

Grudem, Wayne, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today*. Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1988. 351 pp. Paperback, \$11.95.

Wayne Grudem, a Baptist minister and currently Associate Professor of Biblical and Systematic Theology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, has expanded and popularized his doctoral dissertation into a very helpful paperback. The book is organized into fourteen rather short chapters (they vary from three to twenty pages), followed by three appendices, eighteen pages of content footnotes, and a brief bibliography (two and one-half pages). The readability is enhanced by his straightforward statement of a problem at the beginning of each chapter, followed by several suggested solutions, which are then followed by Grudem's solution. Normally, each chapter includes a summary and an "application for today." However, for some unexplained reason, chapters one and two omit the summary. It almost appears that the author thought about including a summary paragraph after he had completed the first two chapters.

According to Grudem, Pentecostals believe that the gift of prophecy continues today and is the sure word of God, whereas the "cessationists" believe that the gift disappeared after NT times and has not reappeared. Grudem, however, stakes out a middle position, which he believes preserves what is important to both of these arguments and yet is faithful to the teaching of the NT.

The essential point in his thesis is a redefinition of the NT concept of prophet or prophecy. Grudem shows how the OT prophets had about them the very authority of God, since they routinely delivered God's word to Israel (e.g., "The word of the Lord came to Jeremiah"). Thus to disobey the prophet was to disobey God. On the other hand, if there was a person with such authority in the NT, it was an apostle, not a prophet. Paul repeatedly asserts that his words have the authority of God behind them (e.g., "I have received of the Lord what I have delivered unto you"). When the book of Revelation was called a "prophecy," it was not because the author was considered a prophet, but because he was an apostle.

In contrast to the authoritative words of the apostles, the words of NT prophets were subject to evaluation and a "weighing" of the value of what was said (I Cor 14:29). Accordingly, the prophecy of the Corinthian believers was an impression that God brought to mind that was then put into human words. Grudem thus comes up with two distinct kinds of NT prophecy—the authoritative prophecy of the apostles and the "ordinary" or "congregational" prophecy of various believers. Throughout the NT, most of the prophesying was of the "congregational" variety and thus, according to Grudem, did not have absolute authority. This type of prophecy may be likened to the counsel of mature Christians, but it was not to be thought of as being on a level with scripture. The source was God and it

was spontaneous, so it was not like a sermon, which results from the study of scripture. But since it came to just one individual and was subject to evaluation, no charismatic “prophecy” should be raised to the level of scripture, nor even used as the authoritative interpretation of scripture. Furthermore, since “ordinary” NT prophecy lacked the authority of the OT prophets, a person should not preface his/her remarks by a phrase like “thus says the Lord,” which would indicate an authority equal with scripture. Instead, the person should say: “I feel the Lord has impressed me with.” If a prophecy is from God, its evaluation by other members of the congregation will in time corroborate that fact, and the message will hit home in the hearers’ hearts by means of the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

Numerous cautions notwithstanding, Grudem allows that the experience of prophecy should continue, since the only passage that refers to the cessation of the gift is in 1 Cor 13 and seems to suggest that the gift will continue until the close of the age, i.e., when the Lord returns. But he does not believe that the gift was ever thought of as an office in the church structure. Instead, he suggests that “prophet” came to be a more informal designation that arose out of an experience rather than out of an election or appointment. Accordingly, it was appropriate for Paul to say, “If one *thinks* himself to be a prophet,” but it would have been incongruous for him to say, “If one *thinks* himself to be an elder.” Therefore, by NT times, prophecy had become a function rather than an office.

In his chapter on prophecy and teaching, Grudem goes to considerable effort to show that teaching, since it involves authoritatively expounding the written word of God, is of greater authority than prophecy. His effort appears to be instrumental—so that he can then explain Paul’s permission for women to prophecy (1 Cor 11:5), but not to teach (1 Tim 2:12). But since Paul said that prophecy builds up, encourages, and edifies the church (1 Cor 14:3, 4)—all of which could just as well apply to teaching—Grudem’s distinction between the two gifts remains unconvincing. In fact, Grudem’s depreciation of prophecy so that women can do it seems more than a little labored. For example, he repeatedly makes the point that prophecy is based on a revelation, whereas teaching is expounding scripture. But it is hard to follow his logic to the conclusion that prophecy, therefore, has less authority than teaching, so women can prophesy but must not teach. Similarly, Grudem goes on to decry “spectator Christianity”—the lack of participation (he specifically mentions women) in all church activities, including prophecy. Yet he fails to acknowledge that his interpretation of Paul, which excludes women from full participation, continues the notion of subservience and thus of “spectator Christian women.” It is simply not clear how Grudem can advocate “full participation by women in worship” (p. 223) when he has just made the point that male headship means that women cannot be given authority

to evaluate prophecy or to teach. He speaks as if everything is perfectly clear, but leaves to the reader the task of resolving what sounds like a rather paradoxical position.

In spite of using a few texts loosely, Grudem has done a good job of highlighting and explaining many facets of a spiritual gift that is more understandable because of his research. In fact, it is a work that must now be reckoned with by anyone who makes a serious study of NT or contemporary charismata.

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MacArthur, John F., Jr. *The Gospel According to Jesus*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1988. 300 pp. \$14.95.

In *The Gospel According to Jesus*, John MacArthur examines the contemporary evangelical debate over the nature of the gospel in the light of the teachings of Jesus as outlined in the four Gospels. Must Jesus be accepted as Lord or only as Saviour? Is regeneration a necessary corollary of justification? The content of the book is divided into three main parts. The first section explores the significance of Jesus' dealings with individuals, such as Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman, and the rich young ruler. The second examines Jesus' illustrations of salvation, such as the parables of the soils, the wheat and the tares, and the hidden treasure. The third focuses on Jesus' key theological terms, such as repentance, faith, salvation, and discipleship. MacArthur concludes from all this that "no one can be saved who is either unwilling to obey Christ or consciously rebellious against the lordship of Christ" (p. xiv). Thus he proclaims what some have come to call "lordship salvation."

In this conclusion, MacArthur takes issue with the gospel teaching of such evangelical scholars as Zane Hodges, Charles C. Ryrie, and Lewis Sperry Chafer. He argues that they encourage people to claim Jesus as Saviour while deferring a commitment to obey Him as Lord. Beyond that, he suggests that the recent foibles of "televangelists" can be blamed on a cheap-grace theology that divorces behavior from faith.

MacArthur laments that contemporary Christians have been conditioned to believe that because they recited a prayer, walked down an aisle, or spoke in tongues, they are saved and should never question that salvation. Jesus, by contrast, asserts that no past experience, not even prophesying or casting out demons, should be viewed as evidence of salvation where there is no ongoing life of obedience (cf. Matt 7:21-23). The gospel is more than just a plea to make a decision or to pray the sinner's prayer; it is a call to follow Jesus in submissive obedience.

The Gospel According to Jesus is aimed at the people in the pew and their pastors rather than scholars. Thus the title is somewhat misleading.