaker deserves **absolute submission**

- This debate can get very technical, and there are earnest and studious Christians on both sides of the issue
- The **undergirding questions** include: Is it only His communication through Scripture? What part does the Spirit play? Is it possible to prophecy and not be a prophet? Does God continue to communicate today? If so, how?
- Both men and women throughout Scriptures, but variety of ways received and delivered messages
- Acts 2:17-18 men and women, young and old, a new chapter of the Spirit's work in the church of Christ
- A “gift” Rom12:6 - Desire to pursue – 1Cor14:1ff – speaks edification, exhortation, and comfort 1Cor14:3
- The debate is over the **quality of the message**, is it given by God; is God speaking through His people?
- Is the work of the Spirit merely **static** (fixed; stationary), or also **dynamic** (marked by change, intense, vigorous)?
- I suggest that there is a dimension of God giving wisdom, knowledge, understanding, insight, and Spirit-empowered ability to His people (who are not quenching the Spirit) that, as they apply the truth of the Scriptures, God is genuinely speaking to His church
- Much of **our hesitancy** to use such language is a response to the charismatic abuses
- There are also **shadows of God's Truth** displaying themselves in other ways, like beauty reflected in creation
- So without settling the debate this morning, I would like to use a more general definition of any speaking and application of the Truth of God's Word intended to speak edification, exhortation, or comfort
- This could include **preaching, personal communication, conversations, e-mails**, etc.

What is meant by “Despise”?

- (Gk. exoutheneo) treat with contempt, look down, count as no value - Lk18:9 (self righteous) 23:1 (soldiers to Jesus)
- We are not told the circumstances of why Paul wrote this, and in what way they were despising them
- There are several reasons/ways we can despise: (1.) **pride** (2.) **sin-harboring** (3.) **self-degradation** (4.) **neglect**
- **[But] Test all things** – (Gk. dokimatzete = examine, interpret, discern, discover) - the heightened responsibility of each follower of Christ to be discerning, wise, and knowledgeable of the Scriptures
- **Hold fast what is good** – cling to it, hold to it, don't let it go
- **Abstain from every form of evil** – the opposite of cling, stand back from it; evil in all the ways it appears
- **Connection to the Spirit** in v.19 – need for light of knowledge and heat of holy affections
- What a blessing it is that we not only have the Spirit, but also now completed Bibles as an absolute standard