

Is There a Place for “Prophetic” Utterances in Public Worship? A Dialogue with W. Grudem.

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1. Introduction

One of the major points of contention within Baptist discussion is the “charismata” or spiritual gifts that are in operation within the church. The contemporary charismatic movement has contributed to a renewed interest in the relevance of charismatic experience, both for the individual and for the church. As a result, theologians from within the movement have tended to be more experientially oriented in their treatment of gifts and ministries. Thus they have used Pauline material to legitimise recent experiences and movements within the church without consideration for the most important test of the biblical text and of its exegesis.

The growth of the charismatic movement, however, gave rise to an acute need to find adequate answers for the phenomena experienced. The present study calls for an examination of charismatic positions on the cessation of the prophetic, which necessitates a dialogue with Dr. Wayne Grudem in order to arrive at an adequate theological position.

2. An Understanding of the Gift of Prophecy

Friedrich (1965) in *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* considers prophecy to be the most important gift of the church. This fact cannot be overstated, considering the fact that Paul cited this gift consistently in his list. Furthermore, the claim of Friedrich can be supported by Paul’s discussion on prophecy in 1 Corinthians 12-14 because of its communicability of God’s message to the community of faith. This brings us to the definition of prophecy.

Traditionally viewed, biblical prophecy is “inspired utterance” that came through the direct revelation of God. Fee (1988:595) states that, “the attempt to see prophecy as having different levels, ranging from that which is totally God’s Word and therefore inerrant to that which is mixed with varying degree of human thought including error, is difficult to support biblically.” Peisker (1986:85) regards prophesying, as the function of the prophet, which was foundational to the church, as a thing of the past. Schatzmann (1989:40) states that Gerhard Dautzenberg had proposed an entirely different understanding of prophecy. Maintaining that “the structure of the prophetic understanding in 1 Corinthians 12-14 is closely related to the scope of the apocalyptic knowledge arising from the Qumran writing, Philo, Josephus and the apocalyptic writings,” Schatzmann (1989:41-42) states that Dautzenberg believes that prophecy was tantamount to the utterance of mysteries (1 Cor 13:12) and of enigmatic riddles. He explains that, in order for this to be communicated in an intelligible manner, the accompanying of the gift of discernment was essential. What interpretation was to tongues, discernment of the spirit was to prophecy.

Gaffin (1996:44) defines prophecy as a special temporary ability to bring a word, a warning, exhortation or revelation from God under the impulse of the

Holy Spirit. He espouses the belief that the prophet and his function have ceased. He states, “to maintain the continuation of the prophetic gifts today stands in tension with the canonicity of the New Testament, particularly the canon as closed. Inevitably such continuation of these revelatory gifts relativises the sufficiency and authority of Scripture.” Storms (1996:207) notes that prophecy is always rooted in revelation (1 Cor 14:30). It is not based on a hunch, a supposition, an inference, an educated guess or even sanctified wisdom. He states that prophecy is the human report of divine revelation. He then proceeds to say that, although prophecy is rooted in revelation, prophecy is occasionally fallible. He states that although God alone is responsible for revelation, it is through its receptive and interpretative nature and the application of the prophecy process by humans that prophecy at times becomes fallible. However the argument for the continuation of the prophetic utterance seems to contradict his statement. He claims (1996:207) that, “revelation, which is the root of every prophetic utterance, is as inerrant and infallible as the written Word of God itself. In terms of revelation alone, the New Testament prophetic gift does not differ from the Old Testament prophetic gift.” Therein lies the contradiction of his argument because so-called prophecies must be subjected to the same process of evaluation that the Word of God has been subjected to in order to prove or disprove their validity. The question then arises: how infallible is the Word of God (Bible) in the light of the human entity that was involved in its reception? Storms (*ibid*), however, believe that New Testament prophecy does not carry intrinsic divine authority although its source is the same. If Storms’ argument is to be accepted then one can conclude that the book of Revelation does not carry “intrinsic divine authority”.

Those who maintain the continuation of the prophetic gifts today are substantially at odds about them, especially with regards to their authority. On the one hand there are those who hold that these gifts are fallible in their exercise and have a lesser authority than that of the Old Testament canonical prophets and the New Testament Apostles. On the other hand, Fee (1994:892), for instance, dismisses this position as “controlled by factors that do not interest Paul at all and speaking to a lot of concerns that are quite different from Paul’s.” According to Fee (*ibid*), Paul undoubtedly saw the New Testament as in the succession of the ‘legitimate’ prophets of the Old Testament, and the only ‘prophets’ Paul ever refers to are not those who form part of the present Spirit-inspiration, but the prophets whose oracles became part of his Bible (Rm 1:2; 3:2).” Gaffin (1995:46) states that, “while Fee does call this ‘slender evidence to go on,’ in the context it seems difficult not to read him to be saying that, as far as we can tell, we are unable to distinguish between inspiration and authority, between New Testament prophets and inscripturated prophets.”

