

The Verses that Launched Freedom

Church Discussions by the Pilgrims



By **Dave Leach** Photo thanks to www.photofunia.com

“Separatists”, they called themselves. Everyone else calls them “Pilgrims”.

They pioneered a worship service, based on the verses below, which was a forum so open that it launched the Freedoms of Speech and Religion that we take for granted today.

It mixed politics and religion – thoroughly. It was an assembly in which all topics of interest to the community were welcome – even the theological and political.

In a world in which only a tiny percentage of citizens voted, the Separatists gave the vote to every man, and to every female Head of Household. My 12th generation ancestor, Elizabeth Warren, was the first woman to vote in America when her husband, Richard, died in 1627, leaving her Head of Household over seven children.

In a world where no man had freedom of speech to criticize his political or religious leaders unless he didn’t mind being burned at the stake, the Separatists created freedom to criticize both. The Separatists gave even their theological opponents a vote and a voice: a voice even to respectfully criticize both church and state, without being punished. They responded to

criticism with reason, not censorship. They didn’t pre-screen every idea allowed at the podium for nonconformity or controversy.

The Separatists created a forum for robust Freedom of Speech by instituting Sunday afternoon discussions, from which are descended Town Meetings which persist today in that corner of the United States.

In the centuries since, America’s political institutions adopted that free, robust verbal interaction (rather than, for example, the Puritan model where the right to [vote or own property](#) depended on claiming you had a particular kind of conversion experience). But that interaction gradually died out of America’s churches, where worship became dominated by uninterrupted sermons, and in all meetings, “controversy” (that is, discussion of any issue important enough for disagreement to be troubling) became improper.

Freedom. What a funny idea. Everyone else in the world knew it could never work. Only the Bible told them it would.

Or did it? Does the Bible really say what they thought it says? Do we indeed have God to thank for Freedom?

Or is our freedom just an accident based on their bad interpretations? Are claims of Freedom’s Biblical beginnings merely the wishful thinking of looking back in time and hoping to validate what we have created?

In other words, does God actually care about our freedom, or is freedom destined to fade away as Jesus returns and takes charge as the world’s King because freedom is not God’s eternal plan after all?

Or, did the Separatists mistake something God never thought of for His Plan, but now God likes it too and will let us keep it?

Has political freedom always been urged by God, important to God, and holy? To be valued, exercised, and protected by God’s people?

The Separatists claimed they got the idea for their freedoms from the Bible. What verses did they quote? How did they assemble those verses into Freedom?

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Pilgrims and how Pastor Robinson understood them – a 1097 word summary of the complete Biblical evidence in Chapter 8, Book 3, “Of the exercise of Prophecy”

◇ The complete Chapter 8, Book 3, “Of the exercise of Prophecy”. Robinson’s words number 1569. 6822 words if you also read all the Scriptures he cited in the Geneva version, with Geneva notes.

◇ A review: just the paragraph headings, 148 words, of the complete study

Credits. These are the Separatist Bible studies explaining why they thought such an open forum belonged in church. They are from “The Works of John Robinson”, the Separatist’s pastor in England and Holland who was unable to sail to the New World. His preserved writings fill 1,000 pages which you can download at <http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/robinson-the-works-of-john-robinson-3-vols>. The official title of their first publication in a single set of volumes: *The Works of John Robinson, Pastor of the Pilgrim Fathers, with a Memoir and Annotations by Robert Ashton*, 3 vols (London: John Snow, 1851). Vol. 3. The portion of his writings presented here is taken from Book 3, Chapter 8, “Of the Exercise of Prophecy”, followed by four articles from the Separatists’ Catechism.

How the Bible word “Prophesying” launched Freedom of Speech and Religion

Seven verses in 1 Corinthians 14, the Bible’s most detailed order of a worship service, urge “all” to “prophesy”.

Today there are many different assumptions about what that means. Not many of them define “prophesy” as something that everyone is able to do.

Pastor Robinson defined “prophecy” as having two levels: one, a supernatural “gift” which only a few “prophets” have, as described in 1 Corinthians 12; and the other, a natural capacity which everyone has and should be allowed to contribute, whether or not they hold any official church position, as described in 1 Corinthians 14.

It was this second kind of ordinary “prophesying” which turned the Separatists’ “Sabbath Afternoon

Prophecying Services” into a wide open forum.

But in the years leading to 1620, when Freedom was reborn, (see the documentary at www.1620.US), “prophesy” meant only one thing in the Geneva Bible, the most up to date English translation, and the only Bible with notes (explanations and cross references in the margins).

According to the Geneva note on 1 Thessalonians 5:20 which says “Despise not prophesying”, it was the consensus of the translators that “prophesying”, as described in the Bible, **simply means “The explaining and interpreting of the word of God.”** (The verse continues the thought begun in verse 19, “Quench not the spirit”, which is cited in Question 30 of the Separatist catechism as evidence that God welcomes “prophesying” from anyone and everyone, not just church officials. .)

That is something everyone can do.

“The gifts of teaching and applying the doctrine” is another way “prophesying” was described, in the Geneva note on 1 Corinthians 14:3, which is cited in the Separatist catechism. The note says “prophesying” is “most excellent” among all God’s gifts because they “profit the greater part of men”.

So how did that interpretation launch Freedom of Speech and Religion? It did so in four ways:

1. That interpretation gave a voice to all. It was not limited to a handful of church leaders as if it were a supernatural, miraculous, extraordinary, exotic or rare “Holy Spirit Gift”.

2. That interpretation opened up the scope of topics which could be raised by anyone, since Biblical principles may be found which apply to any topic.

3. That interpretation allowed very average laymen with no official power, authority, or credentials to speak about all kinds of topics with great authority, simply by reasoning persuasively how verses apply to a topic.

4. Since the Bible routinely corrects even its most beloved heroes, from priests to prophets to kings, and suppressing truth is treated as evil while telling the truth even at great cost marks God’s heroes, a forum open to all where the Bible is uncensored will not shirk from correcting religious and political leaders as needed.

Every culture allows “freedom” to say what doesn’t bother anybody. The test of freedom is how much you can correct the people in charge of the police without being punished.

But is that definition of “prophesying” correct? Is “opening and applying the Scriptures” how the *Bible*

defines the word?

Just about. As Robinson points out, the definition of “prophesying” in the context of a worship service is found in 1 Corinthians 14:3 “*But he that prophesieth, speaketh unto men to edifying, and to exhortation, and to comfort.*”

The Greek word for “edifying” is οικοδομη. It combines oikia, meaning house, and doma, meaning gift. It means “building up”. It means helping people mature. It means to challenge. The Geneva note on this verse says “edifying” “may further men in the study of godliness.” What better way is there to do that than to “open and apply the Scriptures”?

