

DAILY DOSE OF DOCTRINE

July 7 - 11, 2008



July 7, 2008

Ministry: Prophecy (1)

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“During this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. One of them, named Agabus, stood up and through the Spirit predicted that a severe famine would spread over the entire Roman world. (This happened during the reign of Claudius.)”¹

Prophets are those who deliver inspired messages from God to individuals or groups of believers. Broadly speaking, those messages fall into three categories: foretelling of future events, conviction of sin and insights into present reality that bring encouragement and/or understanding.

The foretelling of future events is given to evoke an appropriate response. In Acts 11, believers responded to the prediction of famine by collecting funds to help the church in Judea. In other situations future events are foretold so that God's people will remain faithful in times of persecution, receive assurance that they are on the right track or so that they will act in obedience because God has a purpose in mind that they cannot presently see.

Believers must be on guard against the temptation to desire to know the future as an end in itself. The ministry of prophecy is not Christian fortune telling. God wants us to walk by faith in a daily, trusting relationship with him. The future is revealed selectively, on a need-to-know basis.

Christians must also be stringent in applying Biblical standards to prophets who predict the future. Those whose predictions do not come true are to be firmly and publicly rejected so that others may not be deceived and so that the ministry of true prophets may be respected.²

¹ Acts 11:27-28 (TNIV)

² Deuteronomy 18:20-22

July 8, 2008

Ministry: Prophecy (2)

“John said to the crowds coming out to be baptized by him, ‘You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance.’”¹

A second focus of the ministry of prophecy is to deliver messages which declare that individuals or groups are guilty of sin. Old Testament prophets were used by God to uncover significant symptoms of spiritual decay in the life of Israel, particularly idolatry, neglect of the law and oppression of the poor and vulnerable. John the Baptist called Israel to repentance in preparation for the coming of the Messiah. The early church exercised this ministry not only against the Jewish leaders who rejected Christ, but to call those in the Church to account.²

Today, in so-called ‘prophetic’ circles, the messages seem to be predominantly ones of blessing and encouragement. Calls to repentance, especially for materialism or self-centeredness are strangely rare. As in Jeremiah’s time, are we experiencing ‘prophets’ who tell people simply what they hope to hear, declaring ‘peace where there is no peace’?³

The ministry of prophecy is alive and well among believers who are passionate about social justice issues and those who care for the poor and oppressed. Believers who stand individually or corporately against evil and injustice are exercising a Spirit-filled ministry of prophecy. Christians who dare to confront sin in the Church likewise are the engaging in this valuable service to the Body. Such prophetic messages should be delivered with much humility and soul-searching and a willingness to suffer for righteousness sake.

¹ Luke 3:7-8a (TNIV)

² E.g. Acts 5:1-11; 1 Corinthians 14:24

³ Jeremiah 23:9-40

July 9, 2008

Ministry: Prophecy (3)

“Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy....those who prophesy speak to people for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort.”¹

While the false prophets of Jeremiah’s day were exclusively good-news-prophets, this does not mean that the ministry of prophecy focuses solely on condemning sin or revealing future events. Those who exercise a Spirit-filled ministry of prophecy are frequently given messages of encouragement and blessing to deliver to God’s people.

This is particularly true if an individual or group of believers is going through a season of stress. At such times we are vulnerable to condemnation from the evil one, our own overactive imaginations and overzealous Christians. A timely prophetic word of encouragement may be just what is required to help us stay the course or take a step of faith.

Christians who are seeking encouragement or direction should be extremely cautious about receiving a prophetic word as the sole or primary means of guidance for a major decision. Prophecy is a wonderful blessing when it confirms leadings already being given by God through other means. It should not be seen as ‘trumping’ the Bible, wise counsel, circumstances or other ways that the Spirit uses to lead us in God’s direction.

When we receive an encouraging message through the ministry of prophecy, it might be wise to follow the example of Mary who “treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart”². Receive the blessing and praise God.

¹ I Corinthians 14:1,3 (TNIV)

² Luke 2:19

July 10, 2008

Ministry: Prophecy (4)

“Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said.”¹

When the ministry of prophecy is utilized it must be accompanied by discernment on the part of the Church. While some discourage discernment as ‘quenching the spirit’ or as evidence of a ‘critical spirit’, poor manners or a lack of faith, the Bible plainly commands us to weigh carefully every message that purports to be from God.

Note that all present are to engage in weighing the message. There is no such thing as a ‘gift of discernment’². The group or individual is responsible to weigh what they hear by asking questions like:

- Is this message consistent with Scripture?
- Does it communicate clearly?³
- Does it bring conviction? Of sin? Of God’s love and faithfulness?
- Does it evoke godly or worldly responses in me?
- Do other Christians concur that it rings true?
- Does it just reiterate platitudes or affect the heart and spirit⁴?
- Does it glorify God or some human being?

Claims of divine revelation and/or ecstatic experience by the prophet do not negate the need to discern – in fact they make it all the more vital for the church to do so. Prophecy that is discerned to be from the church should be affirmed. Prophecies that do not ring true should be publicly disavowed and the prophet lovingly confronted. Where things seem uncertain, clarity should be sought from God.

¹ 1 Corinthians 14:29 (TNIV)

² This is not the same as the ‘discernment of spirits’. False prophecy may arise from the world or the flesh, not just the devil.

³ 1 Corinthians 14:8

⁴ Hebrews 4:12

July 11, 2008

Ministry: Prophecy (5)

“But you must not mention ‘a message from the LORD’ again, because everyone’s own word becomes a message from God. So you distort the words of the living God, the LORD Almighty, our God.”¹

Extra space has been devoted to the ministry of prophecy because, at the present time, highly questionable teachings abound in this area. Some allege that God wants every Christian to possess the gift of prophecy. Others demure at such patently unscriptural statements, but still teach techniques by which believers can ‘hear the voice of God’ and receive direct messages from him on a daily basis. As a result many are mistaking their own ideas, fancies, and random thoughts for divine revelation.

The current popularity of such teaching probably reflects a belief that prophecy is an ecstatic experience which provides a tangible blessing for the prophet. By contrast, the Bible indicates that true prophecy is known by its effects on the recipients, not the prophet.

In 1 Corinthians 14, Paul envisions fellowship gatherings in which almost everyone contributes. In turn they share songs, scriptures, teachings, revelations, testimonies. While some may hold the office of ‘prophet’, a word from God can come from anyone in the context of that sharing. Someone sharing a testimony might unwittingly deliver a ‘prophecy’ when the Spirit uses it to touch the lives of others in the group. A ‘prophet’ may or may not realize at the time that the message is from God. It is the edification of others that demonstrates it to be a word from the Lord.

¹ Jeremiah 23:36 (TNIV)