

thing about it is that it was clear speech, which did not need any interpretation. Herein lay its great advantage over tongues. Because of its intelligibility, it used the mind of the speaker (that mind which lies fallow while he is speaking in tongues, 1 Corinthians 14:14); it contributed to the edification of the whole Christian body assembled for worship; it struck to the heart of unbelievers present who were amazed at the directness and relevance of what was said; it showed that God was indeed present in the congregation (1 Corinthians 14:4, 24f). Therefore it was a gift to be sought and prized by Christians. Not all Christians have it (1 Corinthians 12:9), but all are encouraged to pray for it, because it is useful for other members of the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 14:1).

John Williams (pp. 105-106) writes:

The New Testament prophet, like his Old Testament counterpart, was essentially a medium for the direct communication of God's Word to men. Basically, prophecy is inspired speech. Endued with this remarkable gift, chosen individuals were able to declare divine truth to God's people. Although the predictive element was an essential part of the phenomenon of prophecy, it was probably of lesser importance than proclamation. To cite the well-worn dictum: "Prophecy is as much forth-telling as it is fore-telling." Properly employed, this important gift resulted in "edification, and comfort, and consolation" (1 Corinthians 14:3). In some cases the gift was temporary, resulting in the occasional ecstatic experience (Cf., 1 Samuel 10:10-13); in others, it appears to have been a permanent endowment which thereby constituted its recipient "a prophet" (cf., Acts 19:6; 21:9-11; 1 Corinthians 12:28).

J. Oswald Sanders (p. 117) states:

It appears that the New Testament prophet like the apostle, ministered to the Church at large, not to a local congregation. His function was more that of a proclaimer than a predictor, more a forth-teller than a fore-teller, although the latter element was not entirely absent, e.g. the prophecy of Agabus.

The essential mark of prophecy is that in it God's voice is heard, for it is inspired speech. The emphasis is not on prediction, but on setting forth what God has said. The prophet was moved to utter the deep things of God, and spoke "to edification, and exhortation and comfort". Since prophecy is God's message, it will always have deep significance, never be trifling or trite, and will always be in keeping with the written Word. It was the gift most to be coveted. Spirit empowered preaching would probably be the nearest present-day equivalent.