

differences in the prominence of a particular aspect from place to place, as a whole prophecy at Corinth was not different but the same phenomenon, unified in its various aspects, present in other congregations mentioned elsewhere in Paul, and in Acts and Revelation. This means that, while the discussion of I Corinthians 12-14 is certainly the most extensive, we must give passages elsewhere their due in reconstructing the role of the Corinthians prophets (as typical of prophets in other congregations), rather than concluding, when these other passages clash with a picture derived exclusively from I Corinthians, that they present a different "kind" or diverging conception of prophecy.

To balance our discussion as a whole, we should recognize first of all that according to the New Testament all believers are prophets; the whole church is a congregation of prophets. . . .

Apparently without exception, however, the New Testament vocabulary for prophecy is not used in this sense. There, applied to the church, it refers to a gift or function having two basic characteristics: (1) it is a gift given only to some, not all, in the church; it is a gift present on the principle of differential distribution; (2) it is a revelatory gift; that is, it brings to the church the words of God in the primary and original sense. Prophecy is not, at least primarily or as one of its necessary marks, the interpretation of an already existing inspired text or oral tradition but is itself the inspired, nonderivative word of God. . . .

This basic profile of New Testament prophecy can be substantiated and various objections to it discussed by examining relevant passages more carefully.

1. In I Corinthians 12-14 prophecy is obviously a gift given only to some in the church (12:10, 28, 29, as well as other indications throughout the passage). That it is also the case in other situations follows from Romans 12:6 and Ephesians 4:11.
Also, its revelatory character is apparent.
 - (a) True, Paul does associate prophecy with all intelligible speech (14:19; cf. the connection with teaching, v.6), but the element of revelation is plainly at its core.
 - (b) Another indication of the revelatory character of prophecy is found in the association of prophecy with knowing "all mysteries" (13:2). . . .
2. What Paul says in Ephesians 3:3-5 reinforces and focuses our conclusions from I Corinthians 12-14. My assumption here, . . . is that verse 5 (cf. 2:20) has in view the New Testament prophets as a group distinct from both the apostles and Old Testament prophets.
3. In Romans 12:6, Paul writes: "If [one's gift is] prophecy, [let him prophesy] according to the proportion of his faith." . . .
The thought . . . would be that prophecy is to conform to the truth already revealed to the church. . . .