The First of Three Vocal/Utterance Gifts- Prophecy

1 Corinthians 12:4-10 (NKJV) “There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. {5} There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. {6} And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all. {7} But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all: {8} for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, {9} to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit, {10} to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues.”

Prophecy

Prophecy may be defined as, “A message from God, spoken vocally through God’s servant, by the impartation of the Holy Spirit.” Prophecy includes two separate functions.

- **First**, prophecy is to **foretell** - to speak of the future.
- **Second**, prophecy is to **forthtell** - to speak correction and instruction in the present time.

The Old Testament prophets (God’s covenant enforcers) did more forthtelling than foretelling.

The gift of prophecy continues today. God still speaks to His church through prophecy, both to **foretell** and to **forthtell**.

Prophecy is different from preaching or teaching.

- We do not receive the prophetic message from God through study, research, or any kind of preparation. It is divinely given.
- However, there are times when people preach or teach prophetically, or prophecy flows as part of a sermon.

In this study, we will not examine Old Testament prophecy, or the office of the Old Testament prophet. We will focus on the New Testament gift of prophecy. It is a gift given to Christians who may, or may not hold a five-fold ministry office. We will use 1 Corinthians 14 but will not read the entire chapter. Chapter 14 is provided for your reference, below.
(1 Corinthians 14 NKJV) “Pursue love, and desire spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy. [2] For he who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God, for no one understands him; however, in the spirit he speaks mysteries. [3] But he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men. [4] He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church. [5] I wish you all spoke with tongues, but even more that you prophesied; for he who prophesies is greater than he who speaks with tongues, unless indeed he interprets, that the church may receive edification. [6] But now, brethren, if I come to you speaking with tongues, what shall I profit you unless I speak to you either by revelation, by knowledge, by prophesying, or by teaching? [7] Even things without life, whether flute or harp, when they make a sound, unless they make a distinction in the sounds, how will it be known what is piped or played? [8] For if the trumpet makes an uncertain sound, who will prepare himself for battle? [9] So likewise you, unless you utter by the tongue words easy to understand, how will it be known what is spoken? For you will be speaking into the air. [10] There are, it may be, so many kinds of languages in the world, and none of them is without significance. [11] Therefore, if I do not know the meaning of the language, I shall be a foreigner to him who speaks, and he who speaks will be a foreigner to me. [12] Even so you, since you are zealous for spiritual gifts, let it be for the edification of the church that you seek to excel. [13] Therefore let him who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret. [14] For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my understanding is unfruitful. [15] What is the conclusion then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding. I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding. [16] Otherwise, if you bless with the spirit, how will he who occupies the place of the uninformed say "Amen" at your giving of thanks, since he does not understand what you say? [17] For you indeed give thanks well, but the other is not edified. [18] I thank my God I speak with tongues more than you all; [19] yet in the church I would rather speak five words with my understanding, that I may teach others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue. [20] Brethren, do not be children in understanding; however, in malice be babes, but in understanding be mature. [21] In the law it is written: "With men of other tongues and other lips I will speak to this people; And yet, for all that, they will not hear Me," says the Lord. [22] Therefore tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers; but prophesying is not for unbelievers but for those who believe. [23] Therefore if the whole church comes together in one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those who are uninformed or unbelievers, will they not say that you are out of your mind? [24] But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an uninformed person comes in, he is convinced by all, he is convicted by all. [25] And thus the secrets of his heart are
revealed; and so, falling down on his face, he will worship God and report that God is truly among you. {26} How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification. {27} If anyone speaks in a tongue, let there be two or at the most three, each in turn, and let one interpret. {28} But if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in church, and let him speak to himself and to God. {29} Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge. {30} But if anything is revealed to another who sits by, let the first keep silent. {31} For you can all prophesy one by one, that all may learn and all may be encouraged. {32} And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. {33} For God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints. {34} Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but they are to be submissive, as the law also says. {35} And if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in church. {36} Or did the word of God come originally from you? Or was it you only that it reached? {37} If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord. {38} But if anyone is ignorant, let him be ignorant. {39} Therefore, brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak with tongues. {40} Let all things be done decently and in order."

The New Testament Scriptures look favorably on the gift of prophecy. **We are encouraged to prophesy today.**

God is pleased when we have such a desire and step out in faith, under the guidance of others in authority to learn to use the gift.

**Verse 1:**“Pursue love, and desire spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy.”

Prophecy is not like tongues. Tongues do not speak to men. They are not understood except by God. The Bible calls what we say when speaking in tongues “mysteries.” (See Verse 2, below.) Prophecy is a message from God, spoken through a person, who speaks clearly to people. Prophecy is understandable and certain.

**Verse 2:**“For he who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God, for no one understands him; however, in the spirit he speaks mysteries.”
The Purposes of Prophecy

Verse 3: “But he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men.”

1. Edification

To edify means, “to confirm, build, instruct, improve, encourage and correct.” It always is intended by God to draw those who receive it toward Him. It is His desire that prophetic words bring edification. We are not to prophesy to bring condemnation. Speaking condemnation through prophecy is not a New Testament normative principle. (There may be a time when God requires a prophet to speak harshly, but it would be highly unusual. It must be done with fear and trembling.) Edification is God’s desire. He says this through the following verse.

Verse 4: “He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church.”

