

PROPHESYING

The spiritual gift of prophesy during the Church Age

Prophecy is mentioned as a spiritual gift in 1Corinthians 12-14.

- Is the gift of prophesy for us today? What is prophesying according to the Bible? Who can prophesy?
- These are some questions addressed in this brief overview of New Testament prophets and prophesying.

I. Prophecy in Context: (1Cor 12-14) Spiritual Gifts

A. **First Corinthians 12.1 establishes the context for the discourse that follows.**

1. (1Cor 12.1) The Corinthian believers were ignorant of spiritual gifts—of what they were, what their purpose was, and how they functioned in the Church.
2. This is important for two principle reasons:
 - a) First, it prepares us for what follows. The Corinthians were ignorant about spiritual gifts and therefore Paul is giving clear teaching on the subject.
 - b) Second, it gives us a warning about applying directly to ourselves what we see in *practice* in the Corinthian church.
 - (1) They were ignorant and therefore their current practice reflected that ignorance. We should not seek to follow the Corinthian example but rather the Pauline correction of the Corinthians
 - (2) Pay close attention to what is “descriptive” (a description of Corinthian behavior) and what is “prescriptive” (what Paul teaches, prescribes, instructs).
 - (3) We want to follow Paul's prescriptions while avoiding the errors described by him that existed in the Corinthian church.
 - (4) (1Cor 3.1-3) Remember, the church at Corinth was, without a doubt, one of the most problematic (if not *the* most problematic) congregation that Paul had to deal with in his ministry.

B. **(1Cor 12.10; vv. 4-10) Prophecy is listed among the various spiritual gifts given by God to the members of the Church, the Body of Christ.**

1. (1Cor 12.28-31) It is listed as one of the “best gifts” to be coveted (desired) earnestly by Christians.
 - (v28) The best gifts are listed in order of priority: apostle (missionary), prophets, and teachers.
2. Therefore we know that God does not want us to be ignorant about the gift of prophesy; He wants us rather to covet it (desire it).
3. It would be good, then, to understand what this gift is and how it functions today in the Church.
4. But, before we get into the details about the specific gift of prophesy, we should understand a little about spiritual gifts in general.

II. Spiritual Gifts: An Overview

A. **Every Christian has a Gift**

1. Each and every Christian has received the Spirit of God (1Cor 12.13; if one has not received the Spirit, he is not of Christ: Rom 8.9), therefore every Christian (1Cor 12.7, 11: “every man”) has received at least one spiritual gift.
2. The gift given to the member of the Body of Christ is for the purpose of doing the work that God wants that member to perform.
3. We can think about the gifts as supernatural, God-given abilities to do the work we've been designed and called to do. God gave us a work in Christ and by His Spirit has enable us to do it.

B. Every Gift is for Edification

1. Every spiritual gift given to every member of the Body of Christ is for the specific purpose of edifying the Church.
2. One preliminary observation: No gift is *ever* designed for “personal” edification; your gifts are not for your benefit but rather for the benefit of others.
3. (1Cor 12.7) Spiritual gifts are designed to profit—to benefit—someone or something.
4. (1Cor 14.26) All things we do with our spiritual gifts should be done for the purpose of edifying (for the edifying of others; e.g., vv. 4, 15-20).
5. (1Pet 4.10-11) Peter speaks of the same purpose in every spiritual gift: they are for the purpose of ministering one to another (not to yourself).
6. God has created all believers in Christ Jesus for good works (Eph 2.10) and those good works are for the purpose of edifying others in the Body of Christ (Eph 4.11-12, 16). The spiritual gifts we have received from God are His gracious enabling to give us the capacity to carry out the works He has given us to do.

