

The Gift of Prophecy

“Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy. For one who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but to God; for no one understands him, but he utters mysteries in the Spirit. On the other hand, the one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation. The one who speaks in a tongue builds up himself, but the one who prophesies builds up the church. Now I want you all to speak in tongues, but even more to prophesy. The one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets, so that the church may be built up.” 1 Corinthians 14:1-5

The Gift of Prophecy

“In 1 Thessalonians 5:20 we find the earliest mention of prophecy or prophetic utterance in the NT. Although not a frequent term in the Pauline corpus, it occurs in the earliest and latest of the letters: Romans 12:6, 1 Corinthians 12:10; 13:2, 13:8; 14:6, 14:22; 1 Timothy 1:18, 4:14 strongly suggests that this was a normal expression of the Spirit’s activity in the early Christian communities.”¹

Prophecy is a gift of the Holy Spirit

- Prophecy is a gift of the Holy Spirit as listed in Romans 12:6, 1 Corinthians 12:10, and here in 1 Corinthians 14:1

Definition of the gift of prophecy

Prophecy is the human report of a divine revelation

“What then, brothers? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation.” 1 Corinthians 14:26a

“If a revelation is made to another sitting there, let the first be silent. For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged.” 1 Corinthians 14:30-31

¹ Gordon Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence*, Hendrickson Publishers 1994, pages 59-60
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“The ‘revelation’ which comes...is thought by Paul to be of divine, not human origin. This is evident, first from the fact that the word Paul uses for ‘revelation’...occurs forty-four times in the New Testament and never refers to human activity or communication. Rather whenever the New Testament speaks of a ‘revelation’ it is always given by the activity of God.”²

Prophecy’s Purpose: Edification

- The purpose of the gift of prophecy is to build-up, encourage, and console. The gift of prophecy is given to the church to edify the church.
- 6 times in chapter 14 the language of the “church being built up” and strengthened is used (vv. 3, 4, 5, 12, 17, 26)

Prophecy’s Limitations

1. The Gift of Prophecy is Affected by Our Finite, Fallen Humanness

- Our ability to give and receive prophetic words is limited and imperfect

“For we know in part and we prophesy in part.” 1 Corinthians 13:9

Practical implications

- Need to take any word you receive and submit it to Scripture, prayer and wise counsel.
- We don’t want people making decisions about their lives based on prophetic words alone.

2. The Gift of Prophecy Is Submitted To The Authority of Scripture

- Prophetic words given today do not carry an authority of their own, they must be submitted to the authority of Scripture
- Prophetic words must be measured in light of Scripture

Prophecy is to be Governed

- Because of these limitations, the gift of prophecy must be governed.

“Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said.” 1 Corinthians 14:29

“But all things should be done decently and in order.” 1 Corinthians 14:40

² Wayne Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the NT and Today*, pgs. 116-117, 2000
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Practical implications

- Government doesn't constrain those with prophetic gifting, it actually has the effect of freeing them to use their gift.

Personal Prophecy

- What about prophecies for an individual?
- Does Scripture allow for personal prophecies?

Personal Prophecy in Scripture

- Agabus prophecies to Paul

"While we were staying for many days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. And coming to us, he took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands and said, 'Thus says the Holy Spirit, This is how the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.'" Acts 21:10-11

- Prophecy over Timothy

"This charge I entrust to you, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies previously made about you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, holding faith and a good conscience." 1 Timothy 1:18-19

Purpose of Personal Prophecy: Edification

The Gift of Prophecy and The Gospel

Pursuing and Growing in the Spiritual Gifts

1. Pursue God

"Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone." 1 Corinthians 12:4-6

2. Pursue Love

"Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy." 1 Corinthians 14:1

3. Pursue Faith

“Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith.” Romans 12:6

4. Pursue Opportunities

Conclusion