The person who prophesies edifies individuals and the church body. The Greek word for edify is oikodomeo (pronounced oy-kod-om-eh’-o), which means, “to be a house-builder, to construct or strengthen, embolden and encourage.” This word is repeated in verse 5.

Verse 5 “I wish you all spoke with tongues, but even more that you prophesied; for he who prophesies is greater than he who speaks with tongues, unless indeed he interprets, that the church may receive edification.”

Verse 12 “Even so you, since you are zealous for spiritual gifts, let it be for the edification of the church that you seek to excel.”

2. Exhortation

To exhort means, “to urge, advise strongly or earnestly or to be encouraging.”

Exhortation always is intended by God to help those who receive it to be encouragers to others and be encouraged in their own lives. Then, they will want to continue in their faith in Christ. They will have hope and be motivated for success.
3. Comfort

To comfort means, “to soothe, console, make comfortable or (just like exhortation) to encourage.”

New Testament prophecy is intended by God to bring comfort to those who receive it. This does not exclude the possibility there may be some temporary discomfort until they respond by making whatever changes are necessary. Prophecy can speak correction and bring temporary discomfort. This happens because God desires that our lives always agree with His plans, His Word and His love for us. Remember, this may cause discomfort until we move into a place of agreement with the prophecy.

4. Profits - We can learn from it.

Verse 6 “But now, brethren, if I come to you speaking with tongues, what shall I profit you unless I speak to you either by revelation, by knowledge, by prophesying, or by teaching?”

Do not waste or discard a word of prophecy at a time when its message can deliver a life-changing teachable moment.

5. Brings unbelievers to repentance

Verses 24-25 “But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an uninformed person comes in, he is convicted by all, he is convicted by all. {25} And thus the secrets of his heart are revealed; and so, falling down on his face, he will worship God and report that God is truly among you.”

Prophecy can reveal the secrets of an unbeliever’s heart. It can confront the unbeliever with his or her sins and cause them to come to God asking for forgiveness and a clean heart. The unbeliever will gratefully fall down and worship.

How will you know if the word of prophecy you receive is truly from God?

1 Corinthians 14:29 (NKJV) “let two or three prophets speak and let the other’s judge,”

The NIV translation of this verse says, “weigh carefully what is said.”

How do we judge, or “weigh carefully” a prophecy?
We judge the prophecy. This does not mean we should avoid discerning the intentions and godliness of the person giving the prophecy.

- Be careful who you allow to speak into your life. Look to mature leaders to confirm the character of the person who is prophesying. If you have doubts, bring your question to your leaders. If you have a problem with knowing if the word of prophecy is valid, your godly leaders will help you determine the truth.

- **Never be willing to listen and receive a private word of prophecy if the person giving it will not write it down or go with you to have it judged.** In these circumstances, it is a safe and good practice to refuse to listen to it. Let your pastors and leaders protect you from false or carnal prophets. This is a dependable way to protect yourself.

- **Never give a private word of prophecy if you are not willing to write it down and have it judged by a spiritual authority.**

- **Never give a private word of prophecy if you are not willing to go to a spiritual authority and have it judged.**

### Guidelines to Judge Prophecy

**1. Does it agree with the word of God?**

*Proverbs 30:5-6 (NKJV)*  
“Every word of God is pure; He is a shield to those who put their trust in Him. (6) Do not add to His words, Lest He rebuke you, and you be found a liar.”

*Titus 1:9 (NKJV)*  
“holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort… convict those who contradict.”

**2. Does it glorify Jesus?**

*John 16:13-14 (NKJV)*  
“However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. {14} He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you.”

The Holy Spirit will let you know if it the prophecy is valid.

a. He will guide you into all truth.
b. He will not speak on His own authority.
c. Whatever He hears from the Father He will speak.
d. He will tell you things to come.
e. He will glorify Jesus, for He will take of what is Christ’s and declare it to you. If it is authentic prophecy, it will glorify Christ!

Prophecy must do these things. They must…

a. Edify, encourage and comfort people.
b. Build up the church.
c. Profit people (be good for them).
d. Bring the lost to repentance.
e. Bear witness with your spirit.

A word of prophecy is worth listening to! A word of prophecy will never violate any of these things (a-e).

3. Does the prophecy bring peace and bear witness to your spirit? (It may cause your flesh the opposite!)

*Colossians 3:15 (NKJV)* “And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful.”

*1 Corinthians 13:9 (NKJV)* “For we know in part and we prophesy in part.”

Like a word of knowledge or word of wisdom, the gift of prophecy is spoken in part. It is not the whole picture.

If you are prophesying…

1. Do not try to interpret or explain. This is not your responsibility.
   In most cases, it is beyond your ability.
2. Do not expect to understand everything you say. You are not required by God to do this.
3. Do not keep talking when God is finished. This is an easy mistake to make. Fear of man and inexperience will cause this.
4. Remember that it takes practice to hear from God.
5. Remember to prophesy in a safe place, under the covering of a spiritual authority who can judge it.
6. Do not be a parking lot or curbside prophet. Do not ambush people outside the church to give them a word (outside of the presence of mature believers and known spiritual authority.)
7. Always be willing to have your word judged. Remember, if you are asked, be willing to write it down and not speak it at the moment.

9. Never be tempted to prophesy anonymously.

10. God will never interrupt Himself. Do not try to prophesy during a sermon. Be willing to hold onto your word until it can be spoken decently and in order.