



Prophetically Hearing Instead of Doing

*¹The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, the things which must soon take place; and He sent and communicated it by His angel to His bond-servant John, ²who testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw. ³Blessed is he who **reads** and those who **hear** the words of the prophecy, and **heed** the things which are written in it; for the time is near. (Rev. 1:1-3)*

I have never really come across another person phrasing it the way I do, so perhaps I am singularly obsessed or simply self-deceived, but why is it that I can gather a roomful of sound Bible teachers who, regardless of denomination or theological association, basically all agree on the doctrines of salvation, justification and sanctification, but cannot come to **anything** resembling a consensus when it comes to eschatology? In fact, why is it that in **this** arena, so many of them are ready to shoot each other dead? Christian-on-Christian hate crime is nowhere more publicly prolific than when the discussion turns to the End Times and **especially** the timing of the Rapture. I have come to believe that one of the principle causal roots is in the opening to Revelation above, that when it comes to God's prophetic Word, we are not just supposed to stop at "read" and "hear", but to follow through with "heed". In other word, it seems like the standard behavior even across denominational and theological divides is to employ a new set of rules and standards to prophecy which at the least deviate from, and often outright violate, the way all other Scripture is handled.

On the most surface level, it seems that God's prophetic Word is mined for information to be recorded and charted rather than incarnated so as to be personally applied. "Incarnation" is the fancy term explaining how something spiritual is put into practice to the degree that it actually shapes our faith by changing our behavior, thinking and attitudes from the older worldly person we were saved from, and into the new creation in Christ we are becoming. Merely possessing the information is not the same as putting it into practice so as to live differently because of it. The Holy Spirit constantly challenges us while we are in God's Word as to what we should be **doing** with Scripture and how we

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should be applying it to our life so as to be changed into the image and likeness of Christ, what Paul describes as being “transformed”.

¹⁸But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit. (2 Co. 3:18)

This is the goal of all Scripture, and there is **no exemption** for prophecy.

³But one who prophesies speaks to men for edification and exhortation and consolation. (1 Co. 14:3)

Paul provides a definition of the purpose of prophecy which seems to be frequently overlooked. Too many, when asked to provide a description of what prophecy looks like, cite prediction and date setting of specific events; here we have Scripture providing a concrete definition which has very little to do with that presupposition. If we studied each prophet’s writings in the Bible, and listed everything they said under one side of the page as setting a date or making a prediction, we would find that it is a comparatively short list to everything else falling under the opposite column, which repeatedly meets the definition of “*edification and exhortation and consolation*”.

This is because the true role of a biblical prophet is something more akin to being an evangelist to believers, urging them to return from their backslidden condition, an encourager to them that continuing in God’s Word and ways is the best course, and providing them the comfort and assurance that God is still in control in spite of the outward circumstances which, by the world’s standards, seem quite to the contrary. They are not merely conveyors of information, but preachers of righteousness. God’s prophetic Word needs to be handled with the same rules, care and approach as the rest of His Word, because it is actually intended to accomplish the same thing as all the rest: “*edification and exhortation and consolation*”. It is not something that can be entirely separated out from the rest of God’s Word and handled by a whole new set of rules in the false assumption that it only applies to historical dates, times and places, instead of facing the truth that it is first and foremost intended to change and shape our walk and faith in Christ.

One of the hallmarks of those claiming to be prophets, but who are not, is the complete **absence** of these qualities. So many of them are betrayed for what they are by their sole focus on making a prediction, or setting a date, or coming up with something “new” which

can never be confirmed by God's already given, written Word, and usually contradicts it. I believe that one of the reasons Holy Spirit-filled believers are often repulsed outright by such personalities, or at the least inherently know that something is seriously wrong with these folks, is because what they are witnessing is neither edifying nor exhorting, much less consoling. Ironically, it is a very rare occasion when one of their predictions actually come true, so they are not even successful in their reduced focus. We know on some level, at least, that something is wrong because what such do and say never fully conforms to the biblical standards of a true prophet of God.