3. Monatanism and its Influence on the Church

In the second century, post-apostolic Christianity faced a serious challenge from the prophetic crisis known as the “New Prophecy” or Montanism. This labelling of Montanism as the “New Prophecy” by its adherents shows why the early church rejected Montanism: it was “new” in that it differed markedly from the

early church's understanding of the nature of New Testament prophets and prophecy, as will be seen later in this study. This understanding of the early church arose from the standards set by the Old Testament for the evaluation of prophets. Before being checked, Montanism spread rapidly throughout the Greco-Roman world and quickly won many adherents, so that even the church father Tertullian was swept away by its claims. Such a sharp departure from accepted biblical norms of prophecy, especially in its content and manner of expression, caused great alarm. According to Shelly (1982:80-81), the crisis became so acute that the church struggled for decades to quell the swelling numbers of adherents to Montanism. Thus controversy is no stranger to the Christian church. When Paul wrote 1 Corinthians, the first-century church was already in confusion and turmoil over the nature and practice of spiritual gifts. Misconceptions about, and abuse of the gifts were rampant in the Corinthian church. A three-man delegation (1 Cor 7:1; 16:17) asked Paul to clarify how gifts such as prophecy, tongues, and knowledge should be exercised (1 Cor 13:8). The outcome of the turbulence in Corinth is unknown, but the second century exhibited the same confusion with regards to the Montanist heresy.

Several scholars, Deer, Grudem and Graffin have dealt with the New Testament gift of prophecy. Since neither side of the controversy had closely defined the nature and purpose of these gifts, they have provided fertile ground for the development of a new phase in the discussion of temporary and permanent spiritual gifts. Questions about the nature of this gift threaten to become, if they have not done so already, a major concern in New Testament theology and church worship.

Among non-charismatics, it has been relatively standard practise to regard these gifts as foundational for the church and temporary in nature. The non-charismatics may be labelled cessationists. Exemplifying a standard cessationist view, Ryrie (1987:434) writes, the gift of prophecy included receiving a message directly from God through special revelation, being guided in declaring it to the people, and having it authenticated in some way by God Himself. The content of that message may have included telling the future (which is what we normally think of as prophesying), but it also included revelation from God concerning the present.

Ryrie (1987:435) then proceeds to explain that this gift was limited in its need and use, for it was needed during the writing of the New Testament and its usefulness ceased when the books were completed. God's message then was contained in written form, and no new revelation was given in addition to the written record. Deere (1993:22), a non-cessationist, states that the cessationist group, especially those from the dispensationalist camp, has caused much harm to the present belief and practice of spiritual gifts. Charismatics may be termed "non-cessationists" because they believe that the spiritual gifts have not ceased after the first century, and generally believe that prophecy is presently active as it was during the first 70 years after the church began. In the next section I will engage Grudem's understanding of the gift of prophecy.

4. Dialogue with W. Grudem on Ephesians. 2:20

In the recent history of the Church, it has been argued that the prophetic office and gift has continued in the body of Christ. This argument has been advanced in more or less moderate forms, ranging from the possibility of inerrant revelation being given today, to the idea that prophecy was a fallible human expression to a divine revelation, is evident both in the New Testament and today. The question of whether the New Testament gift of prophecy continues in the life of the church today came to the attention of the evangelical world again because of the publication of Wayne Grudem's book, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today* (2002). His work covers a large number of issues, but arguably none is more important than the treatment of the two principal texts related to the question of prophecy's duration, namely in 1 Corinthians 13:10 and Ephesians 2:20. In this section, I shall dialogue with Grudem by evaluating his position on Ephesians 2:20, the passage that is chief among those "other" texts bearing on the question of prophecy's duration.

In order for one to understand Grudem's proposal for the continuation of prophecy, one must take into consideration Ephesians 2:20 which, he understands to mean "the foundation of the apostles who are also prophets". Grudem (2000: 340-342) suggests several reasons why such an understanding of the passage seems persuasive:

First, this interpretation is quite possible in terms of Greek grammar. He states that it is consistent with Paul's grammatical usage in Ephesians 4:11 where he uses the same construction to speak of pastor teacher.

Second, he believes that this interpretation best fits the historical data which shows that it was to the apostles only and not to the prophets, that God revealed the truth of the Gentile inclusion into the church.

