

FALLIBLE NEW TESTAMENT PROPHECY/PROPHETS? A CRITIQUE OF WAYNE GRUDEM'S HYPOTHESIS

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Spiritual gifts have long been a major topic of discussion in evangelicalism, but in recent years the focus has shifted somewhat from a discussion of gifts like tongues to the gift of prophecy. Wayne A. Grudem has proposed a novel definition of prophecy that he attempts to support from the NT. He traces part of his definition to cessationists and part to Charismatics in hopes of finding a middle ground acceptable to both. A central platform in Grudem's hypothesis is Eph 2:20, a verse whose interpretation he misrepresents because of a grammatical misunderstanding. Other weaknesses in his theory include his assumption of a strict discontinuity from OT to NT prophecy, a mistaken understanding of the prestige of the NT prophet, and a misapprehension of the need of continuous evaluation of NT prophecy.

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SPIRITUAL GIFTS AS A CENTER OF CONTROVERSY

Controversy and crisis are no strangers to the Christian church. When Paul penned 1 Corinthians, this first-century church was already embroiled in turmoil over the nature and practice of spiritual gifts. Misconceptions and abuse of the gifts in Christian worship were rampant. A three-man delegation from the church (1 Cor 7:1; 16:17) asked Paul for clarification on gifts such as prophecy, tongues, and knowledge (1 Cor 13:8). The outcome of the turbulence in Corinth is unknown, but the second century saw the same confusion in the

¹Dr. Farnell is a recent graduate of Dallas Theological Seminary where he completed his doctoral dissertation on the subject "New Testament Prophecy: Its Nature and Duration." The timeliness and quality of his treatment of Wayne A. Grudem's *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today* and related writings prompted the staff of *The Master's Seminary Journal* to incorporate this essay in the present issue.

Montanist heresy. Now the tumult has re-emerged in the twentieth century in the form of Pentecostalism, Neopentecostalism, and movements variously labelled as "Charismatic," "Vineyard," "Signs and Wonders," and "Third Wave."

The gift of tongues (cf. Acts 2:1-13; 1 Cor 14:2 ff.) has drawn a disproportionate amount of this debate until about the last fifteen years. Most recently, however, several books have dealt with the gift of prophecy. Since the nature and purpose of this gift had not been closely defined by either side of the controversy, this gift has provided a fertile topic as a new phase in the discussion of temporary and permanent spiritual gifts. Fundamental questions about the nature of this gift now threaten to become, if they have not done so already, a major storm center in NT theology and church worship. Recent works have challenged long-held views of what NT prophecy is. Among noncharismatics it has been relatively standard to regard the gift as foundational for the church and temporary in nature.² Charismatics who may be loosely labelled "noncessationists" i.e., they deny that any of the spiritual gifts ceased after the first century generally see prophecy as presently active as it was during the first seventy years

²Exemplifying standard noncharismatics, Ryrie writes, "The gift of prophecy included receiving a message directly from God through special revelation, being guided in declaring it to people, and having it authenticated in some way by God Himself. The content of that message may have included telling the future (which was what we normally think of as prophesying), but it also included revelation from God concerning the present. This too was a gift limited in its need and use, for it was needed during the writing of the New Testament and its usefulness ceased when the books were completed. God's message then was contained in written form, and no new revelation was given in addition to the written record" (Charles C. Ryrie, *The Holy Spirit* [Chicago: Moody, 1965] 86). Other prominent dispensational noncharismatic works are John F. Walvoord, *The Holy Spirit at Work Today* (Chicago: Moody, 1965); Robert G. Gromacki, *The Modern Tongues Movement* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1967); Robert L. Thomas, *Understanding Spiritual Gifts* (Chicago: Moody, 1978); Merrill F. Unger, *The Baptism and Gifts of the Holy Spirit* (Chicago: Moody, 1974); John F. MacArthur, Jr., *The Charismatics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978); Charles R. Smith, *Tongues in Biblical Perspective* (Winona Lake, IN: BMH, 1972). Works by noncharismatics who are Reformed and covenant theologians are B. B. Warfield, *Counterfeit Miracles* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1918); Anthony Hoekema, *What about Tongues-Speaking?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966); J. I. Packer, *God Has Spoken* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1958).

after the church began.³

NEW CONTROVERSY OVER THE GIFT OF PROPHECY

The recent surge of interest in the prophetic gift has witnessed a crossing of the traditional boundaries by some individuals in an apparent attempt to find a mediating position between the two perspectives. A prominent example of this is Wayne A. Grudem. Belonging to the Reformed tradition that is cessationist in background, Grudem has crossed traditional lines of understanding in proposing a compromise between the cessationist and noncessationist viewpoints regarding prophecy. In his recently published work on the subject, he writes,

In this book I am suggesting an understanding of the gift of prophecy which would require a bit of modification in the views of each of these . . . groups. I am asking that the charismatics go on using the gift of prophecy, but that they stop calling it "a word from the Lord" simply because that label makes it sound exactly like the Bible in authority, and leads to much misunderstanding. . . .

On the other side, I am asking those in the cessationist camp to give serious thought to the possibility that prophecy in ordinary New Testament churches was not equal to Scripture in authority, but was simply a very human and sometimes partially mistaken report of something the Holy Spirit brought to someone's mind. And I am asking that they think again about those arguments for the cessation of certain

³Kirby, a non-cessationist, laments that the cessationists, especially those of the dispensational persuasion, have hindered the present usefulness of spiritual gifts: "Early on, I had a hunch that more had been lost to humanistic enlightenment, dispensationalism, liberal or extential theology, and fear of the loony fringe than we had guessed" (Jeff Kirby, "The Recovery of the Healing Gifts," in *Those Controversial Gifts* [ed. by George Mallone; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1983] 102). By erroneously linking the cessationist beliefs of some dispensationalists with those of existentialism, liberalism, and humanism and with fear of the "loony fringe," he illustrates the sharp cleavage that exists between the cessationist and noncessationist camps. He also reflects a basic misunderstanding of broader theological issues, because cessationism is not a dispensational issue, i.e., many non-cessationists are dispensational, and many cessationists are non-dispensational.

gifts. . . .

