

Eternity Daily Bible Study

(A ministry of Eternity Christian Fellowship)

Walking In The Spirit - 38

Studies in this series can also be found online at www.globalchristians.org/walkspirit/

Topic: NT Prophecy 3 – How Prophecy Should Be Used

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In today's study I will focus on the proper use of anointed congregational-level prophecy. I am deliberately excluding the book of Revelation from the discussion since Revelation is not a model for the average Christian with the gift of prophecy in the local church. This is because Revelation is: (a) A prophecy by one of the Twelve founding apostles and such absolute spiritual authority figures no longer exist (b) The bulk of Revelation is given outside of the local congregational mode and (c) Revelation is not just prophecy it is also 'apocalyptic' – a different genre.

New Testament congregational prophecy was used for guiding, sending and gifting individuals and for the edification, exhortation and comforting of the Church and for the conviction of sinners. It was also used for 'short-range' predictions such as Agabus predicting a famine so the Church could prepare and react with compassion.

New Testament congregational prophecy was never used 'over the nations' e.g. to prophesy with authority against Babylon, Rome or Israel, or to predict long-term events hundreds of years into the future. There are no collections of writings by NT prophets and they did not publish any books.

The NT prophets were not the untouchable spiritual giants of the OT, rather they were fallible men and women who heard from God and had their words evaluated by the local congregational leadership. They were submitted to an orderly system of church government.

I have no problem with prophecy that speaks with insight into someone's life or which exhorts a church in the things of Christ. I do have problems with people who make wild economic or political predictions or who prophesy over whole countries boldly claiming such authority from the Lord. Not only do such prophecies often fall flat and discredit the 'prophet' but, when made public, they can also discredit Christ and His Church. I believe that many such people are indeed well-intentioned and even godly but they are confusing NT prophecy with the line of OT prophets (see study 36).

A very disturbing modern practice is where some 'prophets' ask for a per-prophecy fee of say \$50 for a ten-minute prophetic session. This is similar to the sin of Simon Magus in Acts 8. While the laborer is certainly worthy of his hire their ministry support should come from a general source such as a church salary, gifts and tithes or from team support. We do not see Jesus or the apostles charging a per-service fee for spiritual ministry. When it comes to spiritual ministry such as miracles, healing, or prophecy the rule is 'freely you have received, freely give'. Financial support generally came from others in the area such as the worthy 'man of peace':

Matthew 10:7-13 MKJV *And as you go, proclaim, saying, The kingdom of Heaven is at hand. (8) Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons. You have received freely, freely give. (9) Do not provide gold nor silver, nor copper in your purses, (10) nor a bag for the journey, nor two coats, nor sandals, nor staves. For the workman is worthy of his food. (11) And into whatever city or village you enter, inquire who within it is worthy. And there abide until you go away from there. (12) And when you come into a house, greet it. (13) And if the house is worthy, let your peace come on it. But if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you.*

Luke 10:4-9 MKJV *Carry neither purse nor bag nor sandals. And greet no one by the way. (5) And into whatever house you enter, first say, Peace to this house. (6) And if a son of peace is there, your peace shall rest on it. If not, it shall return to you, (7) And remain in the same house, eating and drinking the things shared by them; for the laborer is worthy of his hire. Do not move from house to house. (8) And into whatever city you enter, and they receive you, eat such things as are set before you. (9) And heal the sick that are in it, and say to them, The kingdom of God has come near you!*

In fact Paul could say at the end of his ministry:

Acts 20:33-35 MKJV *I have coveted no man's silver or gold or apparel. (34) Yea, you yourselves know that these hands have ministered to my needs, and to those who were with me. (35) I have shown you all things, that working in this way we ought to help the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.*

There is much spiritual yearning in the heart of growing Christians and this is easily exploited. Everyone wants to 'hear a word from the Lord that is especially for them'. Even more so when it speaks to tough times and promises tremendous financial breakthrough or grand ministry results - or when it solves thorny political situations by offering a simple revelation of the future of the world.

Jeremiah contrasts true prophets who get a valid word from the Lord with false prophets who often just relate their dreams or who simply copy their ideas from each other:

Jeremiah 23:25-32 MKJV *(28) The prophet who has a dream, let him tell a dream. And he who has My Word, let him speak My Word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat? says Jehovah. (29) Is not My Word like a fire? says Jehovah; and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces? (30) So Jehovah says, Behold, I am against the prophets who steal My Words each one from his neighbor. (31) Jehovah says, Behold, I am against the prophets who use their tongues and say, He says. (32) Jehovah says, Behold, I am against those who prophesy false dreams and tell them, and cause My people to go astray by their lies and by their lightness. Yet I did not send them nor command them; therefore they shall not profit this people at all, says Jehovah.*

The true Word of God is like fire or a hammer that breaks the rock. The true prophecy is the wheat while the false prophecies are light, dreamy, and insubstantial. The false prophecies are copied from one person to the next as the false prophets practice to deceive the people of God. One sign of a false prophecy is that 'it does not profit this people at all'. In my view most of the prophecies of 'financial breakthrough' fall into this category - they create an strong unfulfilled hope and damage the person's faith in God.

As I see it the valid uses of NT prophecy are:

1. Convicting sinners and bringing them to repentance by disclosing the secrets of their hearts
2. Edifying, exhorting and comforting the saints
3. Predicting situations that the Church or its leaders need to immediately respond to
4. Giving a personal word that acts as a guiding principle for those doing God's work
5. Prophetically imparting spiritual gifts at ordination or its equivalent
6. The proper sphere of operation is the church congregation
7. NT prophecy is submitted to Scripture, to the local church leadership and possibly also to the other prophets who may also be present

On the other hand I think we should be cautious when we observe:

8. Prophets charging per-service fees such as \$50 per prophecy
9. Prophets predicting economic times or telling you to stock up on goods they are selling (which happened with the AD 2000 computer bug scare)
10. Prophets claiming authority over nations, world events or even over the weather!
11. Prophets predicting end-time events, or identifying the anti-Christ, or making wild and rash political statements
12. Prophets writing books of their own prophecies, particularly if they give weight to them or imply they are authoritative for the church as a whole.
13. Prophets refusing to come under the headship and authority of the local church
14. Prophets adding to Scripture or, on the other hand, down-playing Scripture in favor of 'spiritual experiences' and 'revelations'
15. Prophets who tolerate idols, witchcraft, astrology or the occult or who turn people from the simplicity of Christ to bizarre philosophies and 'deep truths'.
16. Prophets who live lives of immorality or of vast material excess or who condone or encourage such things.
17. Prophets who are harsh, condemning and legalistic, or who seek to dominate individuals or a local church - often in an effort to sound like the OT prophets.
18. Prophets who seek to introduce new major doctrines and even heresies based on sudden visions and revelations (such as the well-known preacher who claimed a revelation that there were 'nine gods - a trinity of trinities')
19. Prophets who promote holy water, medical cures, herbs, and remedies or who promote the veneration of relics.
20. Prophets who claim revelations from saints or from the Virgin Mary

As you can tell my view is that there is little, if any, biblical justification for what is being done by some elements in the prophetic movement today. However this does not mean that there is no biblical validity to NT prophecy, or to the idea of the prophetic gift or to the role of the congregational prophet. There is still some wheat amidst the chaff!

Blessings,

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