“Exhortation” means a wide range of conversation that may inspire, persuade, warn, or comfort. The Geneva note on “he that exhorteth”, in Romans 12:8, says “*who in other places is called the pastor*”. That must refer to 1 Timothy 4:13, where the Geneva note says “*The private exercise of pastors, is the continual reading of the scriptures, from which they may draw water out of wholesome doctrine and exhortation, both for themselves and for others.*”

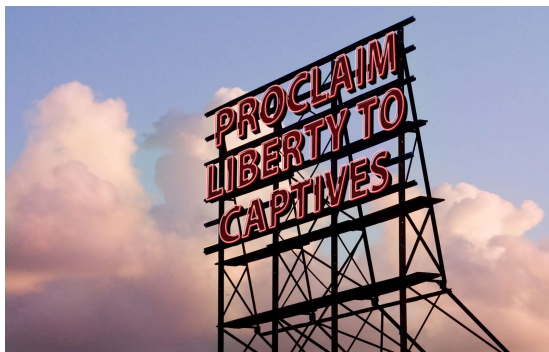
(Except that the “prophesying” of 1 Corinthians 14 is not reserved for pastors, but is for everyone.)

What better way is there to “exhort” like a pastor, than to “open and apply the Scriptures”?

And what better way is there to “comfort”, than to “open and apply the Scriptures”?

The Separatists didn’t let the uninformed babble on unaccountably. They had a moderator, and the more learned among them could answer questions and respond to error. The only thing they didn’t have was someone whose job it was to be the only one who could talk.

Question 32 of the catechism said the time for “prophesying” was “after the public ministry by the teachers, and under their direction and moderation, whose duty it is, if anything be obscure, to open it; if doubtful, to clear it; if unsound, to refuse it; if unprofitable to supply what is wanting as they are able. 1 Cor. xiv. 3, 37; Acts xiii. 15.”



Their own words: the Pilgrims’ Catechism on Freedom

Official title: “AN APPENDIX to MR. PERKINS’ SIX PRINCIPLES OF CHRISTIAN RELIGION.”

Questions and answers #29-32 of the Separatists’ catechism summarize their theology of Freedom of Speech and Religion in 418 words. To read just that, read just the indented paragraphs.

For evidence of its claims, the catechism cites Bible verses, which are interleaved below in italics. The verses are in the Geneva translation, which is the version the catechism relies on to make its points. The Geneva margin notes are included, since they are part of the catechism’s evidence. These verses and notes, added to the four questions and answers, bring their total word count to 1956.

A catechism is a learning tool for children and new adult members to catch up with what the group they are joining has been studying. Placing these questions and answers prominently in their catechism shows the importance they placed on it.

Q. 29. Who are to open and apply the Scriptures in the church?

A. 1. Principally the bishops or elders, who, by the Word of Life, are to feed the flock, both by teaching and government. Acts xx. 28.

Acts 20:28 Take heed therefore unto your selves, and to all the flock, whereof the holy Ghost hath made you Overseers, to feed the Church of God, which he hath purchased with that his own blood.

Geneva note: “Feed”: To keep it, to feed and govern it. “He”, the holy Ghost, or perhaps God, who “hath purchased with his own blood”: A notable sentence for Christ’s Godhead: which shows plainly in his person, how that by reason of the joining together of the two natures in his own person, that which is proper to one is spoken of the other, being taken as deriving from one another, and not in the original: which in old time the godly fathers termed a communicating or fellowship of properties or attributes, that is to say, a making common of that to two, which belongs but to one.

2. Such as are out of office, [Those who hold no official church position or title are to open and apply the Scriptures in church] in the exercise of prophecy.

Q. 30. How is that exercise [the opening and application of Scriptures by those holding no

formal office or title] proved [supported] in the Scriptures?

A. 1, By the examples in the Jewish Church, where men, though in no office, either in temple or synagogue, had liberty publicly to use their gifts. Luke ii. 42, 46, 47; iv. 16—18; Acts viii. 4, xi. 19—21, xiii. 14—16, xviii. 24—26.

Luke 2:42 And when he was twelve years old, and they were come up to Jerusalem, after the custom of the feast,...46 And it came to pass three days after, that they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions: 47 And all that heard him, were astonished at his understanding and answers.]

Luke 4:16 And he came to Nazareth where he had been brought up, and (as his custom was) went into the Synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read. 17 And there was delivered unto him the book of the Prophet Isaiah: and when he had opened the book, he found the place, where it was written, 18 The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me, that I should preach the Gospel to the poor: he hath sent me, that I should heal the broken hearted, that I should preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, that I should set at liberty them that are bruised:

Acts 8:4 Therefore they that were scattered abroad, went to and fro preaching the word.

Acts 11:19 And they which were scattered abroad because of the affliction that arose about Steven, went throughout till they came unto Phenice and Cyprus, and Antiochia, preaching the word to no man, but unto the Jews only. 20 Now some of them were men of Cyprus and of Cyrene, which when they were come into Antiochia, spake unto the Grecians, and preached the Lord Jesus.

Acts 13:14 But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antiochia a city of Pisidia, & went into the Synagogue on ye Sabbath day, & sat down. 15 And after the lecture of the Law & Prophets, the rulers of ye Synagogue sent unto them, saying, Ye men & brethren, if ye have any word of exhortation for the people, say on. 16 Then Paul stood up and beckoned with the hand, and said, Men of Israel, and ye that fear God, hearken.

Acts 18:24 And some were persuaded with ye things which were spoken, and some believed not. 25 Therefore when they agreed not among themselves, they departed, after that Paul had spoken one word, to wit, Well spake the holy Ghost by Isaiah the Prophet

unto our fathers, 26 Saying, Go unto this people, and say, By hearing ye shall hear, & shall not understand, and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive.

2. By the commandments of Christ and his apostles. Luke ix. 1, x. 1; Rom. xii. 6—8; 1 Pet. iv. 10,11; 1 Cor. xiv. 1.

Luke 9:1 Then called he his twelve disciples together, and gave them power and authority over all devils, and to heal diseases.]

Luke 10:1 After these things, the Lord appointed other seventy also, and sent them, two and two before him into every city and place, whither he himself should come.

Romans 12:6 Seeing then that we have gifts that are diverse, according to the grace that is given unto us, whether we have prophecy, let us prophecy according to the portion of faith: 7 Or an office, let us wait on the office: or he that teacheth, on teaching: 8 Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that distributeth, let him do it with simplicity: he that ruleth, with diligence: he that sheweth mercy, with cheerefulness.

1 Peter 4:10 Let every man as he hath received the gift, minister the same one to another, as good disposers of the manifold grace of God. 11 If any man speak, let him speak as the words of God. If any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God ministreth, that God in all things may be glorified through Iesus Christ, to whom is praise and dominion for ever, and ever, Amen.

1 Corinthians 14:1 Follow after love, and covet spiritual gifts, and rather that ye may prophesy.

3. By the prohibiting of women, not extraordinarily inspired, to teach in the church: herein liberty being given unto men (their husbands or others). 1 Tim. ii. 11, 12; 1 Cor. xiv. 34, 35.

1 Timothy 2:11 Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. 12 I permit not a woman to teach, neither to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence.

Geneva Note: The first argument, why it is not lawful for women to teach in the congregation, because by this means they would be placed above men, for they would be their masters: and this is against God's ordinance.

