

PROPHECY: A NEGLECTED MINISTRY

When Emperor Constantine began his rule over the New Testament church she became men instead of God controlled. In fact, so many ways of worship changed within the church that it no longer resembled the early church. As if that weren't enough, the reformers, unaware of the changes, continued many of the same unbiblical practices.

When the N.T. church was changed from an organism into an institution, they lost the direct governing of God as did Israel when they rejected the role of the prophets and wanted a king (I Samuel 8:7). Jesus equipped His church with spiritual ministry abilities, including the role of prophets which had a great effect in the early church.

*“He appointed some to be apostles, some prophets,
some evangelists others to be pastors and teachers” (Ephesians 4:11).*

These ministries, like Scripture, itself are the lifeline for the church in

*“.....teaching, rebuking, correction and training in righteousness
for maintaining the purity in the church” (II Timothy 3:16).*

The Corrupted Church

The pre-reformation Babylonian Roman church had canonized their interpretation of Scripture to the extent that further enlightenment and deeper insights into Scripture were no longer acknowledged. As a result, the newly formed Protestant churches followed the same pattern as well. In addition, anyone who had other insights were banned or simply called heretics and excommunicated from the church. By following these practices, further revelation on Scriptural truth was ignored. Such practices caused the ministries of the Spirit such as prophets to cease. Sadly, in most Protestant churches that problem is still what we have today.

Prophets were meant to be guardians to warn the church of wrong teachings or influences. They were meant to proclaim repentance when things would go wrong. Even during the Old Testament times, Israel was challenged to keep an open ear to the prophets the Lord would send.

*“Have faith in the Lord your God and you will be upheld,
have faith in His prophets and you will be successful” (II Chronicles. 20:20).*

Obedience Better than New Ideas

Success for the church of today does not lie in becoming people-friendly but lies rather in being prophet-friendly. Church restoration is not in just finding deeper biblical insights but rather in greater obedience in areas we know (John 5:39) and to be open to correction (John 5:39). For this, the church has to listen to those with biblical insights who proclaim correction and restoration. True prophets are people with the gift of discernment and who have a concern for the errors of the church. Do we still need these people today? Were they also meant for the New Testament church? Yes, God still appoints prophets (I Corinthians 12:28, 29). Prophesying is a ministry of the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4:11). Prophets are fundamental to the purity of the church

(Ephesians 2:20; Acts 13:1); they have God's message (Ephesians 3:5), and are a gift from God (I Corinthians 14: 1, 29).

A Ministry to be Desired (I Corinthians 14:39)

Prophets were people of insight and are a ministry with other ministries of the Spirit meant to continue in the church today. They might just be lay-people who dare to speak up against errors. Often, however, without realizing it, we have rejected and silenced them as being troublemakers. The Bible clearly teaches us not to label these people in such a manner, but to treat them with respect (Matthew 10:4). If they have a message of warning, correction, and repentance we ought to be willing to listen. They cannot be appointed nor hired by the church because such action would make their ministry ineffective (Jude 1:11; Revelation 2:14). When it comes to the gifts of spiritual ministries Jesus had for His church, the apostle Paul listed prophecy above any other gift to be desired I Corinthians 14:1). As a matter of fact, he warns the church not to quench the work of the Spirit by ignoring those who speak up for biblical correction (I Thessalonians 5:19-21), but to be open to self-examination (I Corinthians 11:30), to test and prove everything in the light of Scripture and not to hide behind tradition (Matthew 15:6).

Prophets, as compared to the other ministries, are not a certain position in the church, but are ordinary people to whom the Lord has given certain insights. Multiple ministries including these are advised in order to have checks and balances. No ministry was ever meant to be a one-man show. This application relates especially to prophetic ministries, as false prophets can easily come on the scene. The warnings of true prophets should not be neglected, but tested and confirmed for truthfulness (Matthew 18:16) by other gifted believers.

A Ministry to be Respected (Matthew 10:41)

The ministry of the prophet is very commonly rejected in most churches because in our man-made structure we have no longer room for ministries of the Spirit like healers, teachers, apostles evangelists or prophets. These ministries were meant to have the same standing as being a pastor. Ever since we have made the role of the pastor a singular authoritative and paid position it has made all other functions look secondary and other ministries of the Spirit are being eliminated. Can you, for example, imagine a pastor being corrected by someone who has a special insight on the scriptures or have the gift of discernment or teaching? Have you ever seen a pastor calling upon someone who he feels may have the gift of healing? Or a pastor being corrected by someone who brings him a message from the Lord?

Yes, the ministry of prophecy must be restored if we want to become biblical again. Prophets are meant to be the watchmen and "trumpet blowers" (I Corinthians 14:8) when they will see procedures functioning incorrectly. The apostle Paul encourages the gift of prophecy for all believers as a safeguard for the church to operate according to the Word of God. In I Corinthians 12:28, we see that the prophet's function was of equal importance to that of the apostles.

A Ministry to be Recognized (I Thessalonians 5:20)

Do we still have prophets today? Yes, but the question is "Do we have room for them in our present church system?" Of course! We live in an age of church decay. Our churches have never

returned to being that powerful N.T. church. We are missing out on what Jesus intended us to be and our prayer should be: “Lord, bring back your Presence in our midst.”

Think of many great Christian leaders of the past, people who struggled with the direction of the church in their times: Jonathan Edwards, Charles Wesley, George Whitfield, C.H. Spurgeon, Charles Finney.... These men were sent by God to bring us a message of repentance; however, in the same manner as were the Old Testament prophets, they were rejected by their own church. Where do we read in the Bible that the day for the prophets has come to an end? Throughout history, the prophets have been ignored, rejected, or even killed. Today we still have no room for these people and consider them a nuisance. By removing the message of the prophets, the church has removed her watchmen and gone continually into further decay. Prophesying is one of the gifts Jesus has for His church that we should encourage (I Corinthians 14:1). Prophets and their message should not be despised (I Thessalonians 5:19-21), but should cause us to search the Scriptures to determine if the passages shared are true (Acts 17:11).

This article is based on the book, *Church on the Rock(s)* and can be obtained by contacting the author at www.RichardOostra.com