I should make it very clear at the beginning that I am not saying that the charismatic and cessationist views are mostly wrong. Rather, I think they are both mostly right (in the things they count essential), and I think that an adjustment in how they understand the nature of prophecy (especially its authority) has the potential for bringing about a resolution of this issue which would safeguard items that both sides see as crucial.⁴

By calling for a compromise between cessationists and noncessationists regarding the prophetic and other related gifts, Grudem has stirred up a "hornets' nest" of discussion on the gifts once again.⁵

He offers his own new definition of Christian prophecy, one that differs markedly from a traditional understanding: "prophecy in ordinary New Testament churches was not equal to Scripture in authority, but was simply a very human and sometimes partially mistaken report of something the Holy Spirit brought to someone's

⁴Wayne A. Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today* (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1988) 14-15.

⁵Other recent writers who have helped bring the prophecy issue to the forefront of discussion include H. A. Guy, David E. Aune, David Hill, Theodore M. Crone, Eduard Cothenet, and Gerhard Friedrich. These more notable ones serve as examples of a number of others. Guy is usually cited as responsible for the most recent round of scholarly debate regarding prophecy (H. A. Guy, *New Testament Prophecy: Its Origin and Significance* [London: Epworth, 1947], but his work has now been largely superseded by more recent research. Crone has been praised for his useful, scholarly, and thorough research in the field (Theodore M. Crone, "Early Christian Prophecy: A Study of Its Origin and Function" [PhD dissertation, Tübingen University, 1973]). Other significant works include David E. Aune, *Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983); David Hill, *New Testament Prophecy* (Atlanta: Knox, 1979); Eduard M. Cothenet, "Prophétisme dans le Nouveau Testament," in *Dictionnaire de la Bible* 8:1222-337; Helmut Krâmer, Rolf Rendtorff, Rudolf Meyer, and Gerhard Friedrich, "proph^hthw," *TDNT* 6:781-861. The last of these works is not as recent as the others, but it is still one of the most basic and best treatments on the subject. Another recent work by Grudem is "Why Christians Can Still Prophecy: Scripture Encourages Us To Seek the Gift Yet Today," *CT* 32/13 (Sept 16, 1988) 29-35.

mind."⁶ In other words, prophecy consists of "telling something God has spontaneously brought to mind."⁷

He traces his definition to both the cessationists and the charismatics. In common with the former he takes prophecy as noncompetitive with the authority of the canonical NT because of the close of the canon at the end of the apostolic era, but he concurs with the charismatic understanding that prophecy preserves "the spontaneous, powerful working of the Holy Spirit, giving `edification, encouragement, and comfort' which speaks directly to the needs of the moment and causes people to realize that `truly God is among you' (1 Cor 14:25)."⁸ OT prophets are not comparable to NT prophets, but to NT apostles, according to his theory.⁹

Consequently, NT prophets were "simply reporting in their own words what God would bring to mind, and . . . these prophecies did not have the authority of the words of the Lord."¹⁰ Grudem writes,

Much more commonly, prophet and prophecy were used of ordinary Christians who spoke not with absolute divine authority, but simply to report something God had laid on their hearts or brought to their minds.

There are many indications in the New Testament that this ordinary gift of prophecy had authority less than that of the Bible, and even less than that of recognized Bible teaching in the early church.¹¹

⁶Grudem, *Prophecy in the New Testament* 14.

⁷Grudem, "Still Prophecy" 29.

⁸Grudem, *Prophecy in the New Testament* 15.

⁹Wayne A. Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in 1 Corinthians* (Washington: University Press, 1982) 71.

¹⁰Accordingly, the NT prophets at Corinth were "speaking merely human words to report something God brings to mind" (Grudem, *Prophecy in the New Testament* 67). That is, sometimes the prophet was accurate and sometimes not. In some circumstances, the prophet could be "mistaken" (Ibid., 96).

¹¹Grudem, "Still Prophecy" 30.

In other words, prophecy depended on a revelation from the Holy Spirit, but the prophet could either understand it imperfectly or report it inaccurately, or both.¹²

Only NT apostles spoke inspired words.¹³ The very words of NT prophets were not inspired as were those of OT prophets.¹⁴ This leaves Grudem with two forms of NT prophecy: nonauthoritative and authoritative (i.e., apostolic).

The crucial point of his thesis is that the apostles, not the NT prophets, were the true successors of the OT prophets and, like their earlier counterparts, spoke under the authority derived from the plenary verbal inspiration of their words.¹⁵ This kind of gift is distinguished from that exercised at Corinth (cf. 1 Corinthians 12-14), Thessalonica (1 Thess 5:19-21), Tyre (Acts 21:4), Ephesus (Acts 19:6), and other places (e.g., Agabus, Acts 11:28; 21:10-11). Only the general content of this secondary prophecy can be vouched for, with allowances made for its being partially mistaken.

It was therefore allegedly open to being disobeyed without blame (Acts 21:4), critical assessment by the whole congregation (1 Cor 14:29), and outright rejection as subordinate to Paul's apostolic revelation (1 Cor 14:37-38). According to Grudem, "these prophecies did not have the authority of the words of the Lord."

GRAMMATICALLY RELATED WEAKNESSES OF GRUDEM'S HYPOTHESIS

The newly proposed theory of a respected professor at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School has multiple weaknesses, only a few of which can be treated here. A discussion of these weaknesses affords

¹²Ibid.

¹³Ibid., 40-41.

¹⁴Grudem, *Prophecy in 1 Corinthians* 69-70. Grudem draws upon 1 Corinthians 12-14 as his principal source regarding "secondary" (i.e., nonapostolic) prophecy.

¹⁵Ibid., 7-113.

an excellent opportunity to present by contrast a clearer picture of NT prophecy by focusing on characteristics that heretofore have been largely overlooked in discussions of this subject.

Misuse of Sharp's rule. Grudem's most significant argument stems from Eph 2:20 and an application of a grammatical rule dealing with two nouns connected by the Greek word for "and" and governed by only one article. This argument is seriously flawed as will be shown below.

