



TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Sermon Notes

Transformed Speaking

Romans 12.6-8

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Introduction

1. In 2013, one news cycle was filled with reports that Pope Francis had said, "A gay person who is seeking God, who is of good will — well, who am I to judge him?"¹
2. Elizabeth Scalia, managing editor of the Catholic Portal at patheos.com, argued that the Pope's words did not signal the position shift many thought it did. She wrote, "Francis is doing nothing more than pronouncing long-standing Catholic teaching on homosexuality, sin, and the mercy of God." (Scalia). That teaching had traditionally distinguished between "[homosexual] orientation" and acting on that orientation.
3. Scalia argued that the Pope was shrewdly "teaching the Christian faith, and the press is accurately quoting him, in blazing headlines that everyone will read." One person who commented on Scalia's post had a different perspective:

You raise some good points, so thank you for your thoughtful post. There is still a big problem though: many Catholics have no clear idea what the Church really teaches in the Catechism of the Catholic Church or elsewhere on same sex attraction, so that when the media totally takes the Pope out of context, millions of Catholics (and the rest of the world) is [sic] left confused. . . . [R]ight now my nominal Catholic friends think that the Pope is all pro-gay because being gay is perfectly normal and legitimate (in their minds). This is hardly a victory for Pope Francis, though it is certainly a teachable moment at which local parishes can clarify what precisely Church teaching is.

4. The reports, Scalia's post, and responses occurred at a time I was studying Romans 12 where I came across James Dunn's comment that, for Paul, "the most characteristic expression of the grace/charis of God was in these two areas — words which speak to will and mind and heart, acts which serve the needs of the more disadvantaged members of any congregation."²
5. Dunn's comment touched on two questions prompted by the discussion about the Pope.
 - a. What is the best way to teach the faith so those who need to hear it will?
 - b. Does the church really know the teaching, or merely watered down distortions?
6. It's important to keep those questions in mind as we consider the speaking gifts in vv. 6-8, all of which are concerned with teaching.

Body

I. "If prophecy, in proportion to our faith" (v. 6).

A. Defining "prophecy."

1. The popular definition is that prophecy *equals* prediction.
2. But "prophet" (προφήτης, *prophētēs*), from the compound προφημι, *prophēmi*, means "to speak forth, speak out; hence, properly, 'one who speaks forth'."³
3. "The Christian prophet is one with a special gift and calling to proclaim the divine message, interpret the times, and urge people to believe in Christ for salvation (EP 3.5)."⁴

B. The need for prophets.

1. As the Christian faith spread, the Spirit gave the words needed for its content and correct explanation (see 1 Cor. 2.9-13).
2. Prophets were especially important to edify believers and convey the teaching needed by the churches (1 Cor. 14.3-6, 24-26, 30-31).

C. Regulating the gift of prophecy: "in proportion to our faith" (κατὰ τὴν ἀναλογίαν τῆς πίστεως, *kata tēn analogian tēs pisteōs*).

1. ἀναλογία (*analogian*) was used in mathematical formulas in the sense of proportionately, in proportion to.
2. Does "the faith" have a subjective or objective meaning here?
 - a) Favoring subjective: "it becomes clear that the *kata tēn analogian tēs pisteōs* [according to the proportion of the faith] describes how the prophet functions, or, more precisely, how the act of prophecy comes about — that is, by the prophet speaking forth in proportion to his faith = his dependence on God (the usual sense of *pistis* throughout Romans;. . .)." (Dunn, 728).
 - b) Favoring objective. Cranfield notes the article with "faith" and argues: "the prophets are to prophesy in agreement with the standard, which they possess in their apprehension of, and response to, the grace of God in Jesus Christ — they are to be careful not to utter (under the impression that they are inspired) anything which is incompatible with their believing in Christ."⁵
 - c) Wright helpfully points out that prophecy (and all the gifts) should be "regulate[d] 'according to the pattern of the faith'. If, in other words and just as an example, you're talking about Jesus, you should be clear what the Christian faith teaches about him and not contradict it. Exercising gifts is never a matter simply of letting 'inspiration' take over. That would be to capitulate to one particular cultural mood . . . rather than to grow up as mature Christians."⁶
 - d) There is probably a subjective element, but Paul's focus on a pattern of teaching and believing the word (6.17-18; 10.14-17) points toward an objective sense.

D. Prophets now?

1. If we are referring to a special, particular new revelation, there is no need.
2. But if we refer to understanding and applying God's word to the times, the *task* is still important.
3. Since the revealed word is complete, the *task* of prophecy is dependent on the work done by the teacher.

II. "The one who teaches, in his teaching" (v. 7).

- A. The need for effective teaching cannot be overemphasized.
 1. The faith is truth-based (Acts 2.42; 1 Cor. 11.2, 23; 15.3; 1 Thess. 4.1; 2 Thess. 2.15; 3.6).
 2. It must be taught (Gal. 6.6; Acts 13.1; 1 Cor. 12.28; Heb. 5.12; Jas. 3.1).
- B. The teacher's task was to "fulfill a vital social function in preserving and passing on the traditions which gave the first Christian communities their distinctive identity" (Dunn, 729).
 1. The difference between teaching and prophesying is slight: prophecy involved new insight into God's will (Dunn); teaching explained and passed it on (Cranfield, 623).
- C. Given its practical importance, teaching must be taken and done seriously.
 1. "People with a gift of teaching shouldn't just expect to be able to stand up and say whatever they think at the time; they should think it through, prepare their material, always be working at filling in gaps, seeing a larger picture, and being able to communicate it better" (Wright, 76).
 2. "Becoming an effective teacher is simple. You just prepare and prepare until drops of blood appear on your forehead."⁷

III. "The one who exhorts, in his exhortation" (v. 8).

- A. As we know, "just the facts" is not enough. Teaching is primarily about instructing, imparting information, and explaining, but exhortation takes the next step to encourage and help Christians live out the requirements of the faith (see Col. 1.28-29).
- B. That Paul begins Romans 12 with "I appeal to you therefore..." (Παρακαλῶ οὖν, *parakalō oun*) illustrates the point. Exhortation should always accompany teaching.

Conclusion

1. "You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free," Jesus said. But first he told the Jews, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples" (John 8.31-32).
2. Gifts that interpret, explain, and exhort to faithfulness in following God's will are vital to the body. If we have such gifts, let's develop and use them. Let us all encourage their use.

August 4, 2013
revised September 10, 2018
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Notes

¹ Elizabeth Scalia, "Don't Tell the Press: Pope Francis Is Using Them," *On the Square: Daily Columns from First Things' Top Writers* (blog post), July 30, 2013, accessed July 30, 2013, <http://www.firstthings.com/onthesquare/2013/07/donrsquot-tell-the-press-pope-francis-is-using-them>.

² James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, Word Biblical Commentary 38B (Dallas: Word Books, Publisher, 1988), 735.

³ Joseph Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (n.p.: n.p., 1889), BibleWorks, v. 10.

⁴ Timothy Friberg, Barbara Friberg, and Neva F. Miller, *Analytical Lexicon to the Greek New Testament*, Baker's Greek New Testament Library (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), BibleWorks, v. 10.

⁵ C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, The International Critical Commentary, Vol. II (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1979), 621.

⁶ N. T. Wright, *Paul for Everyone: Romans Part 2, Chapters 9-16* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), Kindle Electronic Edition: Page 76.

⁷ Marlene LeFever, in Edward K. Rowell, ed., *Quotes and Idea Starters for Preaching and Teaching from Leadership Journal* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996), 163.