1 Corinthians 14:34 Let your women keep silence in the Churches: for it is not permitted unto them to

speake: but they ought to be subiect, as also the Law sayeth. 35 And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the Church.

4. By the excellent ends which, by this means, are to be obtained: as

1. The glory of God in the manifestation of his manifold graces, 1 Pet. iv. 10, 11.

1 Peter 4:10 Let every man as he hath received the gift, minister the same one to another, as good disposers [Geneva note: "stewards"] of the manifold grace of God. 11 If any man speak, let him speak as the words of God. If any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God ministreth, that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom is praise and dominion for ever, and ever, Amen.

Geneva note: v. 11 He reckons up two kinds of these gifts as chief, that is, the office of teaching in the Church, and the other ecclesiastical functions, in which two things especially are to be observed: that is, that the pure word of God be taught, and whatever is done, be referred to the glory of God the Father in Christ, as to the proper mark. He shows the use of charity, that is, that every man bestow that gift which he hath received, to the profit of his neighbour. A reason, because that whatever gift we have, we have received it from God on this condition, to be his disposers and stewards.

2. That the gifts of the Spirit in men be not quenched, 1 Thess. v. 19.

1 Thessalonians 5:19 Quench not the Spirit. 20 Despise not prophecy.

Geneva note: v. 19, The sparks of the Spirit of God that are kindled in us, are nourished by daily hearing the word of God: but true doctrine must be diligently distinguished from false. v. 20, "prophecying": The explaining and interpreting of the word of God.

3. For the fitting [equipping] and trial [testing] of men for the ministry, 1 Tim. iii. 2,

1 Timothy 3:2 A Bishop therefore must be unreprouceable, the husband of one wife, watching, temperate, modest, harberous, [loves to harbour guests] apt to teach,

Geneva note: "Husband": Therefore he that

shuts out married men from the office of bishops, only because they are married, is antichrist.

4. For the preserving pure of the doctrine of the church, which is more endangered if some one or two alone may only be heard and speak, 1 Cor. xiv. 24, 25.

1 Corinthians 14:24 But if all prophesy, and there come in one that believeth not, or one unlearned, he is convinced of all, he is judged of all: 25 and thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest; and so falling down on his face he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth.

5. For debating and satisfying of doubts, if any do arise.

6. For the edifying of the church, and conversion of others, Acts ii. 42; Luke iv. 22, 23.

Acts 2:42 And they continued in the Apostles doctrine, and fellowship, and breaking of bread, and prayers.

Luke 4:22 And all bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words, which proceeded out of his mouth, and said, Is not this Joseph's son? 23 Then he said unto them, Ye will surely say unto me this proverb, Physician, heal thy self: whatsoever we have heard done in Capernaum, doe it here likewise in thine own country.

Q. 31. Who is a prophet in this sense?

A. He that hath a gift of the Spirit to speak unto edification, exhortation, and comfort. 1 Cor. xiv. 4, 24, 25.

1 Corinthians 14:4 He that speaketh in an unknown tongue edifieth himself; but he that prophesieth edifieth the church. ... 24 But if all prophesy, and there come in one that believeth not, or one unlearned, he is convinced of all, he is judged of all: 25 and thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest; and so falling down on his face he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth.

Q. 32. What is the order of this exercise?

A. That it be performed after the public ministry by the teachers, and under their direction and moderation, whose duty it is, if anything be obscure, to open it; if doubtful, to clear it; if unsound, to refuse it; if unprofitable to supply what is wanting as they are able. 1 Cor. xiv. 3, 37; Acts xiii. 15.

1 Corinthians 14:3 *But he that prophesieth, speaketh unto men to edifying, and to exhortation, and to comfort. ...37 If any man think him self to be a Prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge, that the things, that I write unto you, are the commandments of the Lord.*

Geneva note: "Spiritual": Skilful in knowing and judging spiritual things.

Acts 8:15 Which when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the holy Ghost.

Summary of the Freedom Verses noticed by the Pilgrims and how Robinson understood them

John Robinson's actual study, with the Geneva translation of Scriptures he cited, follows this summary.

Just like everyone is invited to sing in church, but only those who do it very well are called "singers", 1 Corinthians 14 invites everyone to "prophesy", but 1 Corinthians 12 says only a few have the "gift" of prophesy and are called "Prophets".

1 Corinthians 14:3 defines "prophesy" as to challenge, correct, and comfort. In our weak churches, "prophesying" by everyone is a goal. Very few are ready and willing to do that publicly, at this point. Yet those few must be allowed. As 2 Corinthians 4:13 observes, we fill the hearts of our people with eternal hope! How then can we ask them to remain silent?!

This liberty for everyone who is able to teach and correct error to do so publicly even if they don't have a seminary degree, and even liberty to question and dispute, was the practice for nearly 3,000 years in Jewish synagogues and in the Temple. Several verses describe this practice and the use of it made by Jesus

and His Apostles! (Would Jesus be allowed in today's pulpits to disagree with the pastor?)

The Jews certainly didn't let Jesus speak because they believed He was the Son of God! It was for that claim that they murdered Him! Yet until they did, they *still* let Him speak! And after that they still let His followers speak, in between murdering them! Why did they, and do they, open their forums as if openness were given by God?

Some kind of national forum serves the Biblical need of providing "counsel" from the "wise", as Jeremiah 18:18 puts it. Counsel from the wise is compared with administration of law by the priests, and updates from God from prophets. Except that we don't have to open up administration of law to everyone: we know who the priests are who are prepared for the job. And we don't need to open up revelations from God to everyone: we know whose prophecies have an established track record. We give prophets and priests titles to let everyone know who gets to do those things.

But we don't know who will say something wise next. And even if we thought we knew who would, he might, just as we turn around, say something stupid. In fact, our most treasured nuggets of wisdom are not from isolated individuals who sit around saying wise things, but from people engaged with others in a struggle to do good or oppose evil. That's why Proverbs 15:22 says nothing good about even the wisest man listening only to himself, but "Plans fail when there is no counsel, but with many advisers they succeed." (TLV version)

That kind of forum, full of uncensored counselors, is what 1 Corinthians 14 calls "orderly". 1 Corinthians 14 says the Corinthians had been violating an orderly worship service, but the order to which they were challenged to return was much like the order followed in Jewish synagogues.

In particular, verse 31 says "For ye may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted." As 1 Corinthians 14:3 says, it served the practical purpose of building up [challenging, edifying] the Church.

Verses 24, 29, and 31 describe those able to "prophesy" in the Corinthian church as so numerous that rules had to be set up so that they could take turns in an orderly manner!

There are many spiritual benefits available from "prophesying" that are available in no other way. Here are seven:

1. That God may be glorified by everyone sharing

the Gift he has received with one another, as 1 Peter 4:10-11 says, and that the Spirit be not quenched by dislike of prophesying, as 1 Thessalonians 5:19-20 warns. The verse means that when allowed, prophesying produces spiritual fruit that excels what pastors alone can produce.

2. That members may develop the relationship skills to become pastors, and that members, seeing who reasons well, may base their selection of their next pastor on this observation and experience.