C. Spiritual Gifts: Which are in manifestation today?

1. There are four primary passages in the New Testament that give us lists of spiritual gifts, and some gifts are repeated in more than one list while others are not.
2. We can use the four passages to create a master list of all the spiritual gifts mentioned in the context of the Church. Such a list might look like this:

Romans 12.6-8	1Corinthians 12.8-11	1Corinthians 12.28-30	Ephesians 4.7-12
1. Prophecy 2. Ministry 3. Teaching 4. Exhortation 5. Giving 6. Ruling 7. Mercy	1. Wisdom 2. Knowledge 3. Faith 4. Healing 5. Miracles 6. Prophecy 7. Discerning of spirits 8. Tongues 9. Interpretation of tongues	1. Apostles 2. Prophets 3. Teachers 4. Miracles 5. Healings 6. Helps 7. Governments 8. Tongues 9. Interpret tongues	1. Apostles 2. Prophets 3. Evangelists 4. Pastors-teachers

3. This master list, however, needs to be “filtered” (“sifted” in other words) using the list of confirmation sign gifts in Mark 16.14-20.
 - a) (Mar 16.19-20) The five sign gifts mentioned in this passage were given for the specific purpose of confirming the new message God was giving through His Apostles (the message we refer to today as the “New Testament”).
 - b) (Mar 16.17-18) The five sign (or confirmation) gifts are:
 - (1) Casting out devils (demons).
 - (2) Speaking in tongues.
 - (a) This gift is mentioned in 1Cor 12.10, 28-30 along with its partner gift of “interpretation of tongues.”
 - (b) The gift of tongues was the supernatural and instantaneous ability to understand and speak a language known by others but foreign to the speaker. It has absolutely nothing at all to do with babbling incoherently.
 - (3) Taking up serpents without being hurt.
 - (4) Drinking deadly things (poison) without being hurt.
 - (5) Healing (also mentioned in 1Corinthians 12.10, 28-29).

- c) Once the new message of the New Testament was confirmed, these sign gifts were longer necessary and therefore their manifestation ceased.
- (1) No one today has any of these five supernatural, God-given capacities (sign gifts).
 - (2) This fact is more than evident in the failure rate of the modern “faith healing” movement.
- d) Therefore, since our master list of gifts includes tongues, interpretation of tongues, and healing (along with “miracles” which could refer to any of the five sign gifts), they must be removed (filtered, sifted) from the list in order to see which of the spiritual gifts are still in manifestation today. We could organize all the gifts according to category in a outline such as this (there are 21 in total, five of which have ceased and 16 of which are still in manifestation today):

(1) Spiritual Gifts in Manifestation During the Church Age

(a) Gifts that are also the responsibility of all saints

i) The Three Best Gifts (1Cor 12.28)

- *Apostle*
- *Prophet*
- *Teacher*

ii) The Rest of the Gifts

- *Ministry*
- *Helps*
- *Exhortation*
- *Giving*
- *Ruling*
- *Mercy*
- *Governments*
- *Evangelist*
- *Pastor-teacher*

(b) Gifts that complement (supplement) other gifts (i.e., they will not manifest alone)

i) *Wisdom*

ii) *Knowledge*

iii) *Faith*

iv) *Discerning of spirits*

(2) Sign Gifts which Ceased at the Beginning of the Church Age (“miracle” gifts)

(a) *Casting out devils (demons)*

(b) *Speaking in tongues (includes interpretation of tongues)*

(c) *Taking up serpents without being hurt*

(d) *Drinking deadly things (poison) without being hurt*

(e) *Healing*

4. Prophecy is one of the gifts that God is still giving to members of the Body of Christ today.

- Since we don't want to be ignorant about this gift (like the Corinthians), we need to find out what Scripture says about it.

III. The Gift of Prophecy: Romans 12.6; 1Corinthians 12.10, 28; Ephesians 4.11

A. The Bible mentions certain “prophets” whom God used to write portions of the Bible.

1. (Eph 2.20; 3.3-5) Like the Apostles, these prophets received direct revelation from God and wrote it down in what we call “Scripture” (e.g., 2Pet 1.19-21).

- These prophets were men like Luke and Mark whom God moved to pen down His revelation that He gave them by inspiration.