Third, he argues that to understand the apostles alone as the "foundation" of the New Testament church is consistent with another picture, which clearly emphasises the unique foundational role of the apostle and some other group of prophets. He uses Revelation 21:14 to support his argument, "And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb".

Fourth, such a designation of the apostles as "also prophets" would be appropriate for Paul's argument, in that it shows the fact, that the Gentiles inclusion was not revealed simply to some insignificant Christian, but revealed to those who were "foundational" in the church, the apostles who are also prophets, the divinely authoritative messengers of the true gospel.

Accordingly, in the context of Paul's comprehensive historical metaphor of house building in Ephesians 2:19-22; verse 20 teaches that the apostles represent the only gift whose addition to the church ceased once God completed its foundation; that is, apostleship is the only gift whose presence in the church would have ended long before Christ's return. With his exegesis of Ephesians 2:20, then, Grudem disassociates New Testament prophets who are not also apostles from the church's foundation and urges us to see prophecy as a gift that has a continuing

function in the church's history and life. The points that Grudem offers in support of his view may be summarised as follows (2000:333-339):

First, the grammar does not require two groups. The semantic range of the article-noun-kai-noun construction in the New Testament, as well as the likely meaning of that construction, permits us to interpret Ephesians 4:11 as meaning "the apostles who are also prophets." He goes on to argue that if the New Testament authors wanted to make it clear that they were talking about two different groups, they would have added the word "the" before the [noun] and the [noun].

Second, he believes that the New Testament apostles alone were the recipients of the foundational revelation for the inclusion of the Gentiles into the church and not a prophet or a group of prophets who were not just apostles functioning in a prophetic role.

Third, the foundation metaphor in Ephesians 2:20 and 3:5, signifies something completed before starting with the superstructure which best fits Grudem's exegesis, in that new Christians who received the gift of prophecy will be added to the church's superstructure as it is built on the finished foundation of the apostles.

Fourth, in relation to the above mentioned foundation metaphor, the foundational role attributed uniquely to the apostles in Rv 21:14 are consistent with Grudem's view of Ephesians 2:20.

Fifth, Paul's focus on the universal church in Ephesians 2-3 would have eliminated any consideration that the members who had the gift of prophecy in the local churches had the same authority and importance as the apostles in the foundation of the universal church in Ephesians 2:20.

Sixth, Paul's proves in Ephesians 2-3 by using the metaphor of building the equality of Jews and Gentiles as members in Christ's church. Paul fails to cite the purported inclusion of Jewish and Gentile prophets in the church's foundation, although that idea would have been most pertinent to his argument for the equality of Jews and Gentiles, suggesting that he did not think of Gentile Christians with the gift of prophecy in the local church as part of this "foundation."

Seventh, the evidence in 1 Corinthians 12-14, 1 Th 5:20-21, and several texts in Acts, describing the New Testament gift of prophecy, gives strong evidence that ordinary congregational prophets did not carry out or possess authority that would give them a "foundational" role in the church. This clarifies the apostolic identity of the foundational prophets in Ephesians 2:20.

Eighth, Grudem objects to the understanding of Ephesians 2:20 and Ephesians 3:5 which refers to New Testament apostles and New Testament prophets as two separate groups because of the lack of any reference in either the New Testament or the post-apostolic writings indicating the existence of non-apostolic prophets who had a part in the universal church's foundation.

Ninth, as for Ephesians 4:11, the context and grammar makes it clear that the prophets mentioned there relate to local churches, while those in Ephesians 2:20 relate to the universal church.

Tenth, Grudem agrees that 1 Corinthians 12:28, does indeed distinguish between apostles and prophets, but he concludes that this single reference should

not dictate the meaning of every reference, for example Ephesians 2:20, where the words “apostles” and “prophets” appear.

Eleventh, the fact that the apostles “as a group” are never designated prophets or any of the other distinct ministries in the church is not decisive for the meaning in Ephesians 2:20 and Ephesians 3:5, provided the grammar and context favour this exegesis.

Finally, the grammar and context of Ephesians 2:20 provide clear signals of Paul’s intention to identify the apostles as prophets, thereby preventing any possible confusion with the prophets of Ephesians 4:11.

Having argued his case from grammatical and contextual factors, Grudem (2000:333) urges, “it seems best to conclude that Ephesians 2:20 means that the church is built upon the foundation of the apostles who are also prophets.

5. Exegesis of Ephesians 2:20

With these observations in mind, I shall now evaluate Grudem’s exegesis of Ephesians 2:20. The crucial issues are:

First, whether or not the “foundation of the apostles and prophets” is a restriction of their roles to the period preceding the formation of the canon.