3. That future church teachers may learn by experience to teach, and be selected after observation to teach – teaching ability being one of the qualifications of a church leader according to 1 Timothy 3:2.

4. That the teachings of the church may be saved from error. Error is much more likely when no one is allowed to expose it, because only one or two are allowed to speak, and no one else is allowed to say what they think. 1 John 4:1 warns us – ALL of us – to test those who claim to be inspired. In Revelation 2:2, Jesus praised people who did that. That kind of Revelation 2:2 “examination” is meaningless if it only means each individual can try to figure it out all by himself, but is not allowed to discuss what he notices with others!

5. That through discussion, those who present information can find out where they have not been persuasive so they can give more evidence; they can find out what was confusing so they can be more clear; they can be corrected when they say something wrong or crazy. Truth happens, through questions, answers, and even modest disputes. Truth is beautiful in the assemblies of saints. Truth is the work of God.

That kind of dialog is how Jesus began His ministry at the age of 12. Those kinds of disputes were the habit of Paul during Sabbath services. Apollos spoke boldly, refuting error with great vehemence, and God put that in His Book as if it were a big compliment.

6. For the development of relationship skills among believers, to enable them to convert unbelievers. Turning “wolves into sheep” is the job of everyone, according to 1 Corinthians 14:24-25, so everyone needs a forum where they can develop discussion skills to be able to reason with people who disagree. The job of pastors is to moderate the forum where they can acquire these skills, according to Acts 20:28.

7. The final reason to encourage all to prophesy is to give all members a voice in matters of concern to

all, so that decisions will have as much support as possible from as many as possible, fostering, unity.

Love has a chance to grow deep roots where people can talk freely about what matters to them. Fellowship is condemned to superficiality when any issue so important that the discovery of disagreement could make some people angry – the definition of “controversial” – is suppressed.

Open conversation also allows leaders and the congregation to know each other better and to enjoy a relationship of partners.

Chapter VIII: OF THE EXERCISE OF PROPHECY

The format of the following study. John Robinson's writings are even harder to read than mine. So in the first part of each section, I restate each of his paragraphs in language a little easier. My restatement includes points made not only in Robinson's words, but made also in the verses he cites, and in the Geneva notes for those verses. Robinson's readers all had Geneva bibles and saw those Geneva margin notes. I do my very best to paraphrase Robinson's actual points without adding my own, although a couple of times, (in parenthesis), I fill a couple of gaps with explanations of my own.

Each new section is marked with <>.

In the second part of each section, I put Robinson's words, indented. Anyone serious about understanding exactly how influential Scripture was in the formation of our freedoms will want to focus on Robinson's words to see what he saw in the Scriptures, not what I see, and whether what he saw really was what God said. If you just want to read Robinson's words and skip all I have added, just read the indented parts; it's only 1569 words, counting Bible references as words.

In the third part, in italics, I reprint the Bible verses Robinson cites, using the Geneva translation that Robinson used, because some of his points aren't clear from reading the cited verses in some modern translations. I also include the Geneva notes which Robinson also relied on to formulate his theology.

Where Robinson's words have changed their meaning over these four centuries, I insert, in brackets, the definition of his word from Johnson's Dictionary, the first English dictionary, published in 1755, which better documents what the words meant in 1620 than a modern dictionary.

◇ **People can “prophesy” who aren't “prophets”.** Our critics think we declare each and every one of our church members a “Prophet”, who publicly “prophesies” in our services. Let me clarify.

There are they, whose names I forbear, for their credit's sake, who have not spared, and that in their public writings, to lay to our

charge, that we will needs have all and every member of the church, a prophet, and to prophesy publicly. With what minds they let loose their tongues to utter these, and many more most false and absurd vituperies against us, we leave it to God to judge, who knoweth: with what conscience, and desert of credit therein, unto thee, Christian reader, into whose hands this our Apology shall come.

◇ **Not everyone can “prophesy”.** 1

Corinthians 14:3 defines “prophesy” as to challenge, correct, and comfort. (We would love to have all our members do that, but) Only two or three in each of our churches can do that at present, because our churches are so weak.

We learn from the apostle Paul, 1 Cor. xiv. 3, that “he who prophesieth, speaketh unto men to edification, exhortation, and comfort:” which to perform conveniently, and as becomes the church assembly, we make account comes within the compass but of a few of the multitude; happily [with luck] two or three in each of our churches, considering their weak and depressed state.

1 Corinthians 14:3 But he that prophesieth, speaketh unto men to edifying, and to exhortation, and to comfort. Geneva Note: He inferreth now that, that he spake before: Therefore seeing charity is the chiefest of all, before all things set it before you as chief and principal: and so esteem those things as most excellent: which profit the greater part of men: (as prophesy that is to say, the gifts of teaching and applying the doctrine, which was contemned in respect of other gifts, although it be chiefest and most necessary for the Church) and not those which for a show seem to be marvelous as the gifts of tongues, when a man was suddenly endued with the knowledge of many tongues, which made men greatly amazed, and yet of itself was not greatly to any use, unless there were an interpreter.

◇ **Anyone who can – church officers or laymen – may.** Our critics assume that if we welcome someone to “prophesy”, we consider them a “prophet”. Not so. We agree with a recent assembly of many pastors which agreed that everyone willing to share their ability – not just “prophets” but other church

leaders including ministers, teachers, elders, deacons, along with every other member – should be welcome, in the order set by the moderators. As 2 Corinthians 4:13 observes, we fill the hearts of our people with eternal hope! How then can we expect them to remain silent?!

Touching prophecy then we think the very same, that the synod held at Embden, 1571, hath decreed in these words: “1. In in all churches, whether but springing up, or grown to some ripeness, let the order of prophecy be observed, according to Paul's institution. 2. Into the fellowship of this work are to be admitted not only the ministers, but the teachers too, as also the elders and deacons, yea, even of the multitude, which are willing to confer their gift received of God, to the common utility of the church: but so as they first be allowed [“acknowledged, permitted, granted, admitted”] by the judgment of the ministers, [“officer of the church”] and others.”* And as the apostle sometimes said, “We believe, and therefore we speak,” 2 Cor. iv. 13, so because we believe with the Belgic churches, that this exercise is to be observed in all congregations, therefore we also observe it in ours. Of this our **both faith and practice**, we have these amongst other special foundations.

2 Corinthians 4:13 And because we have the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, I believed, and therefore have I spoken, we also believe, and therefore speak,

Geneva Note: He declares the former sentence, showing that he and his associates die in a way to purchase life for others, but yet nonetheless they are partakers of the same life with them: because they themselves do first believe that which they offer to others to believe, that is, that they also will be saved together with them in Christ. “Spirit”: The same faith, by the inspiration of the same Spirit.

◇ **Jews have always opened their forums to everyone – even to Jesus!** Let me explain the Scriptures upon which our practice is founded. I begin by noticing that this “prophesying” - this liberty for everyone who is able to teach and correct error to do so publicly even if they don't have a seminary degree, and

even liberty to question and dispute – was the long established practice of Jewish synagogues and the Temple. Several verses describe this practice and the use of it made by Jesus and His Apostles! (How different would history have been had those synagogues not allowed anyone to speak who disagreed with the ruler of the synagogue, as in churches today?)