2. Prophets such as these men, who received direct revelation from God, do not exist today.
 - a) Why? Because God is not giving direct revelation to men anymore.
 - b) Once the New Testament was finished (around AD 95, when John recorded the Book of Revelation), this type of direct communication from God ceased.
 - c) (2Tim 3.16-17) Scripture is sufficient to accomplish all of God's will and desire in men.
 - d) (Rev 22.18-19) Therefore, when Scripture was finished (AD 95), God stopped giving direct revelation to men.
 - (1) He now communicates with us through His written Word.
 - (2) All the revelation we need is now found in Scripture, the 66 books of the Holy Bible.
3. Therefore, we can conclude that the “gift of prophecy” today has nothing at all to do with receiving messages directly from God through some mystical communication or even an audible voice.
 - a) The gift of prophecy has absolutely nothing to do with someone standing up in a church service and saying, “God told me...” and then blurting out some sort of “message from God.”
 - b) God does not speak to us in that manner today; He speaks to us through Scripture.

B. Prophecy in the Bible always refers to one of two things: Fore-telling and/or Forth-telling.

1. Prophecy can be “fore-telling” (predicting): This means that God sent certain men (prophets) to announce future events before they happened.
 - This is common in the Old Testament prophecies about the coming of the Messiah, the Tribulation, the Messianic Kingdom (the Millennium), and even eternity.
2. Prophecy can also be “forth-telling” (preaching): This refers to God's man “telling forth” (preaching) the message God gave him.
 - a) (Jonah 3.1-4) Jonah, the prophet, preached God's message to Nineveh, calling them to repentance.
 - b) (Mat 3.1-2) John the Baptist, who is also called a prophet (Luke 7.28), preached the message God gave him.
 - c) Prophets preach because prophesying is simply proclaiming the message God gave you, whether that be through direct revelation or through Scripture.
 - d) Prophesying is always an authoritative announcement of, “Thus saith the Lord...!”

C. The gift of prophesy, defined:

1. The gift of prophesy, therefore, is the supernatural, God-given capacity to understand and announce the message of God with authoritative power.
2. We refer to those having this gift today as “*preachers*”.
 - a) Many preach the Word, but when a gifted preacher delivers a message, it is preached with notable power and authority.
 - b) A prophet is a preacher, and therefore prophesy is preaching—it is preaching God's Word with authoritative power.
3. The content of the preaching can include both “fore-telling” and “forth-telling.”
 - a) Today the prophet (preacher) can “fore-tell” (predict) future events because the Scripture speaks of them (e.g., the Rapture, the Judgment Seat of Christ, the Tribulation, etc.).
 - b) Today the prophet (preacher) and “forth-tell” by simply preaching the truths of God's Word.
4. What is important to observe, however, is that the message of the prophet (the preacher), in the Church Age, finds its origin in Scripture alone (not in direct revelation from God).

Conclusion:

The gift of prophesy is one of the many spiritual gifts that are in manifestation during the Church Age.

- It is, obviously, very misunderstood by many who, like the Corinthians, are ignorant of what the Bible says about this gift (along with many others).
- Definition: The gift of prophesy is the supernatural, God-given capacity to announce the message of God with authoritative power.
 - ✓ It has nothing to do with blurting forth a “God told me...!” type of “revelation” in a church service.
 - ✓ It refers to the preaching of God's Word in the power of God's Spirit, and the message of the prophet today comes from Scripture, the Bible.

(1Cor 14.3) The gift of prophesy, like all other spiritual gifts, is given for the edification of others.

- It is the preaching of God's Word (Scripture) that edifies, exhorts, and comforts.
- We don't need anymore direct revelation (we have all the revelation God wants us to have in the Bible).
- We need more gifted men to preach and proclaim the revelation we already have. We need prophets: men with the gift of prophesy who live in the Word of God in order to “hear” from God through the pages of Scripture, and then proclaim His message with power.
- Prophets are preachers; prophesying is preaching. The gift of prophesy is the gift of preaching.