Regarding Eph 2:20 he writes,

The absence of the second article in *tyná postōlvn ka4 profhtyn* [*tōn apostolōn kai prophetōn*, "the apostles and prophets"] means that the writer views the apostles and prophets as a single group, and that we cannot immediately be sure whether that group has one or two components. But the grammatical structure clearly allows for the possibility that one group with one component is meant, for there are several instances in the New Testament where one definite article governs two or more nouns joined by *ka3* and it is clear that one group with only one component (or one person) is implied. In Ephesians 4:11 it is noteworthy: *δ̄ dvken toŷw mená postōloyw, toŷw dē profhtaw, toŷw dē eŷ aggelistaw, toŷw dē poimēnaw ka4 didaskaloyw* [*edōken tous men apostolous, tous de prophetas, tous de euaggelistas, tous de poimenas kai didaskalous*, "he gave some as apostles, some as prophets, some as evangelists, some as pastors and teachers"]. The pastors and teachers are the same people but two different functions are named.¹⁶

At this point Grudem lists "most of the clear examples of this type of construction from the Pauline corpus, along with some scattered examples from elsewhere in the New Testament."¹⁷ His list includes examples of the same person described with two or more titles (Rom 16:7; Eph 4:11; 6:21; Phil 2:25; Col 1:2; 4:7; Phlm 1; Heb 3:1; 1 Pet 2:25; 2 Pet 3:18), of phrases in which God is named with a similar form (Rom 15:6; 2 Cor 1:3; 11:31; Gal 1:4; Eph 1:3; 5:20; Phil 4:20; Col

¹⁶Ibid., 97, transliterations and translations added.

¹⁷Ibid., 97-98.

1:3; 3:17; 1 Thess 1:3; 3:11 [2x]; [1 Tim, sic] 6:15; Tit 2:13; 2 Pet 1:1, 11), of nonpersonal objects occasionally referred to in this way (1 Thess 3:7; Tit 2:13), and of participles and infinitives in this type of construction (1 Cor 11:29; Gal 1:7; 1 Thess 5:12).¹⁸ From these usages Grudem concludes,

This does not imply that Eph. 2:20 *must* mean "the apostles who are also prophets," for there are many other examples which could be listed where one group with two distinct components is named (cf. Acts 13:50). Nevertheless, it must be noted that I was unable to find in the Pauline corpus even one clear example analogous to Acts 13:50 or 15:2, where two distinct people or classes of people (as opposed to things) are joined by καὶ and only one article is used. This may be more or less significant, depending in part on one's view of the authorship of Ephesians. But it should not be overlooked that when Paul wants to distinguish two people or groups he does not hesitate to use a second article (1 Cor. 3:8; 8:6; etc; cf. Eph. 3:10). And I have listed above over twenty Pauline examples where clearly one person or group is implied by this type of construction.

So Eph. 2:20 views "the apostles and prophets" as one group. Grammatically, that group could have two components, but such an interpretation would not be exactly in accord with Pauline usage. If the author had meant to speak of a two-component group he certainly did not make this meaning very clear to his readers (as he could have done by adding another τῶν (*tōn*, "the") before προφητῶν (*prophetōn*, "prophets"). On the other hand, the large number of NT parallels shows that "the apostles who are also prophets" would have easily been understood by the readers if other factors in the context allowed for or favored this interpretation.¹⁹

From this reasoning he concludes that Eph 2:20 is speaking of apostle-prophets who are distinguished from those who are simply prophets described in such other passages as 1 Corinthians 12-14. Apostle-prophets, he says, were limited to the first century church, but the other kind continues to the present day.

¹⁸Ibid., 98-100.

¹⁹Ibid., 100-1; transliterations and translations added.

Though the case for this interpretation of Eph 2:20 may appear impressive, it is problematic for a number of reasons. Most basically, it rests on a fundamental error and a commonly misunderstood application of Sharp's rule.²⁰ The rule is as follows:

When the copulative $\kappa\alpha\iota$ connects nouns of the same case [viz. nouns (either substantive or adjective, or participles) of personal description, respecting office, dignity, affinity, or connection, and attributes, properties, or qualities, good or ill,] if the article δ , or any of its cases, precedes the first of the said nouns or participles, and is not repeated before the second noun or participle, the latter always relates to the same person that is expressed or described by the first noun or participle: i.e., it denotes a further description of the first named person. . . .²¹

Though challenged repeatedly, no one has succeeded in overturning or refuting it insofar as the NT is concerned.²²

Yet four lesser known stipulations of Sharp's rule are often overlooked. These must be met if the two nouns in the construction are to be referred to the same person. The four are (1) both nouns must be personal; (2) both nouns must be common nouns, that is, not proper names; (3) both nouns must be in the same case; and (4) both

²⁰Grudem does not specifically mention the name "Granville Sharp," the person whose formulation of this grammatical phenomenon is widely recognized, but he appears to base his interpretation on principles derived from that rule.

²¹Granville Sharp, *Remarks on the Definitive Article in the Greek Text of the New Testament: Containing Many New Proofs of the Divinity of Christ, from Passages Which Are Wrongly Translated in the Common English Version* (1st American ed.; Philadelphia: B. B. Hopkins, 1807) 3. This is the first of six rules articulated by Sharp whose feeling was that the other five merely confirmed his first.

²²The best modern defense of the rule is in a seven-part series by C. Kuehne that appeared in the *Journal of Theology*: "The Greek Article and the Doctrine of Christ's Deity." The seven parts appeared in the following numbers: 13 (Sept 1973) 12-28, 13 (Dec 1973) 14-30, 14 (Mar 1974) 11-20, 14 (June 1974) 16-25, 14 (Sept 1974) 21-34, 14 (Dec 1974) 8-19; 15 (Mar 1975) 8-22. See also the excellent article by Daniel B. Wallace, "The Semantic Range of the Article-Noun- $\kappa\alpha\iota$ -Noun Plural Construction in the New Testament," *GTJ4* (1983) 59-84.

nouns must be in the singular.²³ Sharp did not clearly delineate these stipulations in conjunction with his first rule, so most grammars are ambiguous in these areas.²⁴