The first [the precedent in our *faith* for inviting prophecy from all] we fetch from examples in the Jewish church, where **liberty both for teaching and disputing publicly both, in the temple and synagogue, was freely given to all gifted accordingly, without respect had to any office.** Luke ii. 46, 47; iv. 15, 16; Acts viii, 4, 11, 19–21; xiii. 14–16; xviii. 24–26.

Luke 2:46 And it came to pass three days after, that they found him in the Temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions: 47 And all that heard him, were astonished at his understanding and answers.

Luke 4:15 For he taught in their Synagogues, and was honored of all men. 16 And he came to Nazareth where he had been brought up, and (as his custom was) went into the Synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read.

Acts 8:4 Therefore they that were scattered abroad went to and fro preaching the word ... 11 And they gave heed to them,, because that of long time he had bewitched them with sorceries. ...19 Saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay the hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost. 20 Then said Peter unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou thinkest that the gift of God may be obtained with money. 21 Thou hast neither part nor fellowship in this business: for thine heart is not right in the sight of God.

Acts 13:14 But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch a city of Pisidia, and went into the synagogue on ye sabbath day, and sat down. 15 And after the lecture of the law and prophets, the rulers of ye synagogue sent unto them, saying, Ye men and brethren, if ye have any word of exhortation for the people, say on. 16 Then Paul stood up and beckoned with the hand, and said, Men of Israel, and ye that fear God, hearken.

Acts 18:24 And a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, came to Ephesus, an eloquent

man, and mighty in the scriptures,. 25 The same was instructed in the way of the Lord; and he spake fervently in the Spirit, and taught diligently the things of the Lord, and knew the baptism of John only. 26 And he began to speak boldly in the Synagogue. Whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God [Geneva note: the way that leads to God] more perfectly.

Geneva note: Apollos, a godly and learned man, does not refuse to profit in the school of a base and abject handicraftsman, and also of a woman: and so becomes an excellent minister of the Church.

◇ **Wisdom isn't correlated to credentials. To get wisdom, a forum must be open to people without credentials.** Jesus is the Son of God, but that isn't why they let Him or his disciples speak – that's why they *murdered* Him! Yet until they did, they *still* let them speak! Why? (Nor did Jesus give anyone any special authority to speak in synagogues.)

Why, to this day, do Jews open their forum to any speaker familiar with the Scriptures? They treat the openness of their forum as if they received it from God. Did they?

Some kind of national forum, somewhere, serves the Biblical need of providing “counsel” from the “wise”. Jeremiah 18:18 acknowledges that the “wise” are Israel’s source of “counsel”, as surely as priests are the source of law and case law, and prophets are the source of updates from God. But notice that priests and prophets are official designations formally given to certain individuals, but “wise” is not.

(Explanations not made directly by Robinson:) It probably wouldn't be very wise to officially designate someone as “wise”, because wisdom doesn't proceed from anyone perfectly consistently. So, what if we officially give someone the title of “wise”, and the next thing he says is stupid? Wisdom from group discussion or debate is typically greater than the wisdom of any individual in it, through the process of watching opposing views interact. That's why Proverbs 15:22 says “Plans fail when there is no counsel, but with many advisers they succeed.” (TLV version) See also Proverbs 11:14, 20:18, 24:6)

(From a Geneva Note for one of the verses cited by Robinson:) Notice that Psalm 40:3 credits David's music as not belonging to him, but to God: “And he hath put in my mouth a new song of praise unto our God: many shall see it and fear, and shall trust in the Lord.” The synagogues similarly believed God's

Gifts of grace are within us, and they belong to God. That is what the ruler of the synagogue meant by the idiom “if ye have any word of exhortation for the people, say on”.

If any object, that the examples of Christ and the apostles in this case, are incompetent, [*Or, prove nothing. Johnson: “Not suitable; not adequate...In the civil law it denotes some defect of the right to do anything.”*] seeing that Christ was furnished with his own, and the apostles with his authority; he allegeth that which is true in itself, but to small purpose, considering we lay not our foundation in this, that Christ and his apostles so did; but in that liberty so to do was always had, in all places granted, and sometimes offered them. This liberty they obtained not by the authority of Christ, which the rulers of the synagogues and temple no more acknowledged than they did Christ himself: but **by the order then received**, [*“embraced intellectually”, or “to take or obtain from another” ie. from God, Johnson’s Dictionary*] and **still continued to this day amongst the Jews**, that they whom, with the Scriptures, they call “wise men,” Jer. xviii. 18; Matt.xxiii. 34; 1 Cor. i. 20, without all regard of public office, having any word of exhortation to the people, should “say on,” as we have it written, Acts xiii. 23. [*correction: vs. 15*] Whereunto I add, that divers of them, [all kinds of them] in whom we instance, were furnished with no such authority specially from Christ. [*“Divers” in Johnson’s Dictionary: “1. Different from another. 2. Different from itself; various; multiform; diffused”*]

Jeremiah 18:18 Then said they, Come, and let us imagine some device against Jeremiah: for the law shall not perish from the priest, nor counsel from the wise, nor the word from the prophet: come, and let us smite him with the tongue, and let us not give heed to any of his words.

Geneva note: “for the law”: This argument the wicked have always used against the servants of God. The church cannot err: we are the Church, and therefore whoever speaks against us, they ought to die, (1Ki_22:24; Jer_7:4, Jer_20:2; Mal_2:4) and thus the

false Church persecutes the true Church, which stands not in outward pomp, and in multitude, but is known by the graces of the Holy Spirit. “Tongue”: Let us slander him and accuse him: for we will be believed.

Matthew 23:34 Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and Scribes, and of them ye shall kill and crucify; and of them shall ye scourge in your Synagogues, and persecute from city to city,

1 Cor 1:20 Where is the wise? where is the Scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made the wisdom of this world foolishness?

Geneva note: Where are you, O you learned fellow, and you that spend your days in turning your books? You that spend all your time in seeking out the secret things of this world, and in expounding all hard questions: and thus he triumphs against all the men of this world, for there was not one of them that could so much as dream of this secret and hidden mystery.

Acts 13:15 And after the lecture of the Law and Prophets, the rulers of ye Synagogue sent unto them, saying, Ye men and brethren, if ye have any word of exhortation for the people, say on.

Geneva note: In the Synagogue of the Jews (according to the pattern of which Christian congregations were instituted) the Scriptures were read first, then those who were learned were licensed [welcomed] by the rulers of the Synagogue to speak and expound. Literally, “If there is any word in you”: this is a kind of speech taken from the Hebrews, by which is meant that the gifts of God’s grace are in us, as it were in treasure houses, and that they are not ours, but God’s. In the same way David says, “Thou hast put a new song in my mouth”; (Psa_40:3).

◇ **1 Corinthians 14 explicitly says “ye may all prophesy”.** The second Scriptural precedent for our practice of inviting prophesying from all is Paul’s very clear description in 1 Corinthians 14 of the order of a worship service, which he says they had been violating. The order to which Paul wants them to return is just like the order followed in Jewish synagogues.

