

How You Must Properly Steward Prophecy

Much has been said in recent weeks regarding prophecy and its accuracy in the body of Christ.

My intention in this article is not to call into question any particular prophetic word given or its interpretation or application—but rather it is to give solid scriptural principles by which we can grow and mature in stewarding prophetic revelation, interpretation and application moving forward.

Years ago, when I was in Kansas City with Mike Bickle and others, Bill Hamon (a mature prophet who is the founder of an extensive ministry called Christian International) taught us about the meaning and importance of these three basic prophetic principles, which build upon each other:

- Revelation.
- Interpretation.
- Application.

These three principles are vital foundational building blocks in understanding the gift of prophecy.

- 1. Receiving pure revelation:** How can we know if a word is genuine? It is too easy to dismiss a word as being “off” simply because we do not consider all of the factors.

First, we must evaluate the source of the word. Let’s say you are learning how to use your prophetic gift, and a thought crosses your mind. Simply because you are a prophet, does that mean it is from God? Not necessarily. We must learn to discern the difference between three different voices that can sometimes sound almost the same: God’s Holy Spirit, our own

thoughts and Satan.

John advises us to “test the spirits to see whether they are from God” (1 John 4:1). How should we do that? We cannot test a word by its fruits yet, if it has not been delivered, but we can anticipate its results to some extent. Will the word express God’s love to the hearers, even as it convicts them? Or will it bring them condemnation and hopelessness? Are your own emotions and opinions part of the mix? Have you left an opening for the devil in your own life lately?

The mode of revelation is not as important as the message. If God wants to get His word across, He will use the most appropriate means to do it. “Hear now My word. If there is a prophet among you, I the Lord will make Myself known to him in a vision, and I will speak with him in a dream” (Num. 12:6).

2. Proper interpretation. Too often, genuine words from God have been judged as false because of a misconception, wrong timing or a misinterpretation and thus a wrong application.

In his first letter, Peter made specific mention of how the earlier prophets had tried to comprehend what the Messiah would be like:

“The prophets who prophesied of the grace that should come to you have inquired and searched diligently, seeking the events and time the Spirit of Christ, who was within them, signified when He foretold the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow” (1 Pet. 1:10–11).

Over time, their skewed interpretation that the Messiah would be more of a conquering King than a suffering servant made it difficult to recognize the true Messiah when He came. Some missed their day of visitation altogether. Proper interpretation is always important!

But we can never expect to understand spiritual matters; our

human comprehension is inadequate. Rather than trying to understand everything on our own, it is vital to simply ask God for interpretation help. That is what Zechariah did. He said, "I saw at night [revelation]...Then I said, 'What are these, my lord?' [In other words, "what is the interpretation?]" (see Zech. 1:8–9). Though Zechariah was a seer with a proven track record, he did not assume he could interpret properly. As Bob Jones used to say to us less mature prophets, "It's the wrong time to be a know-it-all."

Prophetic words may seem to be quite specific, and yet they have shades of meaning and intensity. The best prophetic examples are the words "soon" and "quickly." When the Lord Jesus says repeatedly in John's Revelation, "I am coming soon" and "Behold, I am coming quickly," people thought he meant in the next month or year, or at least within their lifetimes. Guess what? It has not happened yet. The interpretation of those words has had to be adjusted.

People have produced whole books that are like dictionaries of Christian symbolic meanings. These can be very helpful, although they are not meant to be rigidly definitive. You learn interpretive skills by trial and error, by getting it wrong sometimes and by getting it right other times. God has a personal alphabet or language for each of us, and it is only through experience that we grow in our understanding of our own patterns of interpretation. {eoa}

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