

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 2:18.

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 or she was God's mouthpiece. Occasionally they 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, 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

But the one who prophesies speaks to people for their strengthening, encouraging and comfort. Anyone who speaks in a tongue edifies themselves, but the one who prophesies edifies the church' 1 Corinthians 14:3-4.

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 prophetic words as somewhat trite, until I was rebuked by:

'... do not treat prophecies with contempt' 1 Thessalonians 5:20.

How to prophesy

There are several ways people hear the prophetic voice of the Spirit. Normally it comes through a strong impression of a word (perhaps from Scripture) 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. In delivering a prophetic word to the church you do not get more authority by yelling!

A wrong emphasis of prophecy

1. In wanting a personal *word of prophecy*, a person may depend more on someone else for a word from God about their life instead of seeking God directly through prayer, meditation and Scripture themselves.

2. 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.
3. Some use this gift in a wrongful way to obtain *personal recognition and attention*. Prophecy must not promote self but glorify Jesus. *'He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you'* John 16:14.
4. 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, that 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 not so involved. When this comes it can bring great encouragement that God is in it.

Points to note

1. Not all who prophesy are prophets (1 Corinthians 12:28). In the Early Church the prophets were next to the apostles in rank, whereas all believers were encouraged to prophesy. *'Follow the way of love and eagerly desire gifts of the Spirit, especially prophecy'* 1 Corinthians 14:1.
2. Even among prophets there are different levels of authority. For example, Elijah had great authority- fire came down from heaven, but at least 100 prophets were hidden in a cave (1Kings 18:13). We know little about these.
3. If God gives a special word, it does not mean it should necessarily be spoken out loud. It may simply be given to provide a personal directive for prayer. 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 13:1) *'Every matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.'* Not all prophecies originate from the Lord. It may also derive from the natural self or even Satan.
6. In giving the word be very careful not to add any extra words, give explanations or interpretations beyond what the Holy Spirit has given. To simply clarify a statement by natural understanding may unwittingly lead astray.
7. Some prophecies should cautiously be given privately e.g. the anointing of David (1 Samuel 16:1-3). However, this opens the recipient to abuse if it is not a true prophecy or is overly directive or harsh.
8. People developing the use of this gift need encouragement. Within certain boundaries let them make mistakes.
9. People should be taught that prophetic words are usually most beneficial when 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.