

Destiny College Notes

‘You may all prophesy’¹

Ian Rawley

I can still clearly remember the time when I was picked out of a large crowd of young people by a man who had never met me in his life, who, in fact, had only just flown into the country a few hours earlier. To my astonishment he prophesied things concerning a future ministry for me which now, many years later, I can verify were entirely accurate. Like me at the time, you might be saying to yourself, ‘Wow, there is no way I could operate like that!’ Don’t worry, unless you are one of those people whom God has called into a prophetic ministry,² you probably won’t ever do that – although you shouldn’t rule it out! However, the clear teaching of the apostle Paul is that each one of us should expect that from time to time we will be inspired by the Holy Spirit to prophesy.³

‘To prophesy’ literally means to speak for, or on behalf of, another: in this case, God. What happens is that the Holy Spirit interacts with our spirit and communicates to us, in a variety of ways, what it is that he wants to say through us. We prophesy as a result of direct revelation⁴, which distinguishes prophecy from teaching. The outcome should be that the hearer is strengthened, encouraged, comforted or instructed.⁵ This is not to say that God would never guide, warn or correct through a prophecy, but if that is what we believe the Spirit is saying, we would be wise to check it first with someone in pastoral oversight. If it were for an individual, it would usually be better to deliver it privately. Even then, what is brought should normally only confirm what that person is already beginning to feel in his or her own heart. Similarly, we should not lightly bring predictive prophecies. In the Old Testament, God instructed that anyone who prophesied what he had not been commanded to speak was to be executed⁶. Whilst that particular injunction is not carried through to the New Testament, certain people may feel

like killing you if they have taken your false prophecy seriously! Far too many people have been hindered rather than helped by uninspired nonsense. Following these simple guidelines should help to minimise the pastoral disasters that immature use of the prophetic gift has sometimes caused.

This is why the apostle Paul instructs that each prophetic contribution is to be ‘weighed’,⁷ which has the connotation of ‘sifting’ or ‘sorting through’. ‘Others’⁸ who are around when you prophesy who are competent to perform such a task should do this. They will usually be leaders, particularly if they themselves have a prophetic gifting, but ultimately everyone listening who is spiritual should have an ‘amen’ in their heart. If the prophesying was in public, then so should be the weighing. This does not mean rating the prophecy out of 10. Rather, it means discerning the voice of God behind what has been said, making that clear to everyone and then deciding upon an appropriate response. You see, we all only ‘...know in part and we prophesy in part...’⁹

This reality also explains why sometimes several people in a congregation can pick up the same leading of the Holy Spirit, yet express it in a variety of ways. For example, they may all sense that the Lord is reminding them of his care and provision; even down to the minutest detail in their lives. The Bible scholar finds that Matthew 6:25-34 comes prominently to his attention, while the scientist next to him has a picture in his mind of God taking enormous care over the setting up of a piece of scientific equipment. On the other side of the room, the mother of young children has a strong sense of God’s parenting love, while the athlete next to her is repeatedly reminded of the attention to detail that his coach takes when training him for an important event. Who got it right – they all did! When each contribution has been given and all have been properly weighed, the hearers will have a clear sense of God’s encouragement to them at that time.

So how do you begin to prophesy, if you are not yet doing so?

- *Believe that God can reveal something to you.
- *Choose a 'safe' environment to start with.
- *Ask the Holy Spirit to give you something.
- *Receive it in faith; whether it comes as a word, a phrase, a whole sentence, a picture, a scriptural story, verse or principle or simply as a sense of what the Holy Spirit feels or is saying.
- *Deliver it!

What are some of the things to remember as you develop your prophesying?

- *Have the right attitude. Your motivation must always be to bless, coming from a heart of love.¹⁰
- *Make sure that you are emotionally at peace. Never prophesy about something or someone causing you anxiety, anger or distress.¹¹ This does not preclude you feeling as God feels about the issue, even when that involves strong emotions.
- *Stay within your faith parameter.¹²
- *Remember that nothing you say can contradict the scriptures. Indeed, they will be the plumbline for anything that you bring.¹³
- *Wait until you believe you have everything that the Holy Spirit is revealing to you on that occasion.
- *Deliver it clearly, with no additions.¹⁴
- *Do not preface your contribution with, 'thus says the Lord', or speak in the first person singular, as if all the words you say are the very words of God.
- *Avoid special voices, King James vocabulary, unseemly histrionics or contortions.¹⁵
- *Remember that 'the spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets'¹⁶; so it is perfectly permissible to hold your revelation until an opportune moment, or to stop in mid-flow if necessary.
- *Take note of other contributions. If the burden of the Spirit has already been clearly heard, it may not be necessary for you to give yours.

Finally, don't worry about being perfect. The church at Corinth was in a terrible mess.

Among other things that were wrong was their whole understanding and practice of spiritual gifts, about which the apostle Paul implies they were 'ignorant'.¹⁷ Nevertheless, he still thanks God for them and believes that they have been enriched in every way in Christ.¹⁸ So don't be paralysed by fear of making a mistake. Step out in faith and bless someone!

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¹ I Corinthians 14:31. All scripture references in the article will be taken from this chapter unless otherwise stated.

² I Corinthians 12:28-29.

³ In addition to verse 31, see verses 1, 5, 12, 24 and 39. See too, Acts 2:17-18 and Numbers 11:29.

⁴ See verse 30 and 25.

⁵ See verse 3 and 33.

⁶ Deuteronomy 18:20.

⁷ See verse 29. For a fuller discussion, see David Mansell's article on page xx of this issue.

⁸ See verse 29.

⁹ See I Corinthians 13:9. See also verses 10-12.

¹⁰ See I Corinthians 13.

¹¹ See 2 Kings 3, especially verses 14-15.

¹² See Romans 12:6.

¹³ See 2 Timothy 3:16.

¹⁴ See verses 7-8.

¹⁵ See verse 33. This remains sound advice, despite testimonies following the recent widespread move of the Spirit, most prominently evidenced in places like Toronto and Pensacola. Whilst we should not refuse to accept the unusual, it is likely to remain exactly that: unusual!

¹⁶ See verse 32.

¹⁷ See I Corinthians 12:1.

¹⁸ See I Corinthians 1:4-9.