

#18 Questions: “How do I actually test the spirit to see if the prophecy is from God?”

The parishioner who asked the question above went on to elaborate. He said, “St. John tells us to test the spirit. But how? Especially with impressions, we can input our own experience. . . . [If I do input my experience,] is the Lord using me because of my past? How do I know when it’s the word of the Lord and when it’s my thinking and when it’s both?” Sometimes we do not know. Sometimes we must make a leap of faith. And sometimes we just plain miss it. But God is pleased when we make the effort. The learning is in the doing.

The Lord does use our past, our experiences, even our prickly personalities as a means to convey His word. For example, as you read the New Testament you can tell the difference in personalities of the various writers as they proclaim the Good News. The epistles of Paul sound very different from the epistles of John. The Gospel according to St. Mark sounds very different from the Gospel according to St. Luke, even though they are telling the same story. Mark and Luke were both followers of St. Paul. They both studied at the feet of the Apostle Paul. But Luke was a physician and well educated. His writing reflects his learning. His focus on the poor and the outcasts of society reveal his heart for those who are hurting. Mark on the other hand was not as highly educated and that is reflected in his simple writing style. He appears to be in a hurry to record the word and eschews details. But God used both men to be vehicles for proclaiming the most important word any of us will hear in our lifetime. He worked through their past experiences and their unique personality.

There are a few ways to “test the spirit.” St. John tells us that, “By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit which confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit which does not confess Jesus is not of God.” (1 John 4:2-3) But how do I know that what I am hearing is truly from God and not from my flesh? Can you sit on it? Is this word burning so heavily in your being that if you don’t say it you will bust? St. Paul says, “the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets. For God is not a God of confusion but of peace.” If you can’t sit on it, it is probably not from God. Wait. Let the Lord bring the word back to you. Seek confirmation of the word. Of course, if the situation is such that it would be difficult, or even impossible, to wait due to the circumstances, you can always put up a balloon, so to speak. You could tell the person to whom you are offering the prophecy, “I’m not sure if this is from the Lord or not, but I’m sensing in my spirit that . . .” Or, you can give the prophecy to them and then ask, “Does that minister to you?” And, of course, it is always appropriate to encourage the person to seek confirmation of any word they receive.

Any true word of prophecy will be Biblical (it will NOT contradict Scripture), it will build up the Body (1 Cor. 14), and there will be confirmation in the Church that the word is from the Lord. Ask the elders of the church for confirmation of a word if you have any doubts. God does speak through His people--all of His people can prophesy. And He chooses to do this to help us hear Him more clearly. As I stated in the second of these teachings, the prophetic word gives further illumination of the Word contained in the Holy Scriptures, and helps us hear and understand by giving it to us through the human being proclaiming it to us. It gives substance and a human quality to the Word. We need to be ourselves. There is no single prophetic voice. God will speak through you, your life experience, and your unique personality.