Second, whether Paul is here referring to two groups or one namely, the “apostles who are the prophets”.

Third, whether the function and role of the prophets (if they are a different group) is co-extensive in any way with the apostles; and, if so, whether the New Testament evidence for the duration of the role and function of the apostles will inform the biblical understanding of the duration of the role and function of the prophets.

The first step in answering these questions is to exegete Ephesians 2:20 in its context. Paul was writing to a largely Gentile audience in Ephesus, and in this chapter he used two contrasting images to make two important points. First, in verses 1-10, he contrasts their former state of deadness with their new life in Christ. They had been dead in their trespasses and sins (v.1), walking according to the course of this world and the prince of the power of the air (v.2); they had lived in the lusts of their flesh and were by nature children of wrath (v.3). Even while they were dead, however, they were loved by God, who made them alive together with Christ (v.4-5). They were saved by God’s sovereign grace, through the faith He himself gave them; as a result, their new state as the redeemed people of God was entire the workmanship of God (v.8-10).

Having established their new identity as the beloved people of God who were brought from death to life, and were seated with Christ in the heavenlies, Paul also wants to assure them that they were not a mere second-rate addition to the Jews as the people of God. In verses 11 and 12 Paul once again emphasises their former state, this time in relation to the Jews and the covenant with God. Using an emphatic you, “the Gentiles in the flesh”, Paul reminds them that they had been in a state of exclusion from the citizenship (or corporate life) of Israel, as they were foreigners to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. Now, however, they had been made near in (or by) the blood of Christ (v.

13). In Christ, the two peoples (believing Gentiles and believing Jews) are made into the one people of God. The dividing wall of partition between them had been (spiritually) destroyed in Christ (v.14). He made the two into one body (v. 16), brought them into one Spirit (v. 18), and made them fellow citizens and members of the one household of God (v. 19).

In verse 20 Paul assures his audience that God had not only made one people for himself, but he was also building them up. For the third time, Paul here inserts a contrast between past and present. They were at one time built upon a "foundation", and now they were further "being built by God".

The household of believing Jews and believing Gentiles were being erected as a temple of God. There are two aspects to this building up. First, it was obviously a continuous, ongoing work of God. To make this point Paul use present participles in vv. 21-22. They were a building being fit together as a holy temple, and being built together as a dwelling place of God. This ongoing work, however, had a prior, established foundation (v. 20). This is my main concern here. Paul tells his readers, who were in the process of being built up as the one people of God, that they had been built on a sure foundation. Not surprisingly, the verb used here is not in the present tense. Paul states that they were built (an aorist passive participle) on the foundation of apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the cornerstone.

The verb "built" here means to build something on something already built, build on to. They were being built on a foundation that had already been established. The foundation itself was fixed. Their household depended on that fixed strength and support for its proper growth.

It is obvious that the role and function of the apostles and prophets was still active, since Paul himself was an apostle. However, his statement evidences the close connection he makes between their offices and the divine revelation of the gospel, the infallible and authoritative Word of God for the Church. It was by the divine Word of the gospel that they had believed and had been brought near as God's people through the blood of Christ. It was by the work of the Spirit that they had been made alive in Christ, the Word of God, which was proclaimed by the apostles and prophets who mediated this. They served as the foundation for the building of the people of God.

It is important to notice that Paul lists one foundation, with two distinct groups of people. The foundation is in the singular and has a definite article, '*to themelio*'. Nonetheless, it was made of apostles and prophets, *the apostle* and the prophet. They, as the foundation, rested upon Jesus Christ as the, cornerstone. The distinction between the foundation and the building is very important. The people of God were being dynamically built. The foundation, on the other hand, was static, by virtue of being the foundation! Paul clearly has in mind here that the ministry of the apostles and the prophets were the foundation upon which the Church rested and would continue to be built and that such "foundation" was not expected to expand. Moreover, Paul joins the two groups into that one foundation; there is no reason to think that their ministry would be anything other than co-extensive.

Grudem (2000:340) has argued that the reference in Ephesians 2:20 to the one

foundation of the apostles and prophets indicates Paul is using the two nouns to signify one group. This is necessary for Grudem's argument that, while the office of the apostles (who were also prophets) have ceased; this has no effect on the office and role of the New Testament prophets, which continues. Grudem admits that if this passage makes the distinction between the two groups, and at the same time unites them in a foundational role, his argument fails. In answering the question of whether Ephesians 2:20 makes a general statement that covers all the other New Testament statement on prophecy, Grudem (2000:45-46) states:

If everyone with the gift of prophecy in the New Testament church did have this kind of absolute divine authority [as the apostles did], then we would expect this gift to die as soon as the writings of the New Testament were completed and given to the churches. Most Christians today would certainly agree that the New Testament is complete and that no one today can speak or write words with the same authority as the words of the Bible.

