

Beacon Positional Paper on prophecy 10.07.17

1) Meaning

According to the Oxford Dictionary the word **“Prophet”** simply means **a proclaimer of the will of God. The English word prophet is a compound Greek word, from pro (forwards – as in pro-jetile) and the verb phesein (to speak, as in the medical terms Dysphasia or Aphasia).**

So a prophet is someone who **“speaks forth”** the word of God.

2) Definitions

Wayne Gruden, a research professor of theology who holds a degree from Harvard, a Masters degree from Westminster Seminary and a PhD from Cambridge writes: **“Although several definitions have been given for the gift of prophecy, examination of the New Testament teaching on this gift will show that it should be defined not as “predicting the future” nor as “powerful preaching” – but rather as “telling someone what God has spontaneously brought to mind.”**

Prophecy is more than just thoughtful application of scriptural teachings, and implies a supernatural element of spiritual revelation. The prophet must be prepared to say, “I believe that this is what God wants spoken into this situation”, beyond just “This is what I believe.”

“When a prophetic word is given it can build up strengthen encourage stir up, motivate or challenge us. It draws us to God. It may bring His presence, release miracles, ignite faith in impossible situations. It aligns us with what God thinks, brings an encounter with the Father, and revelation from the throne room. It can restore hope, bring peace, it can bring healing and freedom. It highlights when change is needed. It exposes the deception and the lies the enemy traps us in.” - Jo McCulloch, Kings Church Horsham.

3) How is Prophecy to be delivered?

In **1 Cor 14:1** Paul states: **“Follow the way of love and eagerly desire gifts of the Spirit, especially prophecy.”** Prophecy words grow in a seedbed of love.

Sean Bolz - in his book “Translating God” - **“Before the prophetic is a spiritual gift it is at heart a culture of love. Before you even prophesy out of your mouth, there has to be a change in your heart, and it starts with a real understanding that God loved the world so much that he sent Jesus to reconnect to humanity and to His creation. Jesus didn’t come to condemn the world where it was going wrong, he came to put the world back to its right state again, to its connection to God, and we can all be part of that, if our hearts are a seedbed of love.”**

4) How do we hear from God?

The same way we hear from anyone – by spending quality time with Him. Prophecy starts in that quiet place when you are with God and you are open to hear his speak, perhaps about something or somebody that is on your mind. You may get just a fleeting sense of something, or an impression – something very simple – don’t disregard it but engage with God in prayer to clarify it.

Being **“filled with the Holy Spirit” (Eph 5:18)** and having our **“minds transformed”** by exposure to God’s word (**Romans 12:2**) will hone, refine and strengthen this gift.

5) What is the relationship between prophecy and God’s word?

David Pawson writes: *“The prophetic takes the revealed word of God which applies everywhere at all times and in all places and applies it to a particular person in a particular situation at a particular time.”*

"The prophet says **"thus says the Lord"** not **"thus said the Lord"** - this is the difference between **the eternal word, true for all time** and **the immediate word for now** which may lose its relevance over time."

Beacon elders would probably qualify David Pawson’s definition slightly and say that the prophet says, “I believe this is what the Lord is saying, but you must weigh it” rather than being too dogmatic and stating “Thus says.....”!

6) New Testament Prophecy is acknowledged to be fallible, and in need of being tested.

In **1 Cor 14:32** Paul states that: **“The spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets.”**

The mind, will and emotion of the prophet has the potential to dilute or distort the Holy Spirit content of the Prophecy. Therefore the New Testament teaches:

1 Thess 5:20: “Do not treat prophecies with contempt, but test all things. Hold fast to what is good....”

Also **1 Cor 14:29: “Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said.”**

7) How is New Testament Prophecy tested?

See paragraphs 9 and 10 below, but in a nutshell: **“No dates, no mates, no corrections and no directions!” (Harold Wilmshurst, Kings Church Darlington).**

In **1 Cor 14:3** Paul states: **“the one who prophesies speaks to people for their strengthening, encouraging and comfort.”** If a word fails to strengthen (build up), encourage (a strong word for firm exhortation) or comfort, it’s probably not from God.

Sometimes strengthening will come through a prophetic word bringing challenge.

Brother Yun wrote in *The Heavenly Man*: “In Western churches... someone invariably brings a comforting message like, “My children, I love you. Don’t be afraid; I’m with you.” I’m not opposed to such words, but why is it that nobody seems to hear a Word from the Lord like, “My child, I want to send you to the slums of Asia or the darkness of Africa to be my messenger to people dying in their sin”?”

