

# THE ARTICLE BEGINS ON THE NEXT PAGE

## **Some Preliminary Comments - The Conflict Between the Prophet and the Evangelist**

- So often, it seems, there is conflict between people within the church. This article looks at one specific example, and then applies the conclusions to "the rest of us."
- Note: that the words "prophet" and "evangelist" are being used in a non-technical manner, referring to "one who has a gifted ability to comprehend truth" (as in 1 Corinthians 13:2) and "one who has a gifted ability to proclaim that truth (the 'good news')."

## The Conflict Between The Prophet and The Evangelist

[Note: the words “prophet” and “evangelist” are being used in a non-technical manner, referring to “one who has a gifted ability to comprehend truth” (as in 1 Corinthians 13:2) and “one who has a gifted ability to proclaim that truth (the ‘good news’).”]

There is a longstanding conflict between the individual who is gifted with knowing the Word of God with great accuracy (the prophet) and the one who is gifted with the ability to communicate with others (the evangelist). Rarely does the same individual have both gifts in equally great abundance; normally the individual will be strong in one area and weaker (though not necessarily totally deficient) in the other.

But should we be surprised? Did not God make us to function *together*, as a body? Each is to do his part... for the whole.

The prophet (the one gifted with the ability to understand Scripture) must carefully explain the Word of God, without adding to it or subtracting from it. If he fails to do this, he sins against the whole body, and ultimately leads it astray. And under such circumstances, it would have been better if he had never been born.

It was originally intended (following the analogy of the “body”—1 Corinthians 12) that those who best understood the Word of God would explain it, making sure that their words accurately expressed the message of the Scriptures (the “measuring rule” or “canon” of our faith—Romans 12:6b). In turn, those who were more gifted with speaking would listen to what they (the ones with a greater ability to understand the Word) were saying. They would learn from what was said—remembering, of course, to examine the Scriptures themselves, to make sure that what was said was accurate (Acts 17:11).

**T**he eye cannot say to the hand, “I don’t need you!”  
And the head cannot say to the feet, “I don’t need you!”

On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, while our presentable parts need no special treatment.

But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.

– 1 Corinthians 12:21-26

The evangelist—now armed with a better understanding of the Word—would use his own gift to express that truth in a way that would best be comprehended by the listeners. He would accurately “translate” the Word of God into our “modern” context, being careful to not “paraphrase,” “edit” or “revise” it in any manner. What he said—though spoken in a manner adapted to the context—would still have the same meaning as what was stated in Scripture. It would still match up to the “measuring rule” of our faith.

It seems that most evangelists and prophets tend to overlook their need for each other. Each tends to think that he can do without the other.

The evangelist may claim that the prophet is too “old fashioned” or “not relevant” or any of hundreds of other excuses for disregarding him. He may even use the prophet’s poorer “social skills” (compared to the evangelist) as a “justification” for ignoring him! As a result, the evangelist tends to go beyond what is written in the Word of God. Personal opinions, the

latest religious “fad” or “hobby horse,” books and commentaries, or even pragmatism become the focal point. Under the guise of “applying” the Word of God and “making it relevant,” the evangelist changes it (in contrast to “translating” it) and becomes guilty of either adding to it, or subtracting from it. He comes under God’s condemnation.

The prophet, on the other hand, may claim that the evangelist is too “modern.” He may look with

suspicion at the evangelist’s ability to “relate” to people and to talk “on their level”—perhaps interpreting it as an expression of “worldliness.” He may become offended by the evangelist’s poor use of Scripture, and reject him because of it. As a result, a wall of hostility is built between them. Ultimately, though the prophet may know the truth better most people, his knowledge accomplishes nothing. And the evangelist can’t learn from the prophet even if he wanted to.

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In such a situation, one might question whether or not these two people truly believe what is said in 1 Corinthians 12:21–26. For *believing* it implies the willingness to *live* by it. Yet the one who is the “mouth” (the evangelist, who has the gift of speaking) has decided that he has no need for the “eyes” (the prophet who is gifted in “seeing” and understanding what the message really is). And the one who is the “eye”—though able to see many things in Scripture—cannot see that he needs the “mouth.” Surely this is NOT what God intended!

The evangelist, in this case, is acting as though he were “self-sufficient.” He can do everything by himself. He may even think he *is* “everything,” and may consider anyone who isn’t a “mouth” inferior. After all, he gets all the attention; everyone flocks to him; everybody praises him. At times people may even name buildings and churches after him! Unfortunately, *his* message is in danger of ceasing to be *God’s* message. He is in danger of becoming a false shepherd—“the blind leading the blind.”

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The prophet may also consider himself to be “everything.” He will not get all the attention, or the following of the crowds, that the evangelist will get. He may even turn people away by the manner in which he tries to convince them of what he knows. And though he may be speaking the truth very accurately (though not necessarily in the most “socially–appealing” manner), his self-sufficiency will neutralize the good that he could have had on the lives of people.

The conflict between these two may not always be as visible and intense as described above. It may even be possible that the two might actually desire the other’s friendship—each not knowing that the other has the same desire. Each may be grieved over what

he perceives to be sin in the life (actions or attitudes) of the other—hindrances to friendship and cooperation—unaware that his own weaknesses contribute to the problem.

In each case, the individual’s value in the body of Christ will be proportional to his willingness to humble himself and to accept the part/function of the other (assuming, of course, that each is being done in accordance with the Word of God). Each needs to work to build-up the other. Each also needs to endeavor to develop in the areas of his own weaknesses.

Ultimately, each is utterly dependent on the other (and on God, of course) for *his own* abilities to be of maximum benefit to the body of Christ, and to all of mankind. Each—the prophet and the evangelist—needs the other.

But what about the rest of us? Does this truth apply *only* to prophets and evangelists? Has not Christ joined us *all* into the one body?

All of us need to remember that we are a *part* of the body of Christ, and not the *whole*. Nobody can live as though he was “everything.” Each of us needs to appreciate the role that other Christians have. We are not better than they, for in Christ, they are part of us!

So let us all live and work together as one body, since that is what we are. And if there is any desire to boast, let it be a boast not in men, but in the Lord—the true head of the body. Let us boast in what he has done in us, for us, and through us.



THE

**CONFLICT**

BETWEEN

the

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