6. A Critique of Grudem's "apostles who are also prophets" in Ephesians 2:20

Grudem (2000:333-339) provides seven arguments to support his view (see sections 4 and 5 above). But his arguments can all be reasonably answered:

First, Daniel Wallace (1983) has effectively argued against the grammatical possibility that Ephesians 2:20 refers to one group. The construction *article-noun-kai-noun*, which is the basis for the Granville Sharp rule, requires (among other things) that neither noun is plural, if it refers to only one group or person. For one thing, Grudem (2000:340) interprets the syntax of *the apostles and prophets* without due regard for the fact that this construction involves plural nouns. With the exception of Ephesians 4:11, Grudem (2000:330-346) fails to cite a single example of the construction as found in Ephesians 2:20. Every one of the texts he alludes to in favor of his exegesis is an example of a construction involving something other than two plural nouns.

Even if Grudem corrected this problem, his exegesis still has to overcome the obstacle namely, that the method he employs to interpret the syntax of the article-noun-kai-noun plural construction in Ephesians 2:20, , has neither clear nor unambiguous parallels in the New Testament as Wallace (1983:59-84) has shown. In addition, Wallace has shown that even the one true grammatical parallel that Grudem cites (Eph 4:11, some shepherds and teachers) has been widely misunderstood because few exegetes have ever seriously investigated the semantic range of the article-noun-kai-noun plural construction. In fact he boldly challenges the exegesis of Ephesians 4:11 by Grudem and others, emphatically insisting, "that such a view has no grammatical basis" in New Testament usage, and maintains that the least likely interpretation of Ephesians 4:11 is that it means "the pastor-teachers, that is, the pastors who are also teachers"; more likely, it means "the pastors and other teachers" (ibid, 1983:83).

With the lack of grammatical evidence favouring Grudem's (2000:329-346) interpretation, one can give little or no credence to his conclusion that the translation "the apostles who are also prophets" is "just as valid [as the translation "the apos-

bles and prophets" and perhaps even more in keeping with New Testament usage. On the contrary, Wallace (1983:82) confirms that, while Grudem's exegesis is a theoretically possible meaning of the construction in question, it is nevertheless, statistically speaking the least likely meaning of that construction. At this point, it should be noted that the syntactical evidence is decidedly against Grudem's exegesis of Ephesians 2:20. Statistically speaking, the most likely meaning of the text according to Gaffin (1979:95) is that it represents apostles and prophets as two distinct groups united by their function as "foundational stones" of the universal church. Thus, one with the gift of prophecy did not have necessarily the office of an apostle. The prophets, however, were still vehicles of authoritative divine revelation, some of which passed into written form and became Scripture (as could be argued in reference to the book of Hebrews). Canonical books written by non-apostles were prophets; the apostles in their canonical writings also used the prophetic gift. The early church understood the canonicity of both sources by virtue of their prophetic nature.

Second, Paul states in Ephesians 3:5 that it was precisely the "apostles and prophets" to whom it was revealed that "Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body." The grammatical argument above supports the distinction of the groups. Grudem intends to use this as an independent argument, but, in reality, he begs the question because he assumes the conclusion of his first argument. Grudem asserts that the apostles were the sole recipients of the revelation of Gentile inclusion. According to Gentry (1989:32), this observation is basically an argument from silence, since the New Testament clearly affirms the apostles' reception of the revelation but is silent on the prophets' reception of it. We therefore must conclude that only the apostles received it. The validity of Grudem's claim depends on whether he has established a burden of proof. It is my contention that, the claims of Grudem fail because he does not take into consideration the relationship between the oracles of Agabus and the revelation of the Gentile inclusion. Thus Grudem's (2000:70-83) only interest in these prophecies is to establish their edifying function and to challenge the claim that they possessed absolute divine authority. The prophecies of Agabus, however, has invaluable reference for evaluating the prophets' relation to the revelation mentioned in Ephesians 3. In Acts 11:28, an oracle from Agabus, a prophet in the Jerusalem church (11:27), prompt the Greek disciples at Antioch to contribute to the famine relief for their Judean brothers and sisters (11:29). Gaffin (1979:99) states that Agabus' prophecy reports a revelation pertaining directly to that aspect of the mystery of Christ mentioned in Ephesians 3:6, and this prophecy is foundational because it brings into effect the occasion of cementing the newly-established, foundational bond of fellowship between Jews and Gentiles within the early church. Likewise, in Acts 21:10-11, Agabus prophesy directly to the progress of Paul's apostolic ministry to the Gentiles, the aspect of the mystery discussed in Ephesians 3. For all its relevance to the specific life situations and concerns in the early church, the prophecies of Agabus are nevertheless revelations and authoritative with an undeniably direct and integral connection to the mystery revealed in Christ. Grudem therefore appears to be incorrect when he assumes that the New Testament is

silent on the prophets' reception of revelation(s) pertaining to the issue of Gentile inclusion in the church.

