

Understanding the Prophetic

The gift of speaking by the influence of the Holy Spirit or the prediction of the future under the influence of divine guidance or the divinely inspired utterance of a prophet.

In the New Testament, words that relate to prophecy, prophesied, and prophets are used 210 times. So this is not an unfamiliar subject in the New Testament section of the Bible.

The Bible tells us in Ephesians 4:11-16 that Jesus Christ was responsible for giving the church the five-fold ministry. It was a balanced diet of ministry in order to prepare all His people for different types of service, as well as for maturing them into the balanced character of Christ in all His fullness. These five ministries were those of the apostle, the prophet, the evangelist, the pastor, and the teacher.

The word “prophecy” means to foretell events, or to speak under inspiration, or to speak as a prophet. Yet, someone can prophesy and not operate in the office of a prophet.

One of the functional gifts in the body [church] is also prophecy - see Rom. 12:6. The 14th chapter of 1 Corinthians speaks about the use of certain spiritual gifts in the church. Verse 3 says “everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort.” (I use the NIV translation of the Bible.)

Age has no bearing on who can prophesy. Acts 2:17-18 says, “In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy.”

Even new believers have the ability by the Holy Spirit to prophesy; see Acts 19:1-2, 6. So we see that one of the gifts of the Spirit is prophecy. It is also listed among the gifts from the Holy Spirit in 1 Corinthians 12:7-11. The Bible note for 1 Corinthians 12:10 defines prophecy as a communication of the mind of God; imparted to a believer by the Holy Spirit. It may be a prediction or an indication of the will of God in a given situation.

Someone who holds the office of prophet is a person who speaks as the interpreter or spokesman for God under the divine guidance of the Holy Spirit. He or she could be a religious teacher or leader regarded as being divinely inspired. A person who holds the office of a prophet may also predict future events under God’s inspiration. The Hebrew word for prophet, *nabi*, means “one who announces or brings a message from God.”

To bring balance to this topic, another gift from the Holy Spirit is mentioned in I Corinthians 12 verse 10. This spiritual gift is the distinguishing between spirits. It is given to distinguish the true from the false. False prophecies can come from evil spirits so this gift is necessary to know the difference.

There are other warnings for us in God's Word. 2 Pet. 2:1 makes reference to "false prophets" and to "false teachers." Some say they heard a word from the Lord when they really haven't, so as to manipulate others or to lead them off into another gospel - a misunderstanding of the truth Jesus brought. It is sad, but not all who claim to be Christian follow the example of Christ.

Whether we have seen abuses or so called prophets not being led by the Spirit, we need to discern and respect God's true prophets or those that bring a true gift of prophesy - a revealing of the heart of God - to uplift and encourage. 1 Thessalonians 5:19-20 tells us "Do not put out the Spirit's fire; do not treat prophecies with contempt." In other words don't despise prophecy. In verse 21-22 it is advised to test everything and to hold on to the good and avoid evil. So just because someone says they have a word from the Lord, it doesn't mean it is to be accepted without question. And definitely it has to line up with the Word of God. God never goes against his own Word.

If someone gives you a personal word they said they received from the Lord, ask yourself these questions. Does the word bear witness with your spirit? Does it confirm something you have already been feeling in your heart? Does it encourage you? Do you have a peace and feel good about this word? Even true conviction is a satisfying thing and enjoyable to our hearts.

Like anything we do, from exercising to using a talent, the more we do it the more proficient we become. As God uses me to bring a personal word or a word for his people, I pray to hear not my heart but his heart, not my thoughts but his thoughts. I desire to minister what God is saying without involving my own thoughts and opinions. I don't want to be misled nor do I want to mislead. That is why I always ask God to give me an accurate word and to help me hear clearly.

"Do not put out the Spirit's fire; do not treat prophecies with contempt."

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