Most exegetes, including Grudem, reflect no awareness of the qualifications, and hence apply Sharp's first rule hastily and without proper refinements. For instance, though the fourth stipulation about the rule's limitation to singular nouns only was not *clearly* stated in the first rule, a perusal of Sharp's monograph reveals that he insisted that the rule applies absolutely to the singular only.²⁵ The limitation may be *inferred* via an argument from silence in his statement of the rule: "the latter always relates to the same person . . . i.e., it denotes a further description of the first-named person."²⁶ Later in the monograph he offers this clarification: "There is no exception or instance of the like mode of expression that I know of, which necessarily requires a construction be different from what is laid down, EXCEPT that the nouns be proper names, or in the plural number, in which there are numerous exceptions."²⁷ Again at another point he states that impersonal constructions are within the purview of the second, third, fifth, and sixth rules, but not the first or fourth.²⁸

Middleton, whose early study on the Greek article is still highly

²³Wallace, "Semantic Range" 62. The present discussion is limited to the issue of the singular number of the nouns (i.e., qualification "4" in the listed stipulations). For further discussion of the other three qualifications, see *ibid.*, 62-63, and *idem*, "The Validity of Granville Sharp's First Rule with Implications for the Deity of Christ" (unpublished paper presented to Southwestern Section of the Evangelical Theological Society, Mar 4, 1988) 15-31.

²⁴Wallace, "Semantic Range" 62.

²⁵*Ibid.*, 63.

²⁶Sharp, *Remarks* 3.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 5-6.

²⁸*Ibid.*, 120. For an excellent discussion of these important qualifications regarding Sharp's rule, see Wallace, "Validity" 4-5.

respected,²⁹ was the first Greek grammarian to accept the validity of Sharp's rule. He notes many exceptions to Sharp's rule when plural nouns are involved:

What reason can be alleged, why the practice in Plural Attributives should differ from that in Singular ones? The circumstances are evidently dissimilar. A *single* individual may stand in various relations and act in divers capacities. . . . But this does not happen in the same degree with respect to Plurals. Though *one* individual may act, and frequently does act, in several capacities, it is not likely that a *multitude* of individuals should all of them act in the *same* several capacities. . . .³⁰

On the basis of an extensive analysis of plural nouns in comparable constructions in the NT, Wallace has confirmed that plural nouns are an exception to Sharp's rule. He has cited many passages where the members of a construction cannot be equated with each other and thus constitute clear exceptions (e.g., Matt 3:7; 17:1; 27:56; Acts 17:12).³¹ His conclusion is, "Granville Sharp applied his rule only to singular, non-proper, personal nouns of the same case."³²

He has catalogued the abuse of Sharp's rule by several grammatical works considered standards in the field of NT grammar. Regarding this abuse he notes,

But what about the *abuse* of the rule? Almost without exception, those who seem to be acquainted with Sharp's rule and agree with its validity

²⁹Wallace, "Validity" 7; cf. C. F. D. Moule, *An Idiom-Book of New Testament Greek* (2nd ed.; Cambridge: University Press, 1959) 94, 109 (n. 3), 113 (n. 2), 114, 115, 116, 117.

³⁰Thomas F. Middleton, *Doctrine of the Greek Article* (ed. by H. J. Rose, 1841) 20. Wallace, "Validity" 8, cites this quotation from the "new edition" of a work originally published in 1808.

³¹Wallace summarizes, "There are no clear instances of the plural construction involving *nouns* which speak of identity, while plural constructions involving *participles*, where the sense could be determined, always had identical referents" (Wallace, "Validity" 10).

³²*Ibid.*

misunderstand and abuse it. Virtually no one is exempt from this charge`grammarians, commentators, theologians alike are guilty. Typically, the rule is usually *perceived* to extend to plural and impersonal constructions`in spite of the fact that the evidence of the NT with reference to plural and impersonal nouns is contrary to this supposition.³³

He cites several well known grammarians to illustrate his point.³⁴

Wallace also focused specifically on the relevant passage in Eph 4:11 where Sharp's rule is often applied. His comment is,

Although most commentaries consider the two terms to refer to one group, we must emphatically insist that such a view *has no grammatical basis*, even though the writers who maintain this view almost unanimously rest their case on the supposed semantics of the article-noun-καὶ-noun construction. Yet, as we have seen, there are no other examples in the NT of this construction with nouns in the plural, either clearly tagged or ambiguous, which allow for such a possibility. One would, therefore, be on rather shaky ground to insist on such a nuance here [Eph. 4:11]`especially if the main weapon in his arsenal is syntax!³⁵

Wallace affirms the validity of the rule for plural adjectives or participles, but indicates he has found no clear instances of the rule's applicability to plural nouns in the NT Koine, Papyri, Hellenistic, or Classical Greek.³⁶

This refined application of Sharp's rule removes Grudem's major foundation for equating apostles and prophets, since the rule is not applicable to Eph 2:20. In this verse Paul designates two separate

³³Ibid., 12.

³⁴For examples of applications of Sharp's rule that are insufficiently precise, see A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Nashville: Broadman, 1934) 785-89; H. E. Dana and J. R. Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (New York: Macmillan, 1955) 147.

³⁵Wallace, "Semantic Range" 83.

³⁶Wallace, "Validity" 15-31.

groups, apostles and prophets, without equating one to the other.³⁷ Since the passage labels prophecy in itself as a foundational gift, the inevitable conclusion is that NT prophecy has ceased along with the gift of apostleship.

Disregard for Eph 4:11. Another weakness in Grudem's reasoning regarding the equation of apostles and prophets in Eph 2:20 lies in his use of Eph 4:11 for support. Two aspects of Eph 4:11 can militate *against* his conclusion: (1) He argues, "When Paul wants to distinguish two people or groups he does not hesitate to use a second article. . . ." ³⁸ On this basis he concludes that the single article with apostle and prophet dictates that Paul intended to equate the two to each other. Yet in Eph 4:11 a verse that he uses in another way as a supporting grammatical analogy Paul uses two articles, one with "apostles" and one with "prophets": ἔδωκεν τοῖς ἀποστόλοις καὶ τοῖς προφήταις (edōken tous men apostolous tous de prophetas, "on the one hand he gave apostles, and on the other, prophets"). It is cogent reasoning that since Paul thus distinguishes between apostles and prophets in 4:11, he must have intended the same distinction in 2:20. This belies Grudem's interpretation. (2) As noted above, the grammatical analogy that Grudem cites in Eph 4:11 i.e., the identification of "pastors" and "teachers" provides no support for his theory, because the plural nouns forbid the pressing of Sharp's rule here, too.