Third, to assert that the prophets could not be a distinct group in the foundation because they continued to exist is to make a circular argument. He is in effect arguing that they were not a distinct group in the foundation because they continued to exist, and they continued to exist because they were not a distinct group in the foundation. (Only the apostles were the foundation, and they have ceased). This is formally fallacious. In this connection, Grudem argues that if the apostles performed prophetic functions, and if the apostles Paul and John spoke of their personal prophetic activity, then there is no inherent reason why the apostles as a group could not be called "prophets" in Ephesians 2:20 provided the grammar and the context favour that interpretation. Grudem (2000:28,333) attaches a crucial and fatal proviso to his claim. He says the identification of the apostles, as "prophets" is reasonable, "provided the grammar and context favor this interpretation." As already pointed out above, neither the grammar nor the context of Ephesians 2:20 favours Grudem's exegesis. The lack of merit in his proviso, then, robs Grudem's point here of its intended force. Moreover, the warrant for the identification of the apostles as prophets turns on the criterion by which someone is identified as a prophet. Though I cannot argue the point fully here, I would contend that since the New Testament customarily links spiritual gifts to the ongoing ministries and stewardships of some believers in distinction to others (Rm. 12:4-6; 1 Cor 12:5, 28-30; 1 Pet 4:10-11), Gaffin elaborates (1979:95) that: "One should understand that in the absence of evidence to the contrary the term prophet applies to those believers who by virtue of their ongoing engagement in prophetic activity are distinguished from other believers".

Using this criterion in evaluating the apostles' prophesying, one can conclude that their identification, individually or collectively, as prophets is based more on conjecture than proof. For instance, Paul certainly alludes to his own prophetic activity (1 Cor 14:6), but the evidence for his identification as a prophet in the conventional sense is inconclusive, firstly, because his prophesying does not appear as an ongoing ministry that distinguished him from other believers, and secondly and more importantly, because Paul invariably distinguishes himself from others by identifying his "gift" (stewardship, ministry, or grace) as that of apostleship or its non-prophetic correlates. Moreover, that John (and arguably Peter) engaged on occasion in prophetic activity (Rv 1:3; 22:7; Ac 10:9-29) fails to meet the criterion above for identifying him as a prophet in the customary sense.

Third, apart from considerations of the grammar and context of Ephesians 2:20, it is pure speculation to argue that any of the other apostles met the criterion and could therefore be called prophets. In the light of these considerations, it would seem wise to say that the prophesying by New Testament apostles illustrates how God could make an exception to his customary practice and enable those who were not otherwise prophets to exercise the gift of prophecy temporarily on particular occasions (cf. Ac 19:6). As I have shown in this discussion, there is sufficient justification to follow Grudem in designating the apostles as prophets, that is, as those whose ministry and stewardship in the body of Christ was that of

ongoing engagement in prophetic activity.

Fourth, to assert that Paul was referring to the universal church, and not to the local prophets, it to beg the question. It is a mere assertion, intended to serve as a supporting argument for what is assumed in the assertion. This is also true for his fifth, sixth, and seventh assertions. Grudem can assert that Paul did not refer to Gentile prophets (which in itself would invalidate his arguments elsewhere) and that other passages in the New Testament talk about "ordinary prophets". Moreover, Grudem claims that in Ephesians 2-3 Paul ignores the supposed inclusion of Gentile as well as Jewish prophets in the church's foundation, even though such an idea would have been most pertinent to his argument for the equality of Jews and Gentiles. But here again we find Grudem arguing from silence, and again the validity of his argument depends on whether he has established a burden of proof. According to Lincoln (1990:170-172), the chief difficulty with Grudem's analysis is that he fails to take adequate account of the relationship between Ephesians 2 and 3. To be sure, one can agree with Grudem that Paul's concern in 2:11-22 is to demonstrate that through Christ, God has brought about equality (fellowship) between Jews and Gentiles. But what is Paul's interest in 3:1-13? In this passage Paul describes his ministry as a stewardship of preaching the mystery of Christ to the Gentiles, especially that aspect of the mystery, which is the equality of Jews and Gentiles in Christ. Paul's interest then is in defining his ministry to the Gentiles as it relates to God's work through Christ, a discussion of great importance to his Gentile readers.