One would hope that as one grows as a Christian and grows in the experience of prophecy, the “soulish” (fleshly) element of the prophet would diminish and the Holy

Spirit element would increase. The aim would be to reach the standard of “THE Prophet” Jesus. **John 6:14...** “**this is the prophet who is to come into the world**”).

He was able to say: “**I have not spoken on My own, but the Father who sent Me has commanded Me what to say and how to say it.” John 12:49.**

8) The timing of the fulfilment of Prophecy. Prophecy is spiritual - there is no time, space or distance in the spirit realm. Even when you read some Scriptural prophecies it can be hard to discern the time of fulfillment. Bible prophets spoke about events hundreds and even thousands of years in the future as though they were imminent. Remember “**with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.**” (2 Peter 3:8). Jesus said, “**I am coming soon**” (Revelation 3:11, 22:7, 12, 20). That was almost two thousand years ago!

So why does it feel as if the fulfillment of some prophecies are so delayed?

- Because the fulfillment of some prophetic words are dependent on our obedience
- Demonic assignments may bring delay.
- Sometimes time frames maybe symbolic rather than literal.

Remember, it is easy to have wrong expectations about prophecy. The Christian journey is about relationship and adventure. It's not supposed to be predictable. In fact, putting an over-emphasis on hearing God's voice through the prophetic word can border on divination and fortune-telling. If every detail of our lives were to be told to us ahead of time there would be no need for trust. So don't get too hung up on timing. Focus instead on obedience.

9) Application of Prophecy

Prophecy is to be listened to not passively but actively. In other words, with the attitude, “How can this word be applied? What can I do?”

Even Jesus in His humanity applied and acted on the prophetic word: in **John 19:28** we are told that on the cross, “**so that Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, “I am thirsty.”**”

David Wagner – an internationally respected Prophet – in a frank interview admitted “**sometimes it can be discouraging being in the prophetic ministry. You faithfully give these amazing words to people and sadly people don't do anything with it. I was in a time of prayer once, and the Lord asked me why I was feeling so frustrated? I replied because people didn't seem to be getting the full blessing the prophetic words. He said “you are frustrated because 98% of the words you give won't come to pass. Not because I didn't speak to them, not because it wasn't from me, not because the timing was wrong, but because they won't do anything with them.”**”

It is important to understand that every revelation requires a response. Sometimes we take a *que sera sera* approach to prophecy. Some sovereign words will just happen, but prophecy is also about partnership with God. It's not just about revelation, but interpretation and application.

10)The “Prophethood of ALL believers!”

“**Pentecost means the prophethood of all believers**” - David Pawson.

We believe that there are certain individuals who are called into the five-fold gifting of being “a Prophet” (with a capital P!) as described in **Ephesians 4:11**: “**And it was**

He who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for works of ministry, to build up the body of Christ, until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God, as we mature to the full measure of the stature of Christ....”

HOWEVER just as **medicine** is not restricted to **doctors**, but can – and should – be practised by all people using the basic principles of first aid, so prophecy is not restricted to those with a five-fold ministry of being a “Prophet” but is a gift given to all Spirit-filled believers. Every New Testament believer has the ability to “hear Gods voice and speak it forth”, according to the aforementioned definition of Prophecy.

This fulfils God’s longing expressed through Moses in **Numbers 11:29**: **“I wish that all the LORD’s people were prophets and that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!”**

And Joel: Joel 2:28: “It will come about after this that I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind; And your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, Your young men will see visions. Even on the male and female servants I will pour out My Spirit in those days.”

In **John 10**, Jesus clearly states that His sheep **know** His voice (**v14 &27**): **“I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me”; “My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.”**

It would seem inconsistent with Jesus teaching to deny that New Testament believers cannot hear and pass on messages of strengthening, encouraging and comfort.

11)‘DO’S’ OF PROPHECY

Do earnestly desire the gifts of the Holy Spirit (*1 Corinthians 14:1*).

Do trust the peace of God (*Philippians 4:7-9*).It will guard your heart and mind in Christ.

Do obey the urging of the spirit. The prophetic spirit is under your control.

Do speak clearly and naturally. No need for King James English. The Holy Spirit will confirm the word if truly from God, in the hearts of the listeners (***John 10:4-5,16; Philippians 4:5***).

Do speak loudly & clearly enough to be heard by everyone.

Do be aware of timing. A prophecy that comes at the wrong time during a meeting sounds like a noisy gong. Sometimes God gives us prophetic revelation to inform our own prayer for another person, which was never intended to be divulged. Sometimes God gives us prophetic words, which he wants us to hold for a while.

Do write down corrective and directional prophecies and leave with the Elders to weigh.

Do ask the Holy Spirit who the prophecy is for.