Invalid cross-references. Furthermore, Grudem's cross-references cited to support an equation of apostles and prophets³⁹ are invalid, because every one of the examples is semantically unparallel. Not one

³⁷Had Paul wished to equate the two, he could have done so clearly with the insertion of a participial phrase (e.g., τῶν ὄντων [tōn ontōn, "those who are"]) or through a relative clause (e.g., "apostles who are also prophets"). This would have removed any doubt about the two groups being equivalent (cf. Dan McCartney, "Review of Wayne Grudem's, *The Gift of Prophecy in 1 Corinthians*," *WTJ* 45 [Spring 1983] 196).

³⁸Grudem, *Prophecy in 1 Corinthians* 101.

³⁹*Ibid.*, 98-100.

is a clear example of an application of Sharp's rule to plural nouns as Grudem's position on Eph 2:20 would require. Many of the cross-references are singular nouns governed by a single article to which Sharp's rule *does* apply,⁴⁰ so long as the nouns are personal and not proper nouns or plural in number. These, however, are a quite different grammatical entity from the plural-noun construction in Eph 2:20 and do not support his view of this verse. Sharp's rule is applicable to a few plural adjectives (e.g., Rom 16:7; Col 1:2), but the same principle does not apply to plural-noun constructions. The same difference holds between plural participles (e.g., Gal 1:7; 1 Thess 5:12) and plural nouns. Grudem's use of impersonal nouns as a grammatical parallel is also inaccurate (e.g., 1 Thess 3:7) because Sharp's rule requires personal nouns. Space forbids an exhaustive citation of all the alleged parallels, but every one of them is nonparallel for one of these reasons.

So none of the cross-references cited supports the case for identification of prophets with apostles in Eph 2:20. None presents an instance of analogous construction. It is wrong, therefore, to found such a conclusion on this verse.

Improper differentiation between Eph 2:20; 3:5 and 1 Cor 12-14.

Besides the alleged grammatical reason, this proposed identification also rests on differentiating prophecy in 1 Corinthians 12-14 from prophecy in Eph 2:20 and 3:5, the latter being apostolic prophecy and the former congregational prophecy.⁴¹ An inherent weakness in this distinction is reflected in a close scrutiny of technical terms used in both sections. The same "clusters" of revelational-type words occur in 1 Corinthians 12-14 as occur in the context of Ephesians 2-3. For example, *prophētai* (*prophetes*, "prophet") and *propheteuō* ("I prophesy") (cp. 1 Cor 12:28; 13:9; 14:1-6, 24, 31-32, 37, 39 with Eph 2:20; 3:5) are used in both. So are *oikodomō* (*oikodome*, "building") and *oikodomōv* (*oikodomeō*, "I build up, edify") (cp. 1 Cor 14:3-5, 12, 17, 26 with Eph 2:20-21), *mysterion* (*mysterion*, "mystery") (cp. 1 Cor 13:2; 14:2

⁴⁰Cf. Eph 6:21; Phil 2:25; Col 4:7; Phlm 1; Heb 3:1; 1 Pet 2:25; 2 Pet 3:18.

⁴¹Grudem, *Prophecy in the New Testament* 64.

with Eph 3:3-4, 9), á pokályciw (*apokalypsis*, "revelation") and á pokalyptv (*apokalyptø*, "I reveal") (cp. 1 Cor 14:6, 26, 30 with Eph 3:3, 5), kryptv (*kryptø*, "I hide") and its cognates (cp. 1 Cor 14:25 with Eph 3:9), á pã stolow (*apostolos*, "apostle") (cp. 1 Cor 12:28-29 with Eph 2:20; 3:5), and sof3a (*sophia*, "wisdom") (cp. 1 Cor 12:8 with Eph 3:10). The grouping of such technical terminology in a single context signals a reference to direct divine communication to a authoritative prophetic instrument. The presence of this type of communication in Ephesians 2-3 is not in doubt, and no significant basis exists for questioning a reference to it in 1 Corinthians 12-14.⁴² So the case for contrasting "congregational" prophecy with "apostolic" prophecy falters at another point.

EXEGETICALLY RELATED WEAKNESSES OF GRUDEM'S HYPOTHESIS

NT Prophecy founded on OT Prophecy. Grudem's case for an unauthoritative "congregational" prophecy in 1 Corinthians 12-14 and elsewhere in the NT also rests on positing a strong discontinuity between OT prophecy and NT prophecy. Unfortunately, he does injustice to the fact that NT prophecy is founded upon and has a significant continuity with the OT prophetic phenomenon and experience. An important passage in this regard is Acts 2:17-21 where Peter's Pentecostal sermon cites Joel 2:28-32.⁴³ The earlier part of Acts 2 has just described manifestations of the Holy Spirit (e.g., speaking in tongues, prophesying) witnessed by Jewish onlookers outside the circle of the 120 Christians who had been gathered for prayer (cf. Acts 2:1-11). Some outsiders were amazed, but others mocked and said the Christians were "full of sweet new wine" (Acts 2:13). Empowered by the Spirit, Peter stood and offered an explanation by relating the charismatic phenomena being witnessed to the prophecy of Joel 2. It is highly significant that Peter linked this beginning of NT prophecy

⁴²Robert L. Thomas, "The Spiritual Gift of Prophecy in Revelation 22:18," *JETS* 32/2 (June 1989) 205 n. 30.

⁴³In the Masoretic Text and the LXX, Joel 2:28-32 in English translations corresponds to Joel 3:1-5a.

with prophetic phenomena of the OT. The same word for "prophecy" is used to depict NT prophecy as is used in the LXX translation of Joel: *profhteyv* (*propheteuō*, "I prophesy") (cp. Acts 2:17 with Joel 3:1[LXX, 2:28 in English]).

