

The Spirit of Prophecy

The Problem

A friend of mine forwarded an email newsletter to me a few days ago asking for my discernment concerning its, so called, prophetic contents. It was from a guy who considers himself a prophet and the newsletter contained a “prophetic word” to the Body of Christ. This guy was also a musician and has recorded several CDs so he has a following and exposure to many of the people of God (of course, he was promoting his CDs with an ad in the middle of his “prophetic word”). Reading the newsletter stirred in me what I hope is a “righteous” anger toward these types of so-called prophetic words.

It seems that anyone who has ever operated in a gift of prophecy thinks that he is a “prophet”, which is simply not true scripturally. And because we have a warped understanding of what it means to be a prophet, we tend to put on the “affectations” of a prophet as we understand them by reading about Old Testament prