

Prophecy

Scripture makes it clear that in the last days there will be a revival of the prophetic gift. 'Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my spirit in those days, and they will prophesy', Acts 2v18. To ignore the operation of this gift is to disobey God's command and to rob the church of revelation.

The prophet in the Old Testament was always conscious that he was God's mouthpiece. Occasionally he would deliver God's message in symbolic acts, as when Jeremiah shattered a potter's vessel (Jeremiah 19), or when Ezekiel dug through a wall (Ezekiel 12).

The Old Testament Office of the prophet had the function of largely foretelling what was to come in the future, while in the New Testament, the primary function was for strengthening, giving encouragement and comfort. A person who prophesied did so to edify the church (1 Corinthians 14v3,4).

For a period of time prophecy had an important place to play in the Early Church. Prophets attached themselves to various churches, but in time many false prophets arose and some of the New Testament epistles were written to warn the Early Church against these abuses. During the 2nd and 3rd century, Montanus and others also discredited the use of this gift and so the use of it slowly died within the church. I used to look upon the prophetic words I heard as somewhat trite, until I was rebuked by 1 Thessalonians 5v20, 'do not treat prophecies with contempt'.

How to prophesy

There are a number of ways people hear the prophetic voice of the Spirit. Normally it comes through a strong impression of a word or a message, while at other times it may come through a picture in the mind or a vision which is then explained to the congregation.

The message itself should be conveyed to the congregation in as natural a way as possible. Use modern day English and deliver it in an acceptable way. True Biblical authority does not normally come through yelling.

A wrong emphasis of prophecy

- In receiving *personal prophecy* a person may look more to another person for a word from God for their own life, rather than spending time seeking it directly from God through prayer, meditation and Scripture.
- Where the person bringing the word *moves out from under the authority* of the Local Church leadership. For example, prophecy is there to build up the church, not to tear it down. Some wrong words brought forth may be presumptuous, critical and judgmental. If this arises during a service the pastor should disassociate themselves from that word given. However this should be done with great love and wisdom.

- Some use this gift in a wrongful way to obtain *personal recognition and attention*. Prophecy must not promote self, but glorify Jesus, Revelation 19v11, John 16v14.
- It can become a *controlling force* to manipulate others for one's desired end. For example, if a person thinks a church should embark on a special outreach, a person may encourage the church to do that through a so called directive word of prophecy. This outreach may be right but a word of prophecy should come from others uninvolved. If this does come it can bring great encouragement that God is in it.

Points to note

1. Not all who prophesy are prophets (1 Corinthians 12v28). In the Early Church the prophets were next to the apostles in rank, whereas all believers were encouraged to prophesy (1 Corinthians 14v1).
2. Even among prophets there are different levels of authority in what they speak. For example Elijah had great authority - fire came down from heaven, but at least 100 prophets were hidden in a cave. We know little about these.
3. If God gives a prophet a word, it does not mean it should necessarily be spoken out. It may simply be given to provide a personal directive for prayer or caution in some situation. Some words are to remain with the receiver from the Holy Spirit.
4. Prophecy is not to bring additions or subtractions to the Bible. Any word given must line itself up with the teachings of Scripture.
5. Every word is to be witnessed by two or three witnesses (2 Corinthians 13v1). Not all prophecies originate from the Lord. It may also derive from self or Satan. The natural feelings of the one who prophesies can have an unhelpful influence on the way they give the message.
6. In giving the word be extremely careful not to add any extra words and give explanations or interpretations beyond what the Holy Spirit has given. To clarify a statement by natural understanding may unwittingly lead astray.
7. Some prophecies should be given privately e.g. the anointing of David (1 Samuel 15v13-31).
8. People developing the use of this gift need encouragement. Within certain boundaries let them make mistakes.
9. A prophetic word is not so much meant to be directive as to confirm the direction a person is going in.
10. People must be taught that any prophetic words given will only be useful if the recipient is living a diligent committed Christian life.

God is restoring this gift to the church. Although we are grateful for this, never should it replace the direct exposition of Scripture.