A revival of the prophetic gift has been long expected in Israel, and Peter ties the prophecy experienced at Pentecost to that promised revival of OT prophecy. Gentry accurately assesses the situation:

Thus, here we have prophecy of the Old Testament type . . . entering into the New Testament era. . . . And this is according to Peter's divinely inspired interpretation of Joel. . . .

This establishes a fundamental continuity linking Old Testament and New Testament prophecy. . . . This divinely expected prophetic gift appears in numerous places in Acts, 1 Corinthians, and other New Testament books. . . .⁴⁴

NT prophecy is fundamentally a development and continuation of OT prophecy.

The NT does not conceptualize any substantial differences in kind between prophetic expressions in the OT and those in the NT. The vocabulary and phraseology are the same.⁴⁵ Aune notes, "The early Christian application of the designation *profhtw* to individual Christians, then, was originally determined by the prevalent conception of the prophetic role of the Old Testament."⁴⁶ The NT's application of the term *prophetes* to its contemporary prophets (e.g., in 1 Corinthians 12-14) makes it evident that NT authors conceived of the existence of a fundamental continuity between these two eras of prophecy. Use of the term in fulfillment formulae in NT citations of the OT are indicative of this. OT prophets were seen as writing the

⁴⁴Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *The Charismatic Gift of Prophecy* (Memphis, TN: Footstool, 1989) 8.

⁴⁵This continuity does not rule out minor differences. It only excludes any differences substantial or crucial enough to warrant a distinction between two kinds of prophetic gifts or expressions that were operable in the OT or the NT.

⁴⁶Aune, *Prophecy in Early Christianity* 195.

very words of the Lord in regard to future happenings.⁴⁷

This continuity of OT prophecy to NT prophecy is borne out elsewhere in the NT. The NT prophet Agabus modeled his prophetic style after the OT prophets. The historian Luke relates that Agabus "indicated by the Spirit" that a famine was about to occur in the world (Acts 11:28a).⁴⁸ He then records the occurrence of the famine in accord with Agabus's prediction (Acts 11:28b). Later Agabus introduces a prophecy with the words, "This is what the Holy Spirit says" (Acts 21:11), an expression that reflects a pattern similar to Matthew's fulfillment formulae when introducing OT prophecies (e.g., Matt 2:15, 17; 3:3). It also parallels the OT prophetic formula, "Thus says the Lord."⁴⁹ It is significant also that no attempt is ever made to distinguish between OT and NT prophetic expression in the vocabulary of introductions to NT prophecy. The cognates of *prophete s* are used for NT prophecy as they are for OT prophecy.

Prestige of the NT prophet. Another weakness in Grudem's hypothesis is his failure to recognize the high degree of prestige enjoyed by NT prophets in the Christian community. As already shown from a correct understanding of Eph 2:20, they in association with the apostles held the honorable status of helping lay the foundation of the church. Their ranking in the list of gifted persons in 1 Cor 12:31 (cf. 1 Cor 14:1) places them second only to the apostles in usefulness to the body of Christ.

⁴⁷Two examples are sufficient to illustrate this point: ἵνα πληρωθῆ τοῦ λόγου τοῦ κυρίου διὰ τοῦ προφήτου λέγοντος (*hina plerōthē to rhēthen hypo kyriou dia tou prophetou legontos*, "in order that the word spoken by the Lord through the prophet should be fulfilled," Matt 1:22), a reference to Isaiah, and γεγραμμένων ἐν τοῖς προφήταις (*gegrammenon en tois prophetais*, "having been written in the prophets," John 6:45), a reference to the prophets as a group.

⁴⁸Luke uses a fulfillment formula, "by the Spirit," similar to the one describing Agabus's prophesying in Acts 21:11.

⁴⁹William Neil, *Acts* (NCB; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973) 217. See also G. H. W. Lampe, "Acts," in *Peake's Commentary* (Matthew Black, ed.; London; Thomas Nelson, 1962) 919.

Prophets also joined the apostles as recipients of special revelation regarding Gentile participation in the church (Eph 3:5-10). The doctrine revealed through them in the context of Ephesians 3 concerned the mystery of the inclusion of Jews and Gentiles in one universal body of Christ. The presence of Gentiles in such a relationship was unrevealed before the NT era (cf. Eph 3:5), but came to apostles and prophets as inspired utterances and writings such as the canonical epistle of Ephesians.

The reception and propagation of such revelations constituted the foundation of the church universal throughout the present age. Prophets were vehicles for these revelations and held a high profile among early Christians for this reason. Grudem's words do not match the high status of prophets upheld in the NT: "Prophecy in ordinary New Testament churches was not equal to Scripture in authority, but was simply a very human and sometimes partially mistaken report of something the Holy Spirit brought to someone's mind."⁵⁰ Such a relegation of prophecy to a lesser status raises the question of how the early church could have guarded itself against hopeless doctrinal confusion. If prophets at times were used to convey inspired revelations and at other times were non-authoritative and mistaken, who could distinguish their authoritative accurate messages from the other kind?

Need for constant evaluation of NT prophecy. A primary argument for the existence of non-authoritative congregational prophecy comes from the call for evaluation of prophetic utterances in 1 Cor 14:29-31.⁵¹ The needed critical evaluation resulted from a changed status of believers under the new covenant. In accord with Joel 2:28-32 and Acts 2:17-21, the Holy Spirit was poured out on all believers. This did not mean that all Christians would be prophets, a possibility that Paul rejects in 1 Cor 12:29: "all are not prophets, are they?" It did, however, create the potential, according to the Joel and Acts passages, that the gift of prophecy would be much more widely disseminated than to a

⁵⁰Grudem, *Prophecy in the New Testament* 14.

⁵¹Ibid., 70-79.

limited group of prophets like those who spoke for the Lord in the theocratic community under the old covenant. The expanded sphere of prophetic activity increased the need for greater care in discerning true prophecies from false prophecies.

This is the need that Paul attempted to meet in 1 Cor 14:29-31. The larger the group of prophets became, the more potential there was for the abuse of prophecy by those who were not NT prophets at all. This danger became a vivid reality in the latter part of the first century A.D. as evidenced by John's warning: "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1; cf. 2 Pet 2:1-22; Jude 4, 11-16).

