

Eternity Daily Bible Study

(A ministry of Eternity Christian Fellowship)

Walking In The Spirit - 40

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Topic: NT Prophecy 5 – The NT Prophet

Date: 5th September 2009

Yesterday we saw that prophecy is for all Spirit-filled Christians. Does this therefore make all Spirit-filled Christians into NT prophets - a position second only to that of the apostles? The short answer is "No!" There is a difference between those who operate in prophecy as a mature ministry gift and those who prophesy from time to time as God graciously touches their lives.

There is a clear instance of this in the Old Testament, in the book of Numbers:

Numbers 11:24-25 MKJV *And Moses went out and told the people the words of Jehovah, and gathered the seventy men of the elders of the people, and set them all around the tabernacle. (25) And Jehovah came down in a cloud and spoke to him, and took of the spirit on him and gave it to the seventy elders. And it happened when the Spirit rested upon them, they prophesied. But they never did so again.*

The 70 elders prophesied once in their lives, but there were not 'prophets'. Moses was the prophet, the elders were just ordinary people with a personal spiritual experience of prophesying. And in the New Testament we find something similar with the twelve rather confused disciples at Ephesus:

Acts 19:4-7 MKJV *And Paul said, John truly baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe into Him coming after him, that is, into Jesus Christ. (5) And hearing, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. (6) And as Paul laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied. (7) And all of the men were about twelve.*

Here the disciples were prophesying as part of their initial Christian experience.

On the other hand a NT prophet is someone that the body of Christ recognizes in that role, whose prophetic utterances have been tested and found to be accurate, and whose prophetic gift is well developed and mature so that it is available for ministry at any time.

We observe apostles, prophets and teachers 'hanging out together' in the New Testament and using their gifts to edify the body of Christ by planting churches, equipping and gifting leaders and instructing the believers for their edification, exhortation and comfort.

Acts 13:1-2 MKJV *And in Antioch some among the existing church were prophets and teachers. (such as Barnabas, and Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, the foster-brother of Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. (2) As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, So, then, separate Barnabas and Saul to Me for the work to which I have called them.*

Prophets who are named as such in the New Testament include Agabus (Acts 11:27, 21:10), Judas & Silas (Acts 15:32), and possibly Barnabas and Paul (by inference in Acts 15:30-32 combined w. Acts 13:1-2 above). Silas later works with Paul as a team of an apostle (Paul) and a prophet (Silas) to raise up an evangelist (Timothy – Acts 16:1, 17:4).

In NT times someone with the title of 'prophet' worked as part of an apostolic team with the overall goal of mission, church-planting and strengthening of the brethren. For example after the dispute over circumcision a letter was written to the Gentile churches and sent to Antioch along with Judas and Silas:

Acts 15:30-33 MKJV *Then indeed they being let go, they came to Antioch. And gathering the multitude, they delivered the letter. (31) And when they had read it, they rejoiced at the comfort. (32) And Judas and Silas, also being prophets themselves, exhorted the brothers with many words and confirmed them. (33) And remaining for a time, they were let go in peace from the brothers to the apostles.*

Judas and Silas delivered the letter from the apostles, then used their prophetic gift to exhort the brethren and when the mission was completed they returned to the apostles in Jerusalem (but Silas ended up remaining in Antioch). So the prophets worked with the apostles yet had the ability to do their own teaching and exhorting and also could make decisions about the direction of their ministry.

Here are the approximate categories of prophets that I observe in the New Testament:

1. People who prophesy just once or very infrequently, generally as part of the initial experience of Spirit baptism.
2. Congregational prophets who take their turn prophesying in a service and whose prophecies are weighed up by those present to sort out the wheat from the chaff
3. Prophets like Agabus and Silas who work with apostolic teams in order to strengthen the church and who operate in prophecy as a mature ministry gift.
4. False prophets who enter into the church in order to flatter, deceive and destroy.

Now we have no great concerns about categories 1 & 3 – one who prophesies very occasionally or the mature and recognized godly prophet. But categories 2 and 4 are a problem. What is the difference between a congregational prophet 'in training' who makes a genuine mistake in hearing God and a 'false prophet' that wants a personal following and tries to split and destroy the fellowship? How can we tell the difference between 'genuinely mistaken' and 'deviously deceptive'?

Every spiritual gift has a learning curve: evangelism, teaching, administration, healing, tongues, interpretation of tongues, discernment of spirits – and prophecy! A spiritual gift may take five, ten or even fifteen years to become fully mature and in the process many unintended mistakes get made. We need to give those developing the gift of prophecy the same amount of leeway - while still holding them to biblical standards.

The godly congregational prophet, who is still on the 'learning curve' is open to correction by the elders and by Scripture and seeks after righteousness and truth. There is a desire to bless the body of Christ and not to tear it apart.

They will be content starting one on one or in a small group. They do not seek to have people follow after them personally but only after Christ. They respect the church eldership and there is a wonderful humility and graciousness as they seek to develop the gift of prophecy appropriately for the edification of all present.

On the other hand the false prophet is not seeking after righteousness nor are they open to biblical correction. They are ego-centric, carnal, boastful and flattering and often use swelling words to deceive the people of God. They are divisive and seek after a following and such false prophets can be greedy and even immoral (see Jude 1:10-16). False prophets will be judged by God and should be immediately removed from any church they attempt to join (2 John 1:9-11).

2 Peter 2:1-3 MKJV *But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who secretly will bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing on themselves swift destruction. (2) And many will follow their pernicious ways, and because of them the way of truth will be evil spoken of. (3) And through covetousness they will use you for gain with well-turned words; for whom judgment from of old does not linger, and their destruction does not sleep.*

The false prophets can be discerned by the fruit of their lives (see also Study 38 – NT Prophets 3) and their lawlessness and iniquity (their inability to follow after holiness and God's righteousness). The false prophet will be arrogant and divisive and demonstrate evil fruit. Though they may work mighty miracles we are never to follow them:

Matthew 7:15-23 EMTV *"But beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. (16) You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grape clusters from thorns, or figs from thistles? (17) Thus every good tree produces good fruit, but a rotten tree produces evil fruit. (18) A good tree cannot produce evil fruit, nor can a rotten tree produce good fruit. (19) Every tree not producing good fruit is cut down and cast into the fire. (20) Consequently, by their fruits you shall know them. (21) "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. (22) Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name we cast out demons, and in Your name we did many mighty works?' (23) "And then I will confess to them, 'I never knew you! Depart from Me, you who work iniquity!"*

Matthew 24:24 EMTV *For false christs and false prophets will be raised up, and they will show great signs and wonders so as to deceive, if possible, even the elect.*

Yes we should all seek to prophesy. Yet if only a few should claim to be teachers (James 3:1), I think that perhaps even fewer should claim the title of the office of NT prophet. And we need to apply biblical correction and discernment to all who claim to move in prophecy.

Blessings,

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