In taking full account of Paul's focus in Ephesians 3, it can be seen why Grudem clearly ignores the importance of Gentile prophets in the foundation while advancing his argument, namely, that Paul is evidently more concerned to define the relationship between his preaching and the equality of Jews and Gentiles than he is to demonstrate further the truth of that equality. It is not, as Grudem suggests, that Paul inexplicably ignores the Gentile prophets in the foundation while pursuing his argument; rather, it is that Paul ignores everyone in the foundation other than himself, except to identify himself with them as those to whom God had revealed the mystery. Suffice it to say therefore that Paul's focus on his own ministry explains why he "fails" to cite the foundational Gentile prophets as proof of the equality of Jews and Gentiles in the church.

Grudem argues that there is no record in the New Testament of prophets who were not apostles but his conclusion is already assumed in this assertion. The conclusion he uses for the basis of his arguments is that Ephesians 2:20 refers to one foundational group (the apostles), of which other prophets were not part. This, of course, begs the question. Grudem recognises that Paul's statement in Ephesians 2:20 become foundational for all other exegesis of prophecy in the New Testament if apostles and prophets are two distinct groups and that the prophetic gift is co-extensive with the apostolic office and function. Given the above considerations, it seems more likely that Paul was referring to apostles and prophets as the foundation of the Church. Consequently, as Sinclair Ferguson (1996:268) states, this "inevitably and necessarily exercises a controlling function," because these offices are explicitly "foundational".

It is important to point out that the prophets to which Paul refers in Ephesians 2:20 were New Testament prophets. There are several reasons for this.

First, the word “apostles” comes before “prophets.” If Old Testament prophets were in view, it should be expected that prophets would have preceded apostles. The order of the words suggests that New Testaments prophets are meant, and that the reference must be to a small group of inspired teachers, associated with the apostles. Their teaching was derived from revelation and was foundational.

Second, in Ephesians 3:5 Paul expressly says that the revelation of the inclusive Gospel had now been made (*nun aiekalufthei*) to Christ’s holy apostles and prophets (*tois hagios apostolois auto kai prophytys*). It seems clear that the reference is to new revelation not explicitly given in the Old Testament, but now made evident to New Testament prophets. The only possible objection is that, again, Paul might be referring to one group. The arguments above against this view should be sufficient here also.

Having established that Paul in Ephesians 2:20 is more likely referring to apostles and prophets, as two distinct groups forming the foundation, there are important implications for the understanding of the role of the prophets, on which I shall now focus.

7. The Role of the Prophets

Apostles and prophets were the first authoritative recipients and proclaimers of God’s revelation in Christ. To assert that these Gentile believers are built upon the apostles and prophets is to state that their membership in God’s people rests on the normative teaching that arises from divine revelation. Aune (1983:338) argues that the distinctive of Christian prophetic speech was its (at least believed) supernatural origin. This evidence supports the argument that Paul would neither have treated true divine prophetic revelation as fallible, nor allowed for the possibility of its continuance if its foundational role in the revelation of the New Covenant scriptures had been fulfilled.

If the apostles and prophets were the “foundation”, it should be asked, what was the extent of that foundation? I have already mentioned that Paul’s statement cannot be divorced from his understanding of the divine and infallible revelation of the Gospel as the foundation of the Church. As a result, there is evidence that the office and role of the apostles was understood by the early Church and by the apostles themselves to have been foundational and limited in time (i.e., co-extensive with the revelation of God’s Word in the New Covenant). To understand the role of the apostles properly, it is essential to recognise that the New Testament was written by them and their close associates. To them was given, by the Holy Spirit, the ability to precisely remember the words and teachings of Jesus (as well as to receive direct revelation after his ascension), and to teach and record them in a unified doctrinal whole without error (cf. Jn 14:25-26). Because of this, the apostles explicitly considered their own writings as being on the same level of inspiration and authority as the Old Testament Scriptures. They were aware that the documents they were producing were inspired by God as Scripture, and were to be received by the churches as such (cf. 2 Pet 3:2, 16; 1 Cor 14:3; 1 Thess 2:13).

The apostles were directly commissioned by Jesus to preach, teach, and write his inspired Word to the Church. If the apostolic office was to be extended throughout the history of the Church, any apostle, at any time, by virtue of his office, could expect the Church to receive his writings as direct revelation from God, inspired documents to be annexed to the Bible.