In particular, verse 31 says “For ye may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted.” It was a very useful custom in the synagogues, and was still useful, unlike the legal ceremonies whose purpose was fulfilled by Jesus’ sacrifice – so Paul saw that it was good to transfer it to the Church. As Paul said in 1 Corinthians 14:3, it served the practical purpose of building up [challenging, edifying] the Church.

The second we take from the apostle Paul, 1 Cor. xiv., where to the full he informeth the church at Corinth of the order of that exercise, which they had formerly violated. Which whole order, according to Beza on 1 Cor. xiv., is apparently taken from the received [from God] custom in the Jewish synagogues. Which custom, saith Peter Martyr on 1 Cor. xiv. 31, [*For ye may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted.*] seeing it was of old both good and laudable in the synagogues of the Jews, the apostle disdains not to transfer it to the Church of Christ, of which also he renders this reason, because it was not a legal ceremony, but serves to the edification of the church.

[*Note: Robinson cites the whole chapter. We won't reprint it here, but when you read it, notice that seven times in the chapter, "all" are urged to "prophesy". Verses 24-25 even promise that "IF all prophesy", the result will be what most of us would regard as revival. The seven verses are 1, 5, 12, 24, 26, 31, 39. Vs. 12 and 26 urge "prophesying" indirectly, by urging "edifying", which verse 3 says is part of "prophesying".*]

◇ **1 Corinthians 12 talks about formal, inspired "prophets", but chapter 14 is about ordinary "prophesying" by anybody. The difference is consistency and quality. The similarity is the involvement of the Holy Spirit.** Our critics are confused by God's distinction between the extraordinary "Prophets", the noun, 1 Corinthians 12, of whom the Holy Spirit provides only a few; and "prophesy", the verb, the ordinary activity in which all may participate. The difference is a matter of degree.

1 Corinthians 12 describes several "Gifts" of the Holy Spirit. It lists "Prophecy", the noun, as a Holy Spirit Gift given to some but not to all, meaning it is not an "ordinary" capacity of everyone but is "extraordinary". But 1 Corinthians 14 says 7 times that "all" should prophesy – the verb – referring to an obviously "ordinary" capacity. It is like the "Gift" of music: only a few are "singers", the noun, but all "sing", the verb.

There were plenty of Gifts of the Spirit in the Church of Corinth! There were plenty of the

"extraordinary" Prophets described in 1 Corinthians 12! But they were not who chapter 14 is talking about; Paul did not, in chapter 14, refer to the Prophets, the noun, that chapter 12 was talking about, which is clear from any thorough study of chapter 14.

Notice one strong difference between the ordinary and extraordinary: along with the testimony of the Apostles, it is the revelations of the "extraordinary" prophets discussed in chapter 12 – not the "ordinary" prophesyings of chapter 14 – that are the foundation of the Church, according to Ephesians 2:20. These Prophets are enlightened by the Spirit *instantly and infallibly*.

Yet notice Ephesians 3:4-5 says *both* groups – Prophets and "prophesyers" – are enlightened by the same Spirit, if not all to the same degree. For example, even the "ordinary prophesyers" can clearly know what Paul understands, which was only vaguely understood in the past.

If this be so, then must they needs take their marks amiss, [*they miss the point*] who imagine that the apostle in this place speaks of the extraordinary gift and exercise of prophecy. And although it be not like, [*likely*] that the Church of Corinth was, in that so plenteous effusion of the gifts of the Spirit, altogether destitute of extraordinary prophets, yet that the apostle did not in that place aim at them, [Or, "the apostle] may be proved by many more, and the same, as I think, firm arguments drawn from the selfsame text. [*That is, in the rest of chapter 14.*] Which that I may do the more commodiously, the prudent reader must call to mind, that upon the foundation of the extraordinary prophets, as well as of the very apostles, the church is built, Eph. ii. 20; and that that mystery of Christ, by the Spirit **immediately and infallibly** enlightening their mind, was in the same manner, though not in all the same degree, revealed to them, and the other. Eph. iii. 4, 5.

Ephesians 2:19 Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners: but citizens with the saints, and of the household of God, 20 And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone;

Ephesians 3:4 (Whereby when ye read, ye may know mine understanding in the mystery of Christ) 5

Which in other ages was not opened unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy Apostles and Prophets by the Spirit,

Geneva Note: "other ages": He does not mean that no one knew of the calling of the Gentiles before, but because very few knew of it. And those that did know it, such as the prophets, had it revealed to them very obscurely, and by means of symbols.

◇ **LOTS of people "prophesied" at Corinth!** Verses 24, 29, and 31 describe those able to "prophesy" in the Corinthian church as so numerous that rules had to be set up so that they could take turns in an orderly manner! Even though we are talking about people able to "prophesy" by ordinary means, it is hard to imagine so many in that small congregation!

This so considered,

1. It seems altogether improbable, that so many prophets of this rank, although inferior in gifts, should have been found in that one small congregation, as the apostle insinuates, ver. 24, 29, 31, that Corinth had.

1 Corinthians 14:24 But if all prophesy, and there come in one that believeth not, or one unlearned, he is rebuked of all men, and is judged of all,....29 Let the Prophets speak two, or three, and let the other judge. ...31 For ye may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may have comfort.

*Geneva note on v. 29: The manner of prophesying: let two or three propound, and let the others judge of that which is propounded, whether it is agreeable to the word of God or not. If in this examination the Lord indicates that nothing was wrong, let them give him leave to speak. **Let every man be admitted to prophesy, severally and in his order, so far forth as it is required for the edifying of the church. Let them be content to be subject to each other's judgment.***

◇ **Ordinary "prophesiers" need correction from each other.** If you take the assumption of our critics that everyone who "prophesies" in 1 Corinthians 14 is a "prophet" described in 1 Corinthians 12, and combine that with verses 1 Corinthians 14:29 and 32 as generally interpreted, you must conclude that the Prophets in Corinth not only were disorderly, but they were so full of errors in what they said God said that they had to continually correct each other!

2. The prophets in Corinth not only behaved themselves inordinately in the church, but withal, as by interpreters from ver. 29 and 32, is generally delivered, were subject to error in the very doctrine which they propounded; ...

1 Corinthians 14:29 Let the Prophets speak two, or three, and let the other judge. ...32 And the spirits of the Prophets are subject to the Prophets.

Geneva note: "Spirits": The doctrine which the prophets bring, who are inspired with God's Spirit.

◇ **The "Prophets" of chapter 12 spoke for God infallibly.** To believe that about the "extraordinary" prophets described in 1 Corinthians 12, those master builders who with the Apostles laid the foundation of the Christian religion, is to doubt the foundation of our faith! If even one such Prophet could be inaccurate, why couldn't they all? And if we believe they *might* have erred, how can we tell they did not *all* err? And if we accept that they all might have erred, how can anything be certain about our faith?