Paul's provision of a precise definition of the hallmarks of authentic prophecy comes within the greater context of explaining the roles and constraints of all the spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12-14. And ultimately the goal of each and every gift of the Spirit is not to in some way function *independently* in and of itself, but to all commonly accomplish *the same purpose*.

*⁴Now there are **varieties** of gifts, but the same Spirit. ⁵And there are **varieties** of ministries, and the same Lord. ⁶There are **varieties** of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons. ⁷But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit **for the common good**. (1 Co. 12:4-7)*

The point Paul keeps coming back to is that all of the gifts and offices within the Church have as a common purpose and goal the building up of the Body of Christ. **Prominently** included in the discussion is prophecy, which appears to have been just as much an issue in Corinth back then as it is today since prophecy and tongues are singled out and mentioned over and over again more than any of the other gifts. Much of the problem seems to stem from making one particular gift the be-all/end-all over all the rest, and not steering them to their common goal of building up the Body of Christ.

*¹²So also you, since you are zealous of spiritual gifts, **seek to abound for the edification of the church**. (1 Co. 14:12)*

When it comes to eschatology in particular, the vast majority of books, websites and online discussion forums seem to lack this constraining goal of seeking "*the edification of the church*", much less the greater embrace of "*edification and exhortation and consolation*". At best, they may be sincere in their desire to impart information as God's prophetic Word by emphasizing the possible attachments to a person, place or thing and often on or by a particular date, but more often the presentation of this information is aggressive and over-the-top in refuting their opposition on a personal level or asserting a

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particular position's perceived doctrinal dominance. But if the author or discussion participant does not have as their goals the exegeting of God's prophetic Word for edification in the first place, such results are really no surprise, are they?

An exercise I highly recommend for **every** believer of all levels and experience is to study the Olivet Discourse with the primary goal of asking, "What is it I'm being told **to do** with this? How do I **apply** this personally?" And then follow up this pursuit in the same manner with the book of Revelation, seeking to "**heed**" rather than merely read; just like the rest of God's Word when so approached, it can be life-changing. One of the chief benefits is that as a result, your faith and walk matures and you find yourself trusting in God's Word even more, even if particular End Times milestones' meanings are still in dispute. It also takes the edge off taking a harsher stance than necessary when encountering a brother or sister who is not in lockstep synchronicity with our point of view. Edification, exhortation and consolation **build up faith** rather than merely convey knowledge, and after all, the whole of God's Word is actually not a test of knowledge but faith.

It is probably unrealistic to believe this, but I think that many of the differences of opinions and outright disputes when it comes to all things eschatological would greatly diminish, if not melt away, if believers at every academic level first and foremost approached God's prophetic Word for the purpose of using it to edify, exhort and console, rather than solve a puzzle. The fact that when the dogmatic presentation and defense of eschatology results in conflict and division, this in and of itself proves the wrong handling of Scripture because what results is the exact **opposite** of building up the Body!

It is interesting that two of Jesus' own major concerns about believers living in the shadow of His Return were expressed as the question, "*However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?*" (Lk. 18:8), and the observation that, "*Because lawlessness is increased, most people's love will grow cold*". (Mt. 24:12) End Times charts and academic defense of positions and interpretations do little, if anything, to assuage the underlying root causes of these conditions, which we plainly see gaining a foothold in the present environment; it takes a willingness to pursue the greater goals of "*edification and exhortation and consolation*" to make a dent in the kind of change which is necessary to address such issues. Faith and love are qualities which cannot be achieved by information alone.

I cannot help but wonder what a so-called “prophecy conference” would look like if this was its goal, or for that matter, websites, books and speakers dedicated to all things eschatological. Perhaps I have identified the problem right there, that all too often the emphasis and priority of eschatology is ultimately a deception when it abandons the fundamental working of God’s Word in one’s faith by falling short of the pursuit of *“edification and exhortation and consolation”*, and instead substitutes the belief of the rightness of their information no matter how it affects others.

In Him,

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