**Perspective**

**By Steve Strang**

**Thank God for Prophets, but Test the Spirits**

**Prophetic gifts are the subject of controversy and misunderstanding, but God promised to pour out His Spirit.**

In the day of **Pentecost**, **Peter** said that moment was the fulfillment of the prophecy in **Joel** that God “will pour out **My Spirit** on all flesh; (and) your sons and your daughters shall prophesy” (**Acts 2:17**). In **Ephesians 4:11**, the apostle **Paul** listed prophets in the five ministry gifts, apostles, prophets, pastors, evangelists and teachers.

As the **Holy Spirit** has renewed the charismata (gifts) to the church in the last century, there has also been a new understanding of the gift of prophecy. In the last 40 years, we have tried to cover the move of the Spirit and the various ministries **God** has raised up, including those giving prophetic words. This isn't to say prophecy totally died out in the church. Many people spoke prophetically to the church even if they weren’t called prophets. Didn’t **Martin Luther** speak prophetically in the 17th century when he emphasized salvation through faith?

What’s different now is that some leaders identify themselves as “prophets:” **John Eckhardt**, for example, writes on how **God** gives prophetic gifts (see “Heaven’s Prophetic Assignments;” page 32). In our coverage through the years, we have tried to give a platform to those **God** has raised up so we could help readers understand the office of the prophet and its place in the body of **Christ**. Often, this has been controversial for a number of reasons,

First, many don't embrace our interpretation of the gift of prophecy. Even in Pentecostal circles, some denominations play down prophecy. It’s a type of Pentecostal cessationism in which what was normal in **New Testament** times apparently is not normal today. Most evangelicals don't embrace this, but rather shun it, as they do most of the charismatic gifts. Yet I’ve noticed that as the culture becomes more ungodly, some evangelicals embrace leaders such as Messianic **Rabbi Jonathan Cahn** and see them as prophetic voices to the culture (even though **Cahn** does not call himself a prophet). And who can deny that leaders such as **Franklin Graham** (and his famous father, **Billy**) are speaking a prophetic word to America today?

Here is one reason why this gift is so misunderstood: There are different types of prophets. The **Old Testament** prophet spoke **God’s Word** to **Israel** about the future and called Israel to repentance. These prophets often thundered their declarations and were often odd. Isaiah prophesied naked and Hosea married a harlot because **God** told them to take these actions. Consider how that would go over today!

Some **Old Testament** prophets, such as **Ezekiel** and **Daniel,** prophesied what would happen in the end of time. But so did **John** the Beloved in the book of **Revelation**. As signs of the end times increase, interest in the prophetic increases too. I believe this explains the widespread interest in **Cahn’s** book **The Harbinger**, in which he draws parallels between the **Prophet Isaiah’s** warning to Israel in **Isaiah 9:10** and **God’s** warning to **America** today.

Yet the books of **Joel** and **Acts** mention another type of prophetic gift. The passages say, “Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,” which indicates that when the Spirit pours out, He empowers average people to speak prophetically.

Though prophecy is a wonderful blessing, it can also be misused. We know of “prophets” who will take payment for prophecies. For example, they will give either a $1,000 prophecy or a $100 prophecy. The more one gives, the better the prophetic word. We believe this is wrong and needs to be the subject of investigation by leaders in the body of **Christ**.

A decade ago, **John Bevere** (who I personally believe has a prophetic voice to our generation) dealt with this in a loving way in his book *Thus Saith the Lord.* As he traveled the country, he saw prophets who tickled the ears of the crowd by giving positive prophecies as well as pastors who brought in these speakers because they attracted huge crowds.

I was criticized for publishing that book. However, I felt **Bevere** needed to write it. He called no names. He documented what he had seen and wrote that Christians needed to exercise greater restraint due to possible abuse from those who say they speak for the Lord. If you sincerely want to follow the Lord and feel you need a word, what do you say to a respected leader who prophesies something that isn't biblically sound?

We must each realize that **God** can speak to each of us and that one of the gifts of the Spirit is the discerning of spirits. The admonition in **I John 4:1** is valid today: “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God.”

**Steve Strang** is the founder of **Charisma** and **CEO of Charisma Media**. Follow him on **Periscope** and **Twitter** (@sstrang) or **Facebook** (stephenestrang).