Grudem maintains that OT prophets were never challenged in this way because of the high regard in which they were held. For him, this signalled a great difference between OT and NT prophets, i.e., NT prophets were not so prestigious.⁵² After evaluation and acceptance as a prophet, an OT prophet's words were never questioned, but each prophecy of a NT prophet had to be evaluated.⁵³ Herein lies a contrast, causing Grudem to conclude that the NT gift operated at a lower level of authority.⁵⁴

Yet Grudem's picture of OT prophecy and its prestige is highly idealized and rather unrealistic. His idealized picture is obtained substantially from historical hindsight rather than from an examination of the actual state of affairs existing at the time of the OT prophets. A brief review reveals four relevant features of OT prophecy: (1) The Israelites frequently disobeyed OT prophets like Samuel, Elisha, and Jeremiah, to name only a few, even when their proclamations were authoritative as the very words of the Lord (e.g., 1 Sam 13:8-14; Jer 36:1-32), and put them to flight, threatening to kill them (e.g., 1 Kgs 19:1-3). Also, Amos's preaching in Bethel aroused

⁵²Grudem, *Prophecy in the New Testament* 17-23; *idem*, *Prophecy in 1 Corinthians* 82-105.

⁵³Grudem, *Prophecy in 1 Corinthians* 58-66.

⁵⁴D. A. Carson supports Grudem regarding two levels of authority (D. A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987] 98).

such opposition that he had to flee from Bethel for his life (Amos 7:10-17).

(2) Some prophets enjoyed greater status and prestige than others who were less famous (e.g., an unknown prophet in 1 Kgs 20:35-43; cf. also 1 Kgs 19:10).

(3) The people threatened and otherwise strongly opposed some prophets like Jeremiah because of their status as prophets of the Lord. Jeremiah could hardly have been said to have enjoyed much of an authoritative status in Israel at such times, because his hearers disobeyed him, despised him, rejected him, beat him, and imprisoned him because of his prophetic ministry (e.g., Jer 11:18-23; 12:6; 18:18; 20:1-3; 26:1-24; 37:11-38:28).

(4) According to Jewish tradition, some prophets like Isaiah were tortured and assassinated rather than given great honor (cf. 1 Kgs 18:13).⁵⁵ Under some kind of duress, some prophets may even have lied or even apostatized (cf. 1 Kgs 13:18).

Jesus recalled that Israel had consistently despised, rejected, and killed her prophets: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her" (Matt 23:37). Such a picture hardly conveys the impression of great respect afforded the OT prophets by their contemporaries. Nor does it suggest that their messages were never questioned or rejected (cf. Heb 11:33-40).

Old Testament prophets became revered only by later generations of Jewish people. They had no such preeminence during their lifetimes. Only as later generations realized their ancestors had been disobedient idolaters who failed to recognize the prophets' advice (cf. Ezra 9:1-11) did the prophets ascend to a place of esteem in the eyes of the people. This elite group of OT spokesmen for the Lord experienced the anointing and influence of the Holy Spirit in a way that was not appreciated by their immediate listeners.⁵⁶

⁵⁵Cp. Heb 11:37-40 with Isa 6:9-10. Rabbinic tradition includes Isaiah among the persecuted heroes of faith alluded to by the writer of Hebrews in the passage cited (cf. *Yebam.* 49b; *Sanh.* 103b).

⁵⁶David, Moses, and other leaders experienced the anointing of the Spirit too, but not in the special way of the true prophets of the Lord, both the canonical ones like Isaiah and the non-canonical ones like Nathan and Gad.

The NT standard for evaluating prophets is comparable to relevant guidelines in the OT. The OT laid down certain rules in Deuteronomy 13 and 18 that were *always* taken as requirements for OT prophets. False prophets were frequently identified by an application of these rules. The rules were applicable even to established prophets like Isaiah and Samuel. In spite of their reputations, they still had to speak the truth. At the very least, the stated requirements served to reinforce the genuineness of the true prophet, because they stressed that a true prophet must accurately proclaim the truth.⁵⁷ So even though OT prophets were not evaluated formally or constantly as NT prophets were in Corinth, they were still subject to the background requirements of Deuteronomy 13 and 18. The NT furnishes no indication that NT-era Jews, particularly those who became apostles in the early church, considered the requirements for prophets in the OT to have been abrogated or substantially modified.

Identification of evaluators. This survey must content itself with noticing one final weakness in Grudem's theory regarding NT prophecy. It regards his method of handling 1 Cor 14:29 which reads, "And let two or three prophets speak, and let the others pass judgment." A critical question in this statement concerns the identity of those "passing judgment" or "discerning" the validity of alleged prophetic pronouncements. Grudem raises a psychological point:

If we understand οἱ ἄλλοι [*hoi alloi*, "the others"] to be restricted to a special group of prophets, we have much difficulty picturing what the rest of the congregation would do during the prophecy and judging. Would they sit during the prophecy waiting for the prophecy to end and be judged before knowing whether to believe any part of it? . . . Especially hard to believe is the idea that the teachers, administrators and other church leaders without special gifts of prophecy would sit passively awaiting the verdict of an elite group.⁵⁸

⁵⁷Cf. 1 Sam 3:19. The mere fact that the writer of 1 Samuel could assert that Yahweh did not let Samuel's words fail indicates that some form of evaluation of Samuel by the people had been going on to provide for such a reply. This may be in some form of hindsight, looking back over Samuel's life.

⁵⁸Grudem, *Prophecy in 1 Corinthians* 60-62; transliteration and translation added.

Aside from the fact that this argumentation is non-exegetical in nature, it is weak in that reason and logic, to which he appeals, can also dictate that not everyone in the congregation would be in a position to evaluate the prophecy, especially in a public setting.⁵⁹ Admittedly, 1 John 4:1-3 urges a testing of spirits in a general sense by all Christians because of false prophecy and teaching, but Paul is very clear in this context at 1 Cor 12:10 regarding the "distinguishing of spirits" that everyone did not possess that special ability. The gift of doing so was dispensed to a limited number according to the sovereign will of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:11; cf. 1 Cor 12:18). It is conspicuous that those possessing special ability in discerning were better equipped to pass judgment on congregational prophecies than the ones who did not possess the gift. This differentiation in valuative capabilities within the congregation raises a loud contextual objection to understanding that all members of the congregation were supposed to evaluate in 1 Cor 14:29.

