

Despise Not Prophecy

I believe a new understanding of the prophetic is coming to the church.

When the Old Testament prophet Joel predicted the coming of the Holy Spirit, he said, “Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy” (Joel 2:28, NKJV). The book of Acts reports that beginning on the Day of Pentecost, his prediction was fulfilled: The people who were filled with the Spirit spoke in tongues and prophesied (see Acts 1:4; 19:6).

I know many charismatics who have refused to buy into the belief that tongues died with the apostles. They may even speak in tongues regularly. And if anyone questions them, they quote Paul’s command to the Corinthians, “Do not forbid to speak with tongues” (1 Cor. 14:39).

But what about the Scripture that warns us to “despise not prophesyings” (1 Thess. 5:20, KJV)?

As important as prophecy was in the New Testament church, it is rarely the norm in charismatic churches. If a traveling prophet comes to town it’s a “big deal.” Yet I believe a new understanding of the prophetic is coming to the church, due in part to the teaching of men such as apostle John Eckhardt of Chicago, who views prophecy as an important function of the fivefold ministry in the church.

Recently my wife, Joy, and I flew to Chicago to visit Eckhardt’s Crusaders Ministries, which began to explode in 1995 when Eckhardt started emphasizing the importance of deliverance. We were amazed to see firsthand a church where ordinary believers were empowered to heal the sick, cast out

demons and prophesy.

We invited Eckhardt to speak at the recent Charisma Women's Conference in Daytona Beach, Florida, to share his experience. He taught the prayer counselors how to pray for deliverance and then led a session for those who wanted to learn to release the prophetic flow.

In discussing prophecy, Eckhardt went over the Scriptures I quoted above, emphasizing that just as speaking in tongues should be normative, so should prophesying. Then a woman who had been trained at his church taught the 600 people in the session that in the same way we can pray at will for perfect strangers we can prophesy when that gift—designed to encourage, exhort and comfort the body—is stirred up.

I grew up in a Pentecostal church where people “tarried,” often for years, to receive the Holy Spirit. Many of them were shocked when charismatics prayed for the baptism in the Holy Spirit and received it almost immediately.

I had the same feeling in this session. Though I've been around the prophetic for decades and have occasionally operated in the gift myself, I didn't believe it could be released at will.

But Romans 12:6 tells us, “Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith” (NKJV).

While I participated in a group with five women, prophesying for those on my right and left, I found that the prophecies I

gave welled up from within my being, and I felt certain I was hearing from God in what I was saying. And the two women who prophesied over me were very specific about things that involved writing. One prophesied that I'd take the vision and write it down.

Afterward I asked them if they knew what my occupation is. They said no. That was somewhat humbling since it was apparent neither read my column in Charisma. However, it was also a confirmation that what they prophesied was from the Lord.

What's the point of all this? I believe God is doing something new in the church. Certainly there's a lot to be criticized, and in my role I'm in a position to hear and see all the negative.

But there is also a fresh wind of the Spirit and a new understanding of how the church should operate being brought to us by a new generation of leaders who are not impressed with titles and who do not push for money or position. John Eckhardt is such a man. His assurance that every Spirit-filled believer is equipped to do the things God has called us in His Word to do was an inspiration to me to step out and make prophesying a normal part of my life. I pray it will be so for you as well.

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