



Discovering Your Design:

Preparing Christ's followers to change the world

PROPHECY

DEFINITION: THE SPIRIT-GIVEN ABILITY TO PROCLAIM A MESSAGE TO GOD'S PEOPLE SO THAT THEY ARE STRENGTHENED, ENCOURAGED, COMFORTED AND INSTRUCTED.

Note: the purpose of prophecy is contained in our definition, but not everything that fulfills these purposes is prophecy. Ex. preaching, teaching and the gift of encouragement could bring about these same results.

There are several different views regarding this gift:

1. Some believe that prophecy is spontaneous revelation from God (not on a par with Scripture) for the edification of the body. "Telling something that God has spontaneously brought to mind" (Grudem, 1049). Example: I Timothy 4:14 concerning Timothy. The difference between prophecy and preaching or teaching lies in the fact that teaching and preaching interpret and apply the Scripture to the congregation, whereas prophecy reports to the congregation something that God has suddenly brought to mind. "None of this means it is necessarily authoritative, infallible, or canon-threatening." (Grudem 1058)
2. Others believe that prophecy is a revelatory gift that gives the very "words of God" and since the Bible is now complete, the gift is no longer necessary (as in New Testament times). Others believe the same and see it as necessary. Revelation is the term Paul uses as he speaks about prophecy (I Corinthians 14:30), but the word in the New Testament has a broad semantic range that goes beyond the authoritative revelation which produced the Bible (see Philippians 3:15; Eph 1:17).
3. Others believe it is preaching or teaching and applying the Bible (Gaffin, Flynn, Gangel).
Yes, it's like preaching – a message. This definition is too narrow and doesn't square with the instructions in I Corinthians 14.

Because Paul instructs the Corinthians to examine each prophetic message we know that they can be false (from another spirit) or fallible (containing something false) and certainly are not on the same level of the inerrant Word of God. Paul in Acts 21:4, 10-11 does not follow what appears to be a prophetic message. Rather all prophecy is subject to the Word of God, our final authority for faith & practice (cf. I Corinthians 14:37,38).

Another important consideration is that the succession of the Apostles is not given over to the prophets which undoubtedly were still active in the churches, rather it is the Scriptures which have authority over the church (cf. II Tim. 2:15, 3:16; II Peter 1:19-20, 3:16; Jude 3).

Because of the Bible's instruction regarding the use of this gift, we can know that it can be exercised with self-control (cf. I Corinthians 14:29-33).

I Corinthians 14:3 helps us understand what the gift of prophecy entails - strengthening (edification), encouragement and comfort.

We know that prophecy has the ability to lead a non-Christian to faith (cf. I Corinthians 14:24-26) in Christ, hence it is closely tied to the Word which leads people to faith (cf. Romans 10:17).

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Prophecy as in the Old Testament will often be a re-iteration of the truths already revealed in scripture. (New Bible Dictionary, p 984)

If it is consistent with Old Testament prophecy we could expect this gift to expand on God's Word pointing out sin, calling people back to God in repentance. This prophetic gift could be predictive or proclamation. Revelation 19:10-note the connection between the Spirit of prophecy & the testimony of Jesus. Prophecy is christocentric.

Biblical References: Luke 1:67ff; Romans 12:6; I Corinthians 12:10,28; I Corinthians 14:1-33; Ephesians 3:5, 4:11; Revelation 19:10; I Timothy 1:16, 4:14

Contribution: this gift builds up the body as the messages bring strength, encouragement, comfort, and instruction (I Corinthians 14:3, 31).

Biblical Examples: Jesus (Mark 14: 27-30) Agabus, Acts 11:27,28; Paul, Ephesians 3:1-6; Judas & Silas, Acts 15:32; leaders at Ephesus over Timothy, I Timothy 4:14

Characteristics - People with gift:

- receive "revelation" from the Lord and boldly proclaim it
- want to build up the body of Christ

Cautions:

- exercise your gift in proportion to your faith - the faith here is not our act of believing but that which we believe - i.e. the faith given us in the Word of God (Moo, 765)
- use your gift within the guidelines of 1 Corinthians 14:29-33
- never usurp the authority of the Bible when using this gift/don't treat this message as more important than the Word of God
- the abuses of this gift (which are many) should not cause us to "write off" this gift - "don't treat prophecies with contempt" (1 Thessalonians 5:20)

Christian Responsibility: there is no specific command which instructs the Christian to prophesy, however, we are called to encourage, comfort and strengthen those who are in the body, in this sense we are reminded of our responsibility to build up Christ's body.