...which to affirm of the extraordinary prophets, those skilful master builders, who together with the apostles laid the foundation, together participated [were inspired by] the same holy Spirit, seemeth not a little to shake the foundation of the Christian religion. And if one of these extraordinary prophets might err, why not they all? And if the prophets, why not the apostles? And if they might err, how should it appear, that they have not erred? And so by consequence, what either then was, or now is, the firmness and certainty of the Christian faith?

Editor's note: Actually, I disagree with Robinson here. Although I agree in distinguishing between the few "Prophets" of chapter 12 from the many who "prophesy" of chapter 14, and although I agree Prophets have greater capacity through the Holy Spirit than all those who prophesy, there is no man who is beyond correction. Paul corrected even Peter in Galatians 2:11, just as Jesus had corrected him several times. Poor Peter, founder of the Church according to Roman Catholics, and

the one Apostle all of the rest of us can relate to!

Peter himself said all of us need to be subject to each other, 1 Peter 5:5. God wrote His Book with fallible men. In fact, God made plain the sins of the very men who wrote most of the Bible!

Moses, who wrote the first 5 books, lost his temper and doubted God, so God kept him out of the Promised Land. David and Solomon together wrote four books, yet David was a murderer and Solomon couldn't keep his pants zipped, which got him into idolatry. Paul, the guy telling us how to do Church, who wrote 14 of the 27 books of the New Testament, persecuted Christians!

Of course there is a difference between the "Prophets" of 1 Corinthians 12 and those who "prophesy" in chapter 14. But just as the difference between a talented "singer", and an amateur who "sings", is a matter of degree and is not absolute – there being no infallible singers, even so it is the same with every human ability.

◇ **The silencing of women proves that men could speak.** Paul tells women who are not Spirit-inspired to be silent in the exercise of prophesying as described in 1 Corinthians 14. This is not inconsistent with the liberty of Spirit-inspired prophetesses, authorized to speak in chapter 12 and named throughout the Bible. But if the two groups are the same as our critics say, God has commissioned many women to speak whom Paul would silence!

3. Seeing that the apostle, ver. 34, 35, enjoins women deep silence in this church exercise, not permitting them at all to speak; it seems most plain that he hath no eye, nor respect at all, to those extraordinary gifts and endowments of prophecy authorising even women furnished with them, to speak publicly, and in men's presence, as appears in Miriam, Deborah, Huldah, Anna, as also even in Jezebel herself in regard of order, and others. Exod. xv. 21; Judges v. 1; 2 Kings xxii. 14; Luke ii. 36; Rev. ii. 20.

Exodus 15:20 And Miriam the prophetess, sister of Aaron took a timbrell in her hand, and all the women came out after her with timbrels and dances.

21 And Miriam answered them, Sing ye to the LORD, for he hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea.

Judges 4:4 And at that time Deborah a Prophetess the wife of Lapidoth judged Israel.5:1 Then sang Deborah, and Barak the son of Abinoam the same day, saying,

2 Kings 22:14 So Hilkiah the priest, and Ahikam, and Achbor, and Shaphan, and Asahiah, went unto Huldah the prophetess, the wife of Shallum the son of Tikvah, the son of Harhas, keeper of the wardrobe; (now she dwelt in Jerusalem in the (g) college;) and they communed with her. Geneva note on "college": Or the house of doctrine, which was near the temple, and where the learned assembled to search the scriptures and the doctrine of the prophets.

Luke 2:36 And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser: she was of a great age, and had lived with an husband seven years from her virginity; Geneva note: Another witness besides Simeon, against whom no objection may be brought, inviting all men to the receiving of the Messiah.

Revelation 2:20 Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit (k) fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols. Geneva note on "fornication": Often in the scripture, by fornication they mean idolatry.

Editor's note: *Robinson's conclusion that Spirit-inspired women were exempt from the verses in chapter 14 about silencing women encouraged him to start a list of other common sense exceptions which are included in the catechism that follows, which led to women at Plimoth enjoying much more freedom of speech than elsewhere in the world. However, his assumption that inspired Prophets must be infallible imploded when two prophets continually contradicted each other, causing the Separatists to never again recognize anyone as a Prophet – which shut that door to female participation.*

For my Bible study showing 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 does not command that all women be silent – that silence is not enjoined on single women at all and only on married women when their husbands want them to be silent, in order to avoid husbands and wives arguing in public – see www.saltshaker.us/BibleStudies/ICOR-2.htm

◇ **Not all the ordinary prophesiers spoke for God, distinguishing them from the formal Prophets.** In verse 36 Paul said some of these prophesying Corinthians do not speak for God. Yet the extraordinary prophets of chapter 12 *do* speak for God. Therefore, they can't be the same people. Although they are inspired by the same Holy Spirit – though to a different degree.

Lastly, The apostle, ver. 36, upbraideth those very prophets unto whom he directeth his speech, as such as from whom the Word of God came not: but without cause, yea, not without notable injury, if they were extraordinary prophets, that is, inspired with the Holy Ghost, and his immediate instruments: seeing that from these kind of prophets, as well as from Paul the apostle, the Word of God came, though in a different degree and measure.

◇ **Prophesying offers unique benefits.** The third reason to reestablish “prophesying” in worship services is the many spiritual benefits available in no other way. Here are seven benefits of “prophesying”:

The third [Scriptural] foundation of this exercise [the exercise of prophecy] is laid in the manifold [many], and the same most excellent ends attainable only by this means.

◇ **1. Better preaching.** That God may be glorified by everyone sharing the Gift he has received with one another, as 1 Peter 4:10-11 says, and that the Spirit be not quenched by dislike of prophesying, as 1 Thessalonians 5:19-20 warns. The verse means that when allowed, prophesying produces spiritual fruit that excels what pastors alone can produce.

1. That “*God may be glorified, whilst every one doth administer to another the gift which he hath received, as good dispensers of the manifold grace of God.*” 1 Pet. iv. 10, 11. 2. That “the Spirit be not extinguished,” 1 Thess. v. 19, 20, [***“Quench not the spirit. Despise not prophesying.”***] that is, the gift of prophecy, or teaching; in which it may so come to pass, that some in the church, though no ministers, may excel the very pastors themselves.

◇ **2. Relationship skills.** That members may develop the relationship skills to become pastors, and that members, seeing who reasons well, may base their selection of their next pastor on this solid observation.

2. This seeing, the apostle would have done, he would questionless have some order for the doing of it; which, excepting this of prophecy, we have none of apostolical institution.

◇ **3. Teaching experience.** That future church teachers may learn by experience to teach, and be selected by observation to teach – teaching ability being one of the qualifications of a church leader according to 1 Timothy 3.

3 That such as are to be taken into the ministry of the church, may both become and appear “apt to teach.” 1 Tim. iii.

◇ **4. Better scrutiny of error.** That the teachings of the church may be saved from error. Error is much more likely when no one is allowed to expose it, because only one or two are allowed to speak, and no one else is allowed to say what they think. 1 John 4:1 warns us – ALL of us – to test those who claim to be inspired. In Revelation 2:2, Jesus praised people who did that. That kind of Revelation 2:2 “examination” is meaningless if it only means each individual can try to figure it out all by himself, but is not allowed to discuss what he notices with others!

