

Edification, Exhortation, and Comfort

Text - 1 Cor. 14:3

The Purposes of Prophesying.....To edification, and exhortation, and comfort.

Prophecy - (1Cor. 11:5; 14:3-4). Not simply 'to foretell future events,' but to 'expound' or to 'forth-tell' the truth of God's Word & Will.

I think about a sign on a department store dressing room mirror that read: "Objects in mirror may appear bigger than they actually are." As we have studied 1 Corinthians we have learned about a Church that had more than average problems. They were divisive, cliquish, worldly, envious, jealous, arrogant, and disorderly. Their condition is best summed up in chapter 3:1, "And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ." Paul states that their carnality is the root cause of all their problems. We read in 1 Corinthians 3:3, "For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?"

Added to all the problems in the Church, as we move into chapter 14 we find that they were also making something bigger than it actually was. Much like today, speaking in tongues was a big issue in the Corinthian Church. To the Corinthians, speaking in tongues was THE gift. In the mind of the Corinthians, if you had the gift of tongues, you were really "spiritual." They felt that those who had the gift of tongues were superior to those who did not have the gift. Those who did not have the gift were inferior to those that did.

Paul has been talking about spiritual gifts in general but in chapter 14 he specifically deals with the gift of tongues. In the opening verses he tells them that they were making a big deal out of that which was not a big deal. They were making the gift of tongues much bigger than it actually was.

In chapter 14 Paul contrasts the gift of tongues with the gift of prophecy. He makes it clear that the gift of prophecy was the preferred gift. Let me remind you what Paul meant by prophesying (Cp.12:10). The word simply means "to speak forth, to proclaim." We often think of prophecy in the terms of prediction; the foretelling of future events. Such an ideal is often derived from the fact that the prophets of the Bible often spoke of future events. Prophecy is simply the proclaiming of God's Word. When the prophets were foretelling future events, they in themselves were not just predicting the future, but simply proclaiming what God had revealed unto them. **The gift of prophecy was a matter of forth telling rather than foretelling.**

There was a marked difference of judgment between Paul and his Corinthian converts with regard to the relative value of speaking with tongues and of prophesying. The Corinthians were disposed to set too high a value upon the more brilliant and startling gift; its novelty and singularity seem to have so impressed them with admiration that, in comparison with it, gifts which appealed to sober reason sank into insignificance. Paul, however, who himself spoke with tongues, maintains the superiority of the rational and moral endowment over that which surprised the sense and dazzled the imagination. He does this most successfully by exhibiting in this verse the purposes of prophesying.

The Purposes of Prophesying.....To edification, and exhortation, and comfort.

I EDIFICATION. A prophet is one who speaks from God and for God, to his fellow men. The prophets of the old covenant came before their fellow countrymen with messages which they prefaced by the declaration, "Thus saith the Lord." In the new dispensation, there seems to have been at first an order of prophets, but in addition to these there were many who upon occasion uttered forth the mind of God. Now, since human nature is dependent upon truth, upon spiritual motive, upon personal influence, for the realization of the designs of the Creator, it is dear that a true prophet is one who apprehends those designs, and seeks their accomplishment by means ordered by Divine wisdom. Character and moral life require building up, *i.e.* upon a divinely laid foundation, by the use of divinely provided material, so that the edifice may assume form, proportions, beauty, in consonance with the idea of the great Architect. Hence the importance given in the New Testament to that element in prophecy denominated edification. No individual can become full grown, no society can be at once progressive and secure, where this department of ministry is lacking.

II EXHORTATION. It must never be forgotten that the communication of knowledge is not the whole of ministry; that religion is not altogether a matter of the intellect; that human life is not simply one long lesson. Man is so framed that he is bound to action, and that he needs inducements, directions, encouragement, with a view to such action as shall be acceptable to his Maker and Saviour. Especially do the young, and converts whose principles are not fully formed, whose habits are not yet established, need frequent admonition. St. Paul reminds us that this also is part of the prophetic office and ministry.

III CONSOLATION. If the necessity of exhortation follows upon the characteristics of human nature, the necessity of consolation arises from the circumstances of human life. Stronger than human philosophy, and tenderer, the consolations of Christian prophecy are able to bind up all wounds, and to cheer all sad and downcast hearts.—**T. HOMILIES BY R. TUCK Ver. 3.—**

Christian prophesying.

In our day a "prophet" is one who predicts future events, but in the older times the word included much more than that. Old Testament prophets were religious teachers who revealed the will of God, and expounded the Word of God. Moses was a prophet, but his chief work was religious teaching. John the Baptist was a prophet, but he appeared as a preacher of repentance and of righteousness. New Testament prophets were the teachers or preachers of the Word—men to whom God had given special insight into his Divine truth, and a happy faculty of imparting that truth to others. The verse now before us describes the proper results that are to be reached by the prophecy, or ministry, of the Word. The gift of prophesying, or preaching, is the most useful and most practical of all the gifts. Other gifts direct attention to the man who possesses them; this gift makes a man a blessing to others, for he may speak to "edification, and exhortation, and comfort."

