

The Work of the Holy Spirit in Revelation

How do Christians expect God to speak to today?

Why do you think that many Christians today prefer to hear God speak through contemporary words and prophecies than through the Bible?

THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE BIBLE

The Inspiration of the Bible

The prophets who wrote the Old Testament were inspired by the Spirit of Christ
1 Peter 1v10-12; 2 Peter 1v19-21

The apostles who wrote the New Testament were guided by the Holy Spirit
John 14v25-26

The Scriptures are inspired by God
2 Tim 3v15

The word of God is the sword of the Spirit
Ephesians 6v17

Read: 2 Timothy 3v15-17

How did the Scriptures come to be written?

Why does Scripture have authority?

What part did the Holy Spirit have to play in the writing of Scripture?
What are the Scriptures able to achieve?

Is any further revelation from God necessary in order to live the Christian life?

God speaks through the Bible

Whilst the Bible might seem to be God's word from the past rather than his word for the present, the New Testament suggests that God speaks today through the Bible.

Read: Hebrews 3v7-18

What passage of scripture is quoted in these verses?

Why does the author of Hebrews quote these verses?

How does the author of Hebrews apply these verses to his readers?

What connection does the author of Hebrews make between the passage quoted and the work of the Holy Spirit?

THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE GIFT OF PROPHECY

What is prophecy?

Prophecy is a gift of the Holy Spirit
1 Corinthians 12v10; Romans 12v6

Prophecy involves the receipt of revelations from God
1 Corinthians 14v5 & 29-30

Not every Christian possesses the gift of prophecy
1 Corinthians 12v29

Women are able to exercise the gift of prophecy in the church
1 Corinthians 11v3-5 (cf. 1 Timothy 2v12)

Christians are to take prophecies seriously
1 Thessalonians 5v19

Prophecy is more beneficial for the church than the gift of tongues

Read: 1 Corinthians 14v1-5 & 18-19

What does Paul want the church at Corinth to do?

Why does he consider prophecy a greater gift than the gift of tongues?

Is the gift of prophecy available to Christians today?

Until the rise of Pentecostalism at the end of the 19th Century, and more recently of the charismatic movement, many Christians thought that the miraculous gifts of the Spirit had ceased to be available to the church at the end of the apostolic age. These included the gifts of tongues and prophecy. This view is termed cessationism 1 Corinthians 13v8-10 speaks of a time when prophecies will cease and tongues will be stilled. It was thought that this meant the completion of the canon of Scripture, thus fulfilling the promise of v10 that 'when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears.' It is much more likely that Paul is referring to the coming of the end of the age when Jesus Christ returns, and that he expected the gifts of the Spirit to continue to be available to the church during the whole of the church age (cf. also Acts 2-17-21 which seems to speak of the whole period until Christ's return). This is the view expressed in the Doctrinal Distinctives of City Church.

How should we expect God to speak through the gift of prophecy?

Whilst it seems that the gift of prophecy is available to the church today it is all too easy to misunderstand how God might speak today. It is extremely common to think that vague impressions and subjective feelings might be God speaking to us. The content of many prophecies given in church are vague and general in nature, and seldom involve specific information or predictions about the future which could be verified and tested. Rarely is anyone identified as having given a false or inaccurate prophecy. It is important to be guided by what the New Testament suggests the gift of prophecy will be like, rather than by the expectations of contemporary Christian culture. In the new Testament when God speaks by his Spirit he always speaks clearly and unmistakably (e.g. Acts 8v29, 10v19, 11v12, 13v2, 16v6-10, 20v23, 21v11). The difficulty is always one of obedience, not of knowing what God is saying.

Read: Acts 11v27-30 & Acts 21v10-14

What did Agabus predict in his two prophecies?

How accurate were his words?

How were his words verifiable?

Read: 1 Corinthians 14v24-25

What effect does Paul expect the exercise of the gift of prophecy to have on the unbeliever?

Why will it have this effect?

How should the gift of prophecy be used in the church today?

Prophecies should be given in an orderly and organised context
1 Corinthians 14v29-32

Every prophecy should be tested before it is accepted
1 Corinthians 14v29-33; 1 Thessalonians 5v21

The gift of prophecy should only be exercised by a person in accordance with the level of his or her spiritual maturity
Romans 12v6

The church must beware of false prophets
1 John 4v1 (cf. Matthew 7v22)

These requirements would suggest that when a person claims to speak the word of God in a prophecy the church should test both the *character* of the person making the claim (including a careful scrutiny of his or her doctrine, spiritual maturity and track record in previous prophetic claims) and the *content* of the specific prophesy (which should be tested by those who are spiritually mature and in leadership in the church to determine whether it is in accordance with Scripture). At City Church we would ask that any person who believes that God has spoken a prophetic word to them should come first to the Elders, who bear the responsibility of testing whether the word is from God and deciding whether it should be given to the congregation.

THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE GIFT OF TONGUES

Does God speak through tongues today?

The purpose of the gift of tongues is often misunderstood. Many Christians think that God may speak through a person with the gift of tongues, and that the tongue must be interpreted so that the church can understand what God is saying. However the New Testament would suggest that rather than being a means by which *God speaks to the church* (which is prophecy), the gift of tongues enables *individuals to speak to God* in a language other than their own.

Read: 1 Corinthians 14v13-17 & 26-28

What, according to Paul, does a person do when he or she speaks in tongues?

Why does Paul think that tongues should only be used in public if an interpretation is available?

How will the church be damaged if people speak in tongue in public but they are not interpreted?

In the light of these verses do you think that God speaks today through the gift of tongues?

Summary

God is free to speak by his Spirit today, and the gift of prophecy is available to the church. However God does not promise that he will speak in this way, and the gifts are distributed as he determines (1 Corinthians 12v11). We must make sure that we do not neglect the Scriptures, which are the sure and certain word of God, treating vague subjective feelings and impressions as if they were God speaking. We need to remember that God speaks through the Bible by his Spirit, and that the Scriptures are sufficient to bring men and women to salvation, and to equip them to live a Christian life which is pleasing to God.

For Further reading:

DA Carson, *Showing the Spirit*

Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, IVP, pp 73-89; 127-138; 1049-1061; 1069-1080

J I Packer, *Keep in Step With the Spirit*, IVP, pp 214-217; 239-241

Sinclair Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit*, IVP, pp 212-237