The biblical evidence, however, suggests that there could be no apostles succeeding the original group. Paul clearly states he was the last apostle to be commissioned by Jesus (1 Cor 15:7-9) and direct commissioning by the Lord was a necessary requirement for the apostolic office (cf. Mt 10:1-7; Ac 1:21-26; Gl 1:1, 11-12). This excludes the possibility that there were any apostles commissioned by God after Paul, i.e., after the middle of the first century, let alone today (as some have claimed). Consequently, as Paul makes provision for the government of the Church after his departure, he instructs Timothy and Titus to appoint bishops, elders (the two words he uses interchangeably) and deacons (cf. 1 Tim 3; Tt 1), not apostles.

This becomes critical for the understanding of the role of the prophets, since Paul has joined the two offices together coextensively as the foundation of the Church. There were no apostles commissioned after Paul, and he seemed to have also understood that there were no prophets after the foundational time of the Church. There is, to be sure, a difference as to how precisely the line can be drawn to demarcate the ceasing of those offices. In the case of the apostles, it can be deduced that if only the original commissioned group could exercise the office, the office dies with the last living apostle. In this case, if Christian tradition is correct, the office of the apostle ceased with the death of the apostle John at the end of the first century. As to the prophets, on the other hand, it is more difficult to make a clear-cut demarcation, since they were not a specific group directly appointed by Jesus.

It seems incorrect to argue that in 1 Corinthians 13:8-12 Paul specifically states that prophecy (and other gifts) would cease with the completion of the canon (indicated by *'to teleion'*). However, Gaffin (1979:570) rightfully observes that, it is not Paul's point in that passage to make clear demarcations, but to indicate that Christ's return would eliminate partialities, without prohibiting discontinuities in the meantime. Nonetheless, inasmuch as their offices were foundational in the sense that they were intrinsically tied to the giving of the New Testament, it should be expected that they would cease with the consolidation of the canon. As Ferguson (1996:226) argues, it would be misguided to expect the cessation of prophecy to be synchronised with the death of the last apostle. Such cessation, however, would be as gradual as the gathering and establishing of the canon.

With the completion of the last book of the New Testament, it should be expected that the gift of prophecy would become obsolete. The book of Revelation, which is the last in the canon, pronounces a severe penalty on anyone who would attempt to add or subtract from its prophecies. Those who understand the book to cover events from the first century to the eschaton have argued that by implication the prohibition applies to any prophecy added after Revelation.

I have argued that Ephesians 2:20 supports the classical cessationist view that

the gift of prophecy was foundational to the Church, and, as such, does not continue today. Paul refers to two groups, the apostles and prophets as being the one foundation upon which the Church is built. Paul's statement cannot be understood apart from the revelatory nature of their offices. As the revelation of the Word of God for the New Covenant was completed with the consolidation of the canon, the foundation had fulfilled its purpose. Consequently, any other discussion of the role of prophets and prophecy in the New Testament has to take into account, first, that Paul understood prophets as necessarily connected to apostles in their revelatory role. If the apostolic prophetic revelation was infallible, it follows that non-apostolic prophetic revelation was also infallible. Second, that both offices were "foundational", and as such, not expected to continue in the life of the Church after the completion of the canon. I thus conclude that in Ephesians 2:20 the New Testament prophets are distinct from but united with the apostles in their function as foundation stones of the church. Indeed, recognising the periodisation of redemptive history implied in Ephesians 2:20 and its context, I would contend that the New Testament prophets had a temporary, non-continuing function in the church's history, and so by God's design passed out of its life, along with the apostles.

8. Conclusion

From the nature of the discussion in this article, the evidence demands the view that the New Testament prophetic gift ceased its operation very early in the history of the church. Furthermore, although no one single argument alone demonstrates this, the aggregate weight of the total evidence decisively points to this conclusion. When claims to prophetic activity today (and indeed throughout church history) are compared to the biblical record, woeful inaccuracy and inadequacy of such practices are evidenced. It is of paramount importance to make a diligent, careful scrutiny of the scriptural evidence regarding such activities. Only by such a close examination can the body of Christ guard against serious doctrinal error and misunderstanding which can and does result from such concepts of "mistaken" prophecy.

Christ's warning to His church must be heeded: "Beware of the false prophets... You will know them by their fruits" (Mt 7:15-16a; cf. 24:11, 24; Mk 13:22; Ac 20:28-31). While the cessationist camp arguably may have "survived" the tongues issue of previous years, this charismatic concept of a form of "mistaken" or fallible prophets and prophecy that is sweeping across traditional lines has the potential of doing untold harm to God's people (Jude 3). However, the church should long for authentic prophetic preaching, which is relevant to contemporary times and which proceeds from the authority of Scripture.

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