I THE PROPER SPHERE OF THE CHRISTIAN PROPHET. Theoretically our pastors are separated unto the ministry of the Word; practically the office is very sadly confused, and our pastors are brought into the most hindering and injurious contact with common worldly things and inferior Church duties. The Pauline idea is, that God has bestowed a variety of gifts upon his Church, and the true conception of his Church is only realized when each man uses faithfully his own gift without interfering with the gifts of others. The work of the Christian pastor is precisely this—by teaching and preaching to cultivate the spiritual life of believers. They should nourish so high and so vigorous a life and activity in the members of the Church as that each one might become, in his place, a light of God, a power for God; each one, in his own way, a holy force bringing in other souls to Christ. It does not matter what other work a pastor may do well, whether it be visiting or governing or writing, he is not faithful to his call and to his office unless by preaching he can speak to men "unto edification, and exhortation, and comfort." It would be a time of holiest revival for the Church of Christ, if her ministers might say, "For all other forms of work, look you out men from amongst you, full of the Holy Ghost and of faith, but we will give ourselves to the Word of the Lord and to prayer." If ministers could be more truly separated to their own proper work, they would bring, out of the deserts of holy stillness and quiet, the most heart stirring views of truth and the noblest spiritual influences. Moses came forth in power from the lonely wilderness. Elijah burst out as a sudden flash of Divine fire from the privacies and hidings of the desert. Our Lord himself had a scene of lonely stillness and struggle on the threshold of his ministry, and his story tells of nights on the desolate mountain brow, or in the shady garden outside the city. The Christian prophet can only come forth aright into his sphere, if he dwells in the "secret place of the Most High, and abides under the shadow of the Almighty."

II THE PROPER INFLUENCE OF THE CHRISTIAN PROPHET WITHIN HIS SPHERE. His sphere is the Church. He is to be a spiritual power upon its members. That is work enough for any man. To do it aright he must know all the forms and influences of human sorrow; he must understand, and find the antidote for, all the subtleties, devices, and diseases of temptation and of evil; he must win the power to

sympathize in every joy that gladdens, and in every sorrow that clouds, the Christian heart. He must be able keenly, critically, to estimate the spirit of the age, "the signs of the times," the tone of social, moral, and religious life, so as to judge aright of the atmosphere in which Christian life has to be lived. He must have a wide acquaintance with the history of Christian thought, and with the books exerting present influence upon the Christian mind. He must be deeply read in the mystery and meaning of God's great Book, so that, "like a scribe instructed to the kingdom, he may bring forth out of his treasury things new and old." Surely all this is a full life-work for any man. Observe the specific terms by which St. Paul describes the Christian prophet's influence.

1. **Edification**—a term bearing immediate relation to Christian growth. There is to be growth, under pastoral influence, in knowledge, in character, in the great grace of self denial, in control over the bad passions and inclinations of a corrupt nature, and growth in practical devotedness to all works of charity. Building up on all these sides must be continued, if the plan of the Divine Architect is to be seen gaining completion in the temple of our life.

3. **Exhortation**—a term bearing relation to Christian dangers, failings, and temptations. Warnings, revelations of the evils of sin, searching pictures of the common experience of frail men, calls to neglected duties—these are "exhortations," and a faithful ministry must deal largely with them. It must reach the worldly minded, the almost drunken, the man whose hands are stained with dishonest or ungenerous deeds, the injurer of the widow and the fatherless, the selfish, the proud, the unforgiving. He must "warn all the wicked from the error of their way."

4. **Comfort**—a term bearing relation to Christian sorrows. The pastor's words are to be holy words of quiet, tender memories of past goodnesses, gentle whispers of the stability of the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, which may lift suffering souls up to their rest in the bosom of the heavenly Father, and lull the tired heart into a sweet sleep upon the "everlasting arms." What would Christian life be without its *comfortings*? It is no little thing that our pastors can bring balm for wounded hearts; leaves for the healing of bruised hearts; whispers of the eternal love for doubting hearts; and upliftings for downcast, tear-filled eyes, so that they may see the great High Priest "touched with the feeling of our infirmities," and "tempted even as we are."—R.T.

1. Preaching edifices – I Corinthians 14:3 "But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification."

2. **Faith edifies** – Jude 20 “Building yourself up on your most holy faith.”

3. **Love edifies** – I Corinthians 8:1 “Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies.”

4. **Spiritual gifts edify** – I Corinthians 14:12 “Since you are zealous for spiritual gifts let it be for edification.”