In the immediate context of 14:29, the most natural grammatical and contextual antecedent of *hoi alloi* ("the others") is *prophetai* (*prophetai*, "prophets") in the first half of v. 29. Paul's use of *allos* ("another of the same kind") instead of *heteros* (*heteros*, "another of a different kind") indicates his intention to designate the same category of persons as those prophets referred to just before. Referring "the others" to other prophets is further confirmed by the use of *allos* (*allos*, "to another") immediately afterward in v. 30 where it is an evident reference to "another" prophet. This repetition of the same adjective, "other" or "another," shows that Paul still had prophets in mind when he used *hoi alloi* in v. 29. In this statement, then, where interpretation is tedious, the contextual probabilities rest on the side of identifying those who evaluate prophetic utterances of others as being the prophets who apparently possessed the gift of the discerning of spirits along with their prophetic gift.

They were to pass judgment on what other prophets said to

⁵⁹In addition, Aune notes, "The observation in verse 31 that 'you can all prophesy one by one' cannot mean everybody present, but 'all upon whom the spirit of prophecy comes'" (Aune, *Prophecy in Early Christianity* 133).

ascertain whether their utterance came from the Holy Spirit or not. Just as ἡρμηνεία (*hermeneia*, "interpretation") was needed in conjunction with the exercise of γλῶσσαι (*glōssōn*, "tongues") (1 Cor 12:10c), διακρίσεις (*diakriseis*, "discernings") needed to accompany προφηταί (*prophetai*, "prophesies") (1 Cor 12:10b).⁶⁰ Inspired spokesmen were in the best position to judge spontaneously whether a new utterance agreed with Paul's teachings (cf. Gal 1:8-9; 2 Thess 2:1-3) and generally accepted beliefs of the Christian community (1 Cor 12:1-3).

The context surrounding 1 Cor 12:3 sheds light on the situation addressed in 1 Cor 14:29. Apparently false prophets had preached that Jesus was "accursed" (12:3) even though they professed to be true prophets. The person making such a startling statement must have been a professing Christian. Otherwise, his statement would not have been tolerated in a Christian assembly and would not have been attributed to the Holy Spirit, as he apparently claimed. In the face of such starkly erroneous prophesying, Paul warned the congregation to evaluate each prophecy carefully to ensure that a genuine prophet was speaking a genuine prophecy. Some recognized voice was needed to declare that the Spirit was not the source of such a statement and that the person voicing it showed himself to be a false prophet. First Corinthians 14:29 does not necessarily mean established prophets had to be verified continually.

Yet it does set down the general principle that any potential prophet needed to be scrutinized by other potential prophets. This principle invalidates Grudem's conclusion that a genuine prophet's message contained a mixture of truth and error. The guideline established merely enforces the need for careful analysis of any prophet who claimed to speak by the Spirit of God to determine the source of his message. Once his source was identified as God, further examination was most likely unnecessary. Yet, according to 2 Cor 11:13-15, even false prophets had potential to feign a true prophecy, so Paul encouraged a continued vigil. The regular ministry of prophets

⁶⁰This correlation is not explicit in 1 Corinthians 14, but it is strongly implicit by virtue of the contextual flow of chapters 12-14 and the use of cognate words in 12:10 and 14:29 to depict the gift of discernings and the exercise of discerning (cf. A. T. Robertson and Alfred Plummer, *First Corinthians* [ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1914] 267, 321-22).

was to ensure the genuineness of prophets and prophecies as a safeguard against doctrinal heresies.

The fact that a prophecy could be interrupted (1 Cor 14:30-32) does not contradict this picture of prophecy and discernment. The permissible interruption did not mark the prophecy as non-authoritative or fallible, i.e. as not from God. The apparent thrust of v. 32 is that if a revelation is from God, the prophet will remain in conscious control of his mind and will. In other words, a true prophecy from God can wait to be given in an orderly manner.

In summary, judging a prophecy does not imply that the gift could result in errant pronouncements.⁶¹ The responsibility of NT prophets to weigh the prophecies of others does not imply that *true* prophets were capable of giving false prophecies, but that *false* prophets could disguise their falsity by occasional true utterances.

Grudem observes that Paul rates the authority of Christian prophets below his own in 1 Cor 14:37-38. He uses this to support his view that NT prophetic authority was inferior to that of the apostles and hence the OT prophets also.⁶² This understanding of Paul's words is not probable, because Paul is here more likely asserting that if a Christian prophet is truly from God, his prophecies will concur with apostolic truths (cf. Gal 1:8-9). False prophets and teachers consistently challenged apostolic authority and doctrine (e.g. Gal 2:4-5; 2 Tim 2:18; cf. Jude 3). In light of his own apostolic office, Paul's comparison between the Corinthian claims of authority and his own is best understood to teach that true prophets and their prophecies would be consistent with apostolic truth and would recognize Paul's words and commandments as coming directly from the Lord Jesus Christ. Any alleged prophet opposing apostolic standards and elevating himself to the role of God's only spokesman (1 Cor 14:36) was to be recognized as false, and his authority rejected (1 Cor 14:38).

A CONCLUDING WORD ABOUT GRUDEM'S HYPOTHESIS

⁶¹Contra Grudem, *Prophecy in 1 Corinthians* 67-70, 115-36, 242.

⁶²Grudem, *Prophecy in the New Testament* 85-86.

The above discussion of Grudem's theory about NT prophecy, both the detailed criticisms and the summary observations, shows the idea of a bifurcation of the prophetic gift to be suspect at many points. His central thesis that the NT apostle be equated with the OT prophet in terms of prophetic activity and that a second kind of prophetic gift consisting of "speaking merely human words to report something God brings to mind" be recognized is extremely weak and therefore unconvincing. His grammatical basis for equating NT apostle with NT prophet in Eph 2:20 is flawed, and in relevant passages, particularly 1 Corinthians 12-14, his evidence crumbles in comparison with interpretations that provide explanations with more exegetical coherence. His basic conclusion regarding the nature of NT prophecy, therefore, cannot be endorsed.