- **You:** then don’t prophesy it publicly
- **An individual:** be careful of individual prophecies to those you are emotionally

involved with. Share it with your Small Group leader (etc) first.

- **Your Small Group**
- **For Whole Church**

Do check your motive for bringing the prophecy. Check you are seeking to exercise the gift of prophecy with the love of God for the person or people you are prophesying to.

Do check your purpose for bringing the prophecy. For example, if you're a person of low self-esteem then make sure you're not trying to elevate yourself while putting others down. It's good when you first start out to be hungry for words that strengthen, comfort and encourage.

Do look to have a submissive heart with the gift of prophecy. You must be willing to submit what you have spoken or shared especially to leadership. Prophecy is to be weighed.

Do have your ears open to Heaven but your feet on the ground.

Do seek to use the gift of prophecy. *Matthew 25:23* - **"The servant who is faithful with a few things will be given responsibility for more."** Prophetic words are unlikely to come for whole denominations when you first step out. You need to grow in gifting and faith first.

Do bring the prophetic word be it a scripture or picture just as you have been given it. Say or describe no more or less than the Holy Spirit has given you.

Do leave the outworking to the Holy Spirit.

Do share with your Small Group Leader or the person overseeing the meeting if you feel you may have something from God but are unsure. It's better to share/ask than not to say anything at all.

Do be positive about what you have received and in bringing the word.

Do ask God for confirmation of the prophecy. This can come by somebody else's prayer, or a reference in a song etc.

Do pray and fast at times. This will purge your motives

Do know that God wants to use you.

12)'DO NOTS' OF PROPHECY

Do not bring anything that's not in line with the word of God.

Do not rely totally on physical sensations. When you first move out in prophecy it is often accompanied by sensations of knots in your stomach, fluttering heart beat or sweaty palms. As time goes on God often withholds these prompting so you can grow in the ability to hear him apart from physical sensations.

Do not give a word of discipline or rebuke directly to a person. You could have heard wrongly. The word may need some pastoral wisdom as how to handle the situation. So share the word with the leadership first for guidance.

Do not prophesy one on one. You should always be in two's, so take someone with you of the same sex that you are bringing the word to. They can be a help in weighing the prophecy and in helping to remember exactly what was said.

Do not prophesy about marriage or children directly to a person. If you receive such a word about either from the Lord, take it and leave with the Elders.

Do not prophesy "nice" words because you want people to like you.

Do not worry if you don't have the application or outworking of the prophetic word. Once given, leave with those overseeing the meeting etc as how best to bring the prophecy.

Do not let the enemy put "self-doubt" into you. "Is it just me"? Share the word with someone.

(Acknowledgement Bruce Collins: "Prophecy a Practical Guide for the "do's and "do not's" of Prophecy)

We hope this positional paper is of help in understanding this most wonderful and precious of gifts to the body of Christ (**1 Cor 14:4: the one who prophesies edifies the church**).

It is worth reminding ourselves that the Holy Spirit was given primarily to empower the church to witness **"to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8)** and perhaps the primary target of blessing for this gift therefore is not the church, but through the church God has given this gift to the world.

1 Cor 14:24: "if an unbeliever or an enquirer comes in while everyone is prophesying, they are convicted of sin and are brought under judgment by all, as the secrets of their hearts are laid bare. So they will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, 'God is really among you!'"

No wonder Paul exhorts us so emphatically to **"follow the way of love and eagerly desire gifts of the Spirit, especially prophecy.... I would like every one of you to speak in tongues, but even more to prophesy" (1 Cor 14:1 & 5).**

- James Muir, Ken Holland and David Williams, Elders, The Beacon Church, Whitchurch, Shropshire, with special thanks to a panel of members from the congregation.
July 2017

Footnotes:

Paul, in **1 Corinthians 12:7-8, 10** writes: **Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, ... to another prophecy...**

A "word" (logos) of wisdom, a "word" of knowledge, and a prophetic word. **What's the difference between the three?**

Whilst one could distinguish between knowledge and wisdom by saying that "**Knowledge** IS information given by God" and "**Wisdom** is the ability to apply knowledge", the question then arises – "are these not both forms of **Prophecy**?"

Biblical scholar **Jack Deere** writes: "**The Bible's authors did not always explain the words they used when they wrote about their prophetic experiences... Paul never tells us the difference between "a word of knowledge," a "revelation" and a "prophecy."** The phrase "word of knowledge" is used only one time and in a context that does not allow us to define it with certainty".

We would say **we don't know if there are any differences**. And we don't need to know. They are all manifestations of God's Spirit, all are given by the Spirit, and all are from God. **They are all a kind of God-revelation, given for the common good of the church, to edify the people of God.**