

St. Mary's Sermon Series

Romans 12

**Spiritual Gifts:
Prophecy**

What is Prophecy?

Prophecy is speaking the word or message of God for a given time or circumstance.

In our reading from Romans 12 Paul is re-iterating some of the gifts of the spirit. To Paul, all the gifts of the Spirit are important and included in Romans 12 is the gift of prophesying which Paul values very highly (we will consider this later).

When we look at the prophets there is a difference between Old Testament and New Testament prophets, the New Testament Prophet does not have the same authority as the Old Testament Prophet. The New Testament Prophet's word is subject to scrutiny and assessment as it is communicated to the church - information 'revealed' from God that otherwise could not have been known. The Old Testament Prophets often stood against God's people in judgement, but under the new covenant in Acts 2:17, prophets strengthen the body to which they belong. Prophecy in the New Testament has rarely to do with foretelling the future but it usually has to do with 'forth-telling' God's word.

Paul says that the gift of prophecy has to be in proportion to faith. Paul could be referring to the prophet's own faith, but it is more likely to be, in general, by the faith in which the prophecy must be measured; and it has to be tested within the faith of the community in which it is given.

The spirit-led interpretation of scriptural truth may be given to anyone, although, those who sense that God wants them to speak out on particular issues have a responsibility not to say the first thing that they think the Spirit is prompting them to say. That can be dangerous and must be regulated according to the pattern of Faith in which it is understood. The gift of prophecy enlightens, informs, urges and comforts (1 Corinthians 14:3); along with the other gifts prophecy helps to build up or strengthen the body of the church and should lead us to the Word of God.

Prophecy is a divinely inspired word - a proclamation from the Holy Spirit in a known language. It is the manifestation of the Spirit of God - not of intellect (1 Corinthians 12:7), and it may be possessed and operated by all who have the infilling of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 14:31).

The gift of prophecy operates when there is high worship (1 Samuel 10:5-6), when other prophets are present (1 Samuel 10:9-10), and when hands are laid on someone (Acts 19:1-6).

I want to share a prophesy with you that was given through a friend of mine:

At a Prayer meeting, the Revd Bob Yule revealed that he had a word a prophesy from God. In this prophesy God promised that He would send the church 60 people and 60 more when the church were able to look after them. We were quite excited about this and we imagined couples and families swelling our family services.

However, only a few weeks beforehand I had felt God calling me to set up a youth club for the youngsters which we did on a Friday night with 4 young children - then ten and eventually 60+ came.

God was true to his word. He did send the 60 people to build up His Church, but not as we had imagined. I still believe that it was God's sense of humour. That happened in 1996 and still, to this day, the youth club is strong with 60 youngsters continuously being replaced by another 60 as the first ones grow older.

Some Common Misconceptions About Prophecy

The gift of prophecy (1 Corinthians 12) and the office of the prophet (Ephesians 4:11) are not the same thing.

There is a ministry and gift of prophecy, but not everyone is a prophet. For example, a person may wear a Manchester United shirt but that doesn't mean he plays professional football for United. You may prophesy, but operating in the gift of prophecy does not qualify you to stand in the office of a prophet, much like, wearing a football shirt does not qualify you to play football for Manchester United - you must be a gifted footballer, so to have the title of prophet, one must usually have a consistent manifestation of at least two of the revelation gifts (word of wisdom, word of knowledge, or discerning of spirits) plus prophecy.

Prophecy is not prediction.

People sometimes think that "prophecy" means to predict (foretell) what will happen in the future. As mentioned earlier, the gift of prophecy is essentially forth-telling; it is a ministry to make people better and more useful Christians, and to build up the body of Christ's church. Prophecy in the New Testament church carries no prediction with it whatsoever, for "*But the one who prophesies speaks to people for their strengthening, encouraging and comfort.*" (1 Corinthians 14:3). Notice that there is no mention of the word prediction here.

Prophecy is not the same thing as preaching..

The words preach and prophesy come from two entirely different Greek words. To preach means to proclaim, announce, cry, or tell. Jesus said, "Go into all the world, and PREACH the gospel.." (Mark 16:15).

The Hebrew word for "to prophecy" means: to flow forth. It also implies "to bubble forth like a fountain, or to spring forth".

The Greek word that is translated prophecy means: to speak for another. It means to speak for God or be His spokesman.

When someone prophesies to us, it is God speaking to us. When someone prophesies in the church, it's God speaking to the church to bring edification, encouragement, and comfort to the body of the church.

Prophecy is not the interpretation of tongues.

To speak in tongues is to exercise a valuable gift, it is a wonderful means of communication with God and it builds up the person who uses it, but it only has limited use for the church as a whole (1 Corinthians 14 v2 -4). Prophecy by contrast has a much more transparent and beneficial effect in encouraging and building up the church.

The Bible tells us that we are to "Do not despise the words of prophets, but test everything."(1 Thessalonians 5:20-21). When a prophecy is given, we are to test it and hold on to what is good in it.

If we look at scripture there are ways to test prophecy:

- (Matthew 7:16-18,20) By their fruits you shall know them.
- (John 16:14; 1 Corinthians 12:3; 1 John 4:1-2) Does it glorify Christ?
- (Isaiah 8:20) Does it agree with the Scriptures?
- The benchmark remains that all prophecies should exalt the Lord Jesus.
- (Isaiah 28:13) Is the prophecy disjointed or confused? True prophecy is line upon line and precept upon precept.
- Do the prophecies produce freedom or slavery? (Romans 8:15)
- All believers have an anointing of the Holy Spirit within them that tells them when something is wrong. The anointing teaches about all things, and is true and not a lie when we abide in Christ.(1 John 2:20,27)

Why Is Prophecy Important?

- (Ezekiel 37:1-4). It brings life. Prophecy brought life to the valley of dry bones
- (Proverbs 29:13,18). It gives spiritual vision. The Bible says, "Where there is no vision, the people perish." The Lord gives vision through the prophetic word
- (1 Corinthians 14:3). It edifies, exhorts, and comforts

- (Acts 2:16-18). It brings revival and restoration. True prophecy brings restoration and revival
- (Acts 13:1-3) It guides you to your right position in Christ. Prophecy is used by God to direct you where you need to go

I will conclude by example of two words of prophecy that were given to me on different occasions, to build up myself and thus build up the body of Christ – His Church:

One from a Pentecostal minister whom I had only met once, she said that she had a word from God for me. It was just as I began my ministry as an ordained person:

From Isaiah 45 v 3

“I will give you the treasures of darkness, riches stored in deep places, so that you may know that I am the Lord God of Israel, who summons you by name.”

This I have held with me since then and feel the power and confidence from it, encouraging me to use gifts (treasures), stored up to enrich my ministry and those whom I minister to, coming out of the role of lay reader and clergy spouse to be summoned by name for this ministry.

The other was from Bishop Paul who also gave me a passage of scripture which was very poignant and has come true:

2 Corinthians 1 v 3-4

“Praise be to God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.”

In my ministry to the bereaved and sick this has come to fruition, as I have visited some ladies who have been widowed. They have appreciated my listening and ministry as they know I have experienced the same. I have been able to encourage people in their faith.

Let us be encouraged to pray and listen to God’s word so that we can share this with others; thus enabling a building up of God’s Church and Kingdom here in Eastwood.