(If private scrutiny is what Jesus praised, then what a surprise it was when John’s letter got to Ephesus and each member found out he wasn’t the only one who noticed a problem! If each individual can’t find out if anyone else noticed what he did, so that he is not the only member to see a red flag, then there can be no authority to remove a false prophet or pastor from the pulpit. Matthew 18:15-17 says the “whole church” must agree in such censure. And the one censured must hear from the “whole church”. Jesus’ remedy is made unavailable by reducing the “whole church” to deep silence.)

4. That the doctrine of the church may be preserved pure, from the infection of error: which is far more easily corrupted, when some one or two alone in the church speak all, and all the rest have deep and perpetual silence enjoined them. 1 John iv. 1; Rev. ii.

2, 7, with i. 11.*

1 John 4:1 Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits [test those who claim to be inspired] whether they are of God: for many false prophets are gone out into this world.

Geneva note: Taking occasion by the name of the Spirit, lest love and charity should be separated from the worship of God, which chiefly depends on his true knowledge, he returns to that which he spoke of in the second chapter concerning the taking heed of in antichrists: He will have us here take heed of two things, the one is, that seeing there are many false prophets, we should not trust every man: the other is, that because many men teach false things, we should not therefore believe any. We must then observe, that we may be able to discern the spirits of God which are to be followed, from impure spirits which are to be avoided. “believe not every spirit”: This is spoken by metonymy and it is as if he had said, Believe not every one who says that he has a gift of the Holy Spirit to do the office of a prophet. [Metonymy in Johnson’s Dictionary: A rhetorical figure, by which one word is put for another, as the matter for the materiate [something made of matter]; “he died by steel”, that is, by a sword. They differ only as cause and effect, which by a metonymy usual in all sorts of authors, are frequently put one for another. A modern definition: the substitution of the name of an attribute or adjunct for that of the thing meant, for example suit for business executive, or the track for horse racing.]

Revelation 2:2 I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil, and hast examined them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found the liars: Geneva note: The proposition first condemning the pastor of this church (Rev_2:2,3) then reproving him (Rev_2:4) after informing him, and threatening that he will move the church to another place (Rev_2:5). This threat of divine vengeance Christ mitigates by a type of correction, calling to mind the particular virtue and piety of the Church, which God never leaves without recompense (Rev_2:6). Concerning the Nicolaitans, see (Rev_2:15).

...7 Let him that hath an ear, hear, what the Spirit saith unto the churches, To him that overcometh, will I give to eat of the tree of life which is in the midst of the paradise of God. Geneva note: The conclusion containing a commandment of attention, and a promise of everlasting life, shown in a figure; (Gen_2:9). “Paradise”: That is, in paradise after the

manner of the Hebrew phrase. Thus Christ speaks as he is mediator.

Revelation 1:11 Saying, I am Alpha and Omega, that first and that last: & that which thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven Churches which are in Asia, unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamus, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea.

◇ **5. Feedback.** That through discussion, those with a teaching can find out where they have not been persuasive so they can give more evidence; they can find out what was confusing so they can be more clear; they can warn when they say something wrong or crazy and be corrected. Truth happens, through questions, answers, and even modest disputes. Truth is beautiful in the assemblies of saints. Truth is the work of God.

That kind of dialog is how Jesus began His ministry at the age of 12. Those kinds of disputes were the habit of Paul during Sabbath services. Apollos spoke boldly, refuting error with great vehemence, and God put him in His Book.

5. That things doubtful arising in teaching may be cleared, things obscure opened, things erroneous convinced; and lastly, that as by the beating together of two stones fire appeareth, so may the light of the truth more clearly shine by disputations, questions, and answers modestly had and made, and as becomes the church of saints, and work of God.† Luke ii. 40; iv. 21, 22; Acts xvii. 2; xviii. 24, 26, 28.

Luke 2:46 And it came to pass three days after, that they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions: 47 And all that heard him, were astonished at his understanding and answers.

Luke 4:21 Then he began to say unto them, This day is the Scripture fulfilled in your ears.

Acts 17:2 and Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days disputed with them by the scriptures.

Acts 18:24 And a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, came to Ephesus, an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures,

...26 And he began to **speak boldly in the Synagogue**. Whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly....

28 For mightily **he confuted publicly** the Jews, **with great vehemence**, shewing by the Scriptures, that Jesus was that Christ.

◇ **6. Witnessing skills.** For the development of relationship skills among believers, to enable them to convert unbelievers. Turning “wolves into sheep” is the job of everyone, according to 1 Corinthians 14:24-25, so they need a forum where they can develop discussion skills to be able to reason with people who disagree. The job of pastors is to moderate the forum where they can acquire these skills, according to Acts 20:28.

6. For the edification of the church, and conversion of them that believe not: and this the rather because it appertaineth not properly to the pastors, as pastors, to turn goats or wolves into sheep, but rather to feed the flock and sheep of Christ, in which the Holy Ghost hath made them overseers. 1 Cor. xiv. 4, 24, 25; Acts xx. 28. ‡

1 Corinthians 14:4 He that speaketh in an unknown tongue edifieth himself; but he that prophesieth edifieth the church. ...24 But if all prophesy, and there come in one that believeth not, or one unlearned, he is convinced of all, he is judged of all: 25 and thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest; and so falling down on his face he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth.

Acts 20:28 Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.

◇ **7. Enfranchisement.** The final reason to encourage all to prophesy is to give all members a voice in matters of concern to all, so that decisions will have as much support as possible from as many as possible, or in other words, unity. It is easier for people to genuinely love each other (beyond superficial polite smiles shared by people who can't relate to each other in depth because any issue so important that the discovery of disagreement could make some people

angry – the definition of “controversial”) – is suppressed. It also allows leaders and the congregation to know each other better and to enjoy a relationship of partners.

7. And lastly, Lest by excluding the commonalty and multitude from church affairs, the people of God be divided, and charity lessened, and familiarity and goodwill be extinguished between the order of ministers and people. §

Review: just the headings from this study

People can “prophesy” who aren't “prophets”.

Not everyone can “prophesy”.

Anyone who can – church officers or laymen – may.

Jews have always opened their forums to everyone – even to Jesus!

Wisdom isn't correlated to credentials. To get wisdom, a forum must be open to people without credentials.

1 Corinthians 14 explicitly says “ye may all prophesy”.

1 Corinthians 12 talks about formal, inspired “prophets”, but chapter 14 is about ordinary “prophesying” by anybody. The difference is consistency and quality. The similarity is the involvement of the Holy Spirit.

LOTS of people “prophesied” at Corinth!

Ordinary “prophesiers” need correction from each other.

The “Prophets” of chapter 12 spoke for God infallibly.

The silencing of women proves that men could speak.

Not all the ordinary prophesiers spoke for God, distinguishing them from the formal Prophets.

Prophesying offers unique benefits.

1. Better preaching.

2. Relationship skills.

3. Teaching experience.

4. Better scrutiny of error.

5. Feedback.

6. Witnessing skills.

7. Enfranchisement.