

A New Testament Apologetic for the Contemporary Continuance of Prophecy and the Office of Prophet

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Abstract

Considering the recent events concerning Shawn Bolz and his fall from grace, it is important that the Church has a clear understanding of the New Testament gift and office of the prophet. The temptation is to react and dismiss the gift and ministry of the New Testament prophet. However, it is better to explore the Biblical position on the gift and office of the prophet so that we, as the universal Church can discern good prophetic practice and reject false prophetic practice.

This work presents a Biblical apologetic for the contemporary continuance of the spiritual gift of prophecy and the ministry office of prophet, drawing exclusively from the New Testament. It argues that prophecy is a normative, Spirit-empowered gift intended for the entire Church age and that prophets function as ongoing ministers given by the ascended Christ for the edification and maturity of the Church. Careful distinctions are made between New Testament prophets and Old Testament covenant prophets, emphasizing the fallible, tested, and Christ-centered nature of New Testament prophetic ministry. The study concludes that no New Testament text teaches the cessation of prophecy prior to the eschatological consummation, and that prophetic ministry remains valid when exercised under apostolic doctrine and communal discernment.

Introduction

The question of whether the spiritual gift of prophecy and the office of prophet continue beyond the apostolic era remains a significant theological debate within contemporary Christianity. While some traditions argue that prophecy ceased with the completion of the apostolic witness, others maintain that the New Testament envisions prophecy as an ongoing gift of the Holy Spirit operative until the return of Christ. This short essay argues, using the **New Testament alone**, that prophecy and prophets were intended to function throughout the Church age. By examining key New Testament texts, this study defines what constitutes a New Testament prophet, clarifies what such a prophet is not, and demonstrates that prophetic ministry operates in submission to Scripture and for the edification of the Church.

Pentecost and the Eschatological Framework

The apostle Peter interprets the events of Pentecost as the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy concerning the outpouring of the Spirit in the "last days" (Acts 2:16–18). In this context, prophecy is presented as a defining characteristic of the Spirit-filled community, extending to "sons and daughters," "young men," "old men," and "servants." The New Testament consistently identifies the "last days" as the period inaugurated by Christ's death, resurrection, and exaltation (Acts 2:17; Heb. 1:1–2). Consequently, prophecy is framed not as a temporary phenomenon but as a normative expression of life in the Spirit throughout the entire eschatological age.

Apostolic Instruction Concerning the Gift of Prophecy

Desire, Practice, and Regulation

The apostle Paul repeatedly exhorts believers to pursue and value prophecy. In his instructions to the Corinthian church, Paul commands, “Earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy” (1 Cor. 14:1, ESV). This exhortation presupposes the ongoing availability of the gift within the local church and situates prophecy as central to corporate edification. Paul further describes prophecy as speech that builds up, encourages, and consoles believers (1 Cor. 14:3).

In 1 Thessalonians 5:20–21, Paul warns against despising prophecies while simultaneously commanding believers to test them. This dual instruction demonstrates that prophecy is neither to be rejected wholesale nor accepted uncritically. The necessity of testing implies both the continuation of prophecy and the fallibility of its human expression.

The Duration of Prophecy According to 1 Corinthians 13

Paul explicitly addresses the temporal nature of prophecy, stating that prophecies will cease “when the perfect comes” (1 Cor. 13:10). He further clarifies that this consummation involves seeing “face to face” and knowing fully (1 Cor. 13:12). Within the New Testament, such language consistently refers to the eschatological encounter with Christ at his return. Therefore, prophecy is described as partial and provisional yet enduring until the eschaton rather than terminating at the close of the apostolic era.

Prophets in the Post-Resurrection Church

Evidence from Acts

The book of Acts provides multiple examples of prophets functioning within the early Church. Agabus prophesies a coming famine and later warns Paul of impending suffering (Acts 11:27–28; 21:10–11). Prophets and teachers minister together in Antioch, participating in prayer, worship, and communal discernment (Acts 13:1–3). Judas and Silas, identified as prophets, strengthen and encourage believers through exhortation (Acts 15:32). These figures are distinguished from apostles, demonstrating that prophetic ministry was not limited to apostolic office.

Prophets as Gifts of the Ascended Christ

In Ephesians 4:11–13, Paul identifies apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers as gifts given by the ascended Christ for the equipping of the saints and the building up of the body of Christ. The stated duration of these ministries extends “until we all attain to the unity of the faith” and mature into the fullness of Christ. Because the Church has not yet reached this eschatological maturity, the inclusion of prophets within this list supports the continuation of prophetic ministry.

Defining the New Testament Prophet

Characteristics of a New Testament Prophet

A New Testament prophet is one who speaks by the revelation of the Holy Spirit for the edification of the Church (1 Cor. 14:3). Prophetic speech is Christ-centered, as “the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy” (Rev. 19:10). Prophets operate under communal accountability, with their messages subject to evaluation by others (1 Cor. 14:29). Furthermore, prophetic speech is subordinate to apostolic teaching and the gospel already received (Gal. 1:8; Acts 17:11).

What a New Testament Prophet Is Not

Unlike Old Testament covenant prophets, New Testament prophets do not deliver infallible, covenant-establishing revelation. They are not authors of Scripture, nor do they introduce new doctrine. Their authority is ministerial rather than foundational, functioning within the boundaries of the apostolic witness (Eph. 2:20; Jude 3). New Testament prophets also do not exercise unilateral authority over the Church but serve alongside other ministries for the common good (1 Cor. 14:26).

Prophecy and Scriptural Authority

The New Testament consistently places prophecy under the authority of Scripture and apostolic teaching. The Bereans are commended for examining the Scriptures to test teaching (Acts 17:11), a principle that applies equally to prophetic utterances. Prophecy functions not as a rival to Scripture but as a Spirit-empowered means of application, exhortation, and encouragement within the life of the Church.

Conclusion

A New Testament examination of prophecy reveals a gift intended for the duration of the Church age, operating under clear theological and communal boundaries. Prophecy is promised as a last-days gift, encouraged by apostolic instruction, practiced in the post-resurrection Church, and linked to the ongoing equipping of the saints. Properly understood, New Testament prophetic ministry is Christ-exalting, accountable, and subordinate to Scripture, remaining a valid and vital expression of the Spirit’s work until the return of Christ.

References

The Holy Bible, English Standard Version. (2001). Crossway Bibles