

Responding to Personal Prophecy

by Frank Damazio

We are living in a time when personal prophecy can come to you at any time. When you least expect it, someone will come up to you and say, "I believe I have a word for you." Or someone will begin by praying over you and will end up saying "Thus saith the Lord."

Because most of us are in an environment where people believe in the gifts of the Spirit and are sensitive to the moving of the Holy Spirit, prophetic utterances are common place and "words" at times will be given to you. So how should you respond when they come?

Some people run here and there looking for words of prophecy. Many such people take every word as being from God with no filter in place for any word given. They carrying a bundle of prophecies in their Bibles, some of them are from God, some from a sympathetic friend, some from a futuristic well-wisher and most of which are unfulfilled.

Other people have a fear of prophecy and go into hiding whenever anyone is present who has a purported "prophetic ministry." They have no desire to have a new prophetic word. They are still trying to walk out the prophetic words that they have received in the past. Or they have no real sense of value when it comes to the power and importance of prophetic ministry in our lives.

Somewhere we must find a balance in all of this. On the one hand, we must not be gullible people who believe every word that anyone ever gives to us. We must be willing to test the words that are given (See the article on Judging Prophecy). On the other hand, we must realize that this is an important gift to the Church that God can use in powerful ways in our lives to equip, strengthen and guide us as believers.

When you receive a prophetic word (keeping in mind all of the principles of judging that word), there are some things you should remember. First of all, you should receive that word with respect and expectation knowing that God may want to speak into your life through the person giving that word. Maintain an attitude of meekness and humility, realizing that God sees you as important and wants to encourage, exhort and comfort you. Be open to what He may say through your brother or sister.

Second, you must realize that there are some aspects of most prophetic words that are clearly God's responsibility to bring about and some that are specifically your responsibility to work through. Separate the two aspects in your prophecy and focus on what you must do, being diligent to accomplish those things. With that, pray that God will fulfill His part of the word, keeping His promises to you. Doing so will allow you to give the word its proper attention while not allowing it to distract your focus from God.

Third, whether you receive a word through a prophetic presbytery or from another believer in a time of prayer, personal prophecy is one word from God for your life. It cannot take the place of the believer's personal responsibility for Bible reading and daily devotion to God. Nothing can be a substitute for the believer's life in the Word of God and a personal relationship to Jesus Christ cultivated through prayer.

There are five common errors that people make when receiving a prophecy. Each of them must be overcome if we are going to receive the full benefit of this ministry in our lives.

1. The error of taking no personal responsibility.

It's easy to hear a word and feel that you have nothing to do with making it come to pass. This is a fallacy. I have seen people wave their prophecies around with all of the promises circled. I am usually more interested in what they have not circled. That is usually the path to see the prophetic word fulfilled in a person's life.

When you receive a word, you should identify what your responsibilities are and do your part to make them happen. Instead of assuming that the prophecy is automatic and relying totally on the sovereignty of God, you must work through the portion of the prophecy that requires a response from you.

2. The error of total dependence upon personal prophecy.

God's written word, the Bible is referred to as the prophecy of Scripture. It alone is inerrant. Rejecting its input or the input of godly counsel from others after receiving a word of prophecy is to exalt that prophecy above the Bible and godly wisdom.

Doing so violates God's principles in the Bible and runs the risk of elevating a subjective interpretation by a well-meaning Christian above the Word of God. Remember, in the mouth of two or three witnesses, let a matter be established (Deut. 19:15, Matt. 18:16, 2 Cor. 13:1, 1 Tim. 5:19, Heb. 10:28). Prophecy is merely one witness of God's direction for you. Remember that destiny is formed for you more by the development of your character than by the prophecy you receive. These five errors are to be avoided.

3. The error of humanistic-fatalism.

This response says, "What will happen will happen. I cannot change it!" This is not, as some may feel, the ultimate faith confession. Instead, it is a way to not take responsibility for our part of the word. Just like the patriarchs of old, we must mix obedience with our faith.

If this is a word from God, we should pray about it, get some godly counsel, and examine our hearts to see if the word meshes with the goals and dreams God has planted within you. If these all agree, we should put our energies into it and with God's help walk it out.

4. The error of harmful comparisons.

This is especially possible when you receive a prophecy in a prophetic presbytery where many other people are listening to what is being said. It's easy in that setting to compare what you hear for yourself to what you hear for everyone else. To compare what God says to others with what He says to you is to take the first step off the path to realizing your potential through the prophecy.

5. The error of misusing prophecy.

This is using the prophecy to justify bad behavior or to short-circuit wise decision making. It can also be using your prophecy in part - focusing only on the part you want to hear.

A spoken word must agree with the Bible. It comes to you for edification, exhortation and comfort. We are to receive it with respect and expectation realizing at the same time that it comes from a fallible source. Discover what responsibilities you have and work on those things. Pray that God fulfills His part of the word. Allow the word to be proved. Avoid the five common errors people make when they receive prophecy. Be open to hearing from God and know that when He speaks He does so because you are valuable to Him!