

THE SPIRITUAL GIFT OF PROPHECY

Prophecy is a miraculous gift which is often misunderstood. Although it sometimes involves predicting the future, it doesn't always. More accurately, prophecy is the ability to make known God's will and purpose. In the Bible, prophets of both the Old and New Testaments helped God's people understand where God was present in events that were happening in the current moment, but also sometimes told them about God's purposes in what was to come. They were also fearless in pointing out sin and hypocrisy, particularly among those who were powerful.

Today, we sometimes hesitate to speak about the gift of prophecy because we have seen many examples of it being abused. It can be dangerous to assume we know what God is doing in any particular event or situation, and people are sometimes hurt by those who wrongly make that assumption. Yet, St. Paul tells us not to disregard the gift of prophecy even while we are vigilant against false prophets: "Be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues; but all things should be done decently and in order." (1 Cor. 14:39-40).

God continues to use this gift in His people, both in ways that seem miraculous and in ways that seem ordinary. Good preachers can be prophets, when they are able to see and proclaim God's hand in current events. Lay people can be prophets as well, when they speak with Divine authority on God's actions in the church and world. In every case, prophecy is for the building up and encouragement of the church. It may mean pointing out hidden wrongs, but it is never judgmental or cruel. Prophecy may draw attention to the prophet, but it is never undertaken for the sake of personal gain, notoriety, or to satisfy curiosity.

Because of the dangers of misuse, practicing this gift as the Spirit intended requires caution, discernment, and the support of other wise Christians.

People with this gift...

- Are sensitive to God's work around them, and often sense clearly where God is leading them
- Are open to God doing miraculous and out-of-the-ordinary things
- Are sensitive to both the prompting of the Holy Spirit and the needs of the church
- Are humble and continually study the Scriptures in order to test their words before speaking them
- Are open to testing by others, to ensure what they say is consistent with God's character and revelation as revealed in the Bible
- Are highly committed to truth and openness
- Are not offended or hurt easily by those who have doubts about their words or action

"Those who prophesy speak to other people for their building up and encouragement and consolation."

- 1 Corinthians 14:3

Putting your gift into action

If you are gifted with prophecy, this may only come occasionally and in specific circumstances. But using it requires preparation and receptivity to God's leading. This includes cultivating virtues like Bible reading, discernment, courage, and humility. You can do this by...

- Fostering a regular practice of openness to God's Spirit, telling God that you are ready to listen when He speaks
- Making a habit of asking God for the wisdom to know when to speak and when to remain silent
- Familiarizing yourself with the Bible and applying its wisdom in your life
- Forming deep friendships with wise, mature Christians
- Paying close attention to the world around you, looking for ways that God is at work
- Making worship a high priority in your life
- Acting swiftly and confidently when God speaks to you