

Kingdom Government—Prophets

Introduction

In previous lessons we have stated that the so-called five-fold ministry constitutes the functioning government of the Kingdom of God. The five-fold ministers are gifts of men from the Lord Jesus to His people to perform the function of equipping the believers for their work and for the building up of the body of Christ.¹ In some spiritual sense, the five-fold ministry or the ascension ministries of Jesus are the “shoulders” of Jesus upon which the government rests.² It is important that we understand how these ministries function.

Definition of Prophet

First we need to understand that a new testament prophet is different than an old testament prophet. This lack of understanding is creating a number of difficulties within the assembly of God's people. In terms of the old testament prophet, neither his work or nor his function exists today. Any attempt to emulate old testament prophets leads to problems. Why do I say this?

Under the Old Covenant, God dealt with and spoke to His people through three primary channels.

1. **Priests.** The priests provided for righteous relationship with God by helping with sacrifices and offerings as required by God.
2. **Judges.** The judges provided for righteous relationship between the people of God by their acts of righteous judgment according to the Law of God.
3. **Prophets.** The prophets provided for righteous conduct as a nation by their prophecies concerning the moral requirements of God. The prophets spoke to the people on behalf of God.

If a person needed to make a sacrifice or offering, he went to a priest. If a person needed a conflict or disagreement resolved, he went to a judge. If a person needed to inquire of the Lord, he went to a prophet so that the prophet could make an inquiry so that he would receive direction as to what he should do. Therefore, besides their prophetic function to the nation, individuals would seek out the prophet for a personal word from God.

However, Jesus changed all of that under the New Covenant. We are now a kingdom of priests³

1 Ephesians 4:11-12

2 Isaiah 9:6-7

3 I Peter 2:9

and we all should function as priests (even though, we don't because we have never been taught). We are all judges because we will judge the world and angels⁴ (even though, we go to court instead of receiving judgment by the saints). We all can prophesy by the Holy Spirit for exhortation, edification, and comfort⁵ (even though, we don't because we either don't believe it or we haven't been taught).

Hebrews tells us clearly of this transition.

Hebrews 1:1-2 NASB

- (1) God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways,
- (2) in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.

Everything that God desires to speak to us now comes in Jesus. We are told in Revelation that the “. . . testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy”⁶. Jesus told us that He would send us the Holy Spirit, the promise of the Father, who would be a helper to us.

John 14:26 NASB

- (26) "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.

The Holy Spirit will teach us and bring to our remembrance all that Jesus said. This is an aspect of the prophetic that is now being fulfilled by the Holy Spirit, Himself.

John 15:26 NASB

- (26) "When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, *that is the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father*, He will testify about Me,

The Holy Spirit will testify about Jesus. This fits with “the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy”. The Holy Spirit is fulfilling the prophetic role for us.

John 16:13 NASB

- (13) "But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come.

The Holy Spirit will guide us into truth, will only speak what He hears God say, and He will disclose future things to us. Again, the Holy Spirit is fulfilling prophetic functions for us. We longer need to search out a prophet to inquire of the Lord. The Holy Spirit, Himself, speaks to us directly of the things of the Lord, His direction and plan for our lives.

4 I Corinthians 6:2-3

5 I Corinthians 14:3, 31

6 Revelation 19:10

Since the Lord has sent the Holy Spirit to us, many of the prophetic functions of the Old Covenant have been distributed by the Holy Spirit as gifts to His people⁷. Except for tongues and interpretation, all of the gifts of the Spirit were manifest in the old testament prophets.

One of the things that we learn from this is that prophesying does not make you a new testament prophet. All of us who have received the Holy Spirit can prophesy as the Spirit wills, or have a word of knowledge, or discern spirits. Therefore, a new testament prophet must be something different than one who just gives prophecies, even if prophecies are given on a regular basis.

So the function of a new testament prophet is contained within the same purpose or reason that the five-fold ministry was given by the Lord when He ascended.

Ephesians 4:12 NASB

(12) for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ;

A new testament prophet sees the potential in a believer as it relates to God's calling and work. He is to help equip the believer to accomplish God's calling and work. The prophet's work is not so much directive as it is confirming what God has already put into a person. He is also a part of the construction workers who are involved in the building of God's spiritual temple, which is made up of living stones.

The Work of a Prophet

Because of what was said earlier, we need to understand that the old testament work of a prophet has been taken by the Holy Spirit and *diffused* and *distributed* to the entire Body. New testament prophets do not, normally, give direction, that is the work of the Holy Spirit in the believer. We are to be led by the Spirit of God.⁸ An example of this is given in Acts by the interaction of Agabus, a new testament prophet, and Paul.

Acts 21:10-11 NASB

(10) As we were staying there for some days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea.

(11) And coming to us, he took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands, and said, "This is what the Holy Spirit says: 'In this way the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.'"

Notice that Agabus did not direct Paul in any way. He simply demonstrated what the Holy Spirit was saying would happen. It was up to Paul to hear the Spirit and act according. It was Paul's decision to go or not go to Jerusalem. It was up to Paul to decide if this was a warning to stay away from Jerusalem or a preparatory word so that Paul would be prepared and know that this

7 I Corinthians 12:7-11

8 Romans 8:14

was in the will of the Lord.

New testament prophets are usually teamed up with apostles, teachers, or other prophets. This is the Lord's safety measure. Jesus did not intend for the five-fold ministries to operate individually but to function as a team so as to bring forth the full manifestation of Jesus.

New testament prophets in conjunction with the other ministries function in relation to the whole Body and the purposes of God and His Kingdom. Their words, in practice, should be corporate words as it relates to God's current will and moving in the earth. While there may be an individual, personal word occasionally, that is not the focus of a new testament prophet.

Prophet Problems

There is *no such thing as the office of a prophet* in the new testament. This terminology is misleading and implies an organizational structure with associated authority positions. What is appropriate in the new testament is *the function of a prophet*, which implies an organism (the Body of Christ) with proper organic processes.

Because there has been a void of prophetic functions in the Body, many have rushed to fill it. They have thought of a prophet's office as a *high rank* in the army of God or a *high position* in the Kingdom of God. As a consequence they have thought of themselves more highly than they ought to have done.

Romans 12:3 NASB

- (3) For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith.

Notice that proper evaluation of yourself leads to sound judgment while thinking more of yourself than you should leads to unsound or improper judgment. There are many who are using the Scriptures and their own desire for honor and the esteem of men to exalt themselves to positions of unquestioned obedience, thinking themselves to be infallible when they “have a word” for someone. They are out of balance, leading many astray, and leaving destroyed lives in their path.

Prophets had prominent ministry and visibility in the old testament but much of that has been distributed to others in the new. Prophets are just one of the ascension gifts of Jesus in Ephesians four. Like all of the other ascension gifts, one is not more important than another. At various times each function is needed and some are needed more than others at particular times, but there is no ranking hierarchy of importance.

The Lord is building His house, His temple, out of living stones and He is using His ascension gifts to do the work under the direction of the Holy Spirit. When you are constructing a house, different workers with different skills are needed at different times. When laying the foundation,

the foundation workers are the most important. When completing the roof, the roofing workers are the most important. And so it is with the electrical, the plumbing, the finish carpentry, etc. Each worker has a job to do at the appropriate time. Some can't do their work until others have completed theirs.

I think that the scriptures present that to us in these verses:

1 Corinthians 12:28 NASB

(28) And God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, *various* kinds of tongues.

The Greek word that is translated “appointed” in this verse is translated “laid” 22 times in the New American Standard Bible. This is a building term and is the same word that is translated as “laid” in referring to a foundation in this verse:

1 Corinthians 3:10 NASB

(10) According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it.

In light of this, the meaning of I Cor. 12:28 is not a ranking of authority as some teach, but instead an order of function—first things first, then second things second, etc. This is in complete agreement with the Lord building His Church and the functions of the workers as it is done.

There is work to be done. We need to get on with it and quit playing the “I'm more important than you” game. We do not need ingrown ministries that dilly-dally around with feel good words and the acclaim of men.

They Call Themselves Prophets

True prophets are called by God. One has to have the Father's heart before the Lord will permit him to move into Kingdom ministry. Functioning in the government of God without having a Father's heart leads to dictatorial behavior and mis-applied Kingdom principles.

In Revelation when Jesus is addressing the angel of the church of Thyatira, one of the problem issues was in the area of the prophetic.

Revelation 2:20 NASB

(20) 'But I have *this* against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray so that they commit *acts of immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols*.

The language is figurative in terms of labeling this issue “the woman Jezebel”. This type of spirit

can be male or female. One of the key factors is that *she calls herself a prophetess*. She is self-appointed and not God appointed. The end result is that she leads God's people astray.

There are many self-appointed prophets and prophetesses running around today bringing “words” to anyone and everyone. They are usually self-appointed because someone tried to correct them and they responded with the “I speak for God and you won't hear” syndrome.

Some consider themselves appointed by God because their mutual admiration society spoke over them and “sent” them, or, using their terminology, “released” them. Is there anything scriptural in this procedure. Only apostles are “sent”; that is the very meaning of the word “apostle”. Do we find anywhere in the New Testament an example of someone being “released” as a prophet? I don't think so. Most of what we call “releasing” is a fleshly or carnal need for recognition.

We have scriptural examples of laying on of hands to impart a spiritual gift or for the recognition of an Elder but not anything about “releasing” a prophet. One is a prophet because he begins to function as a prophet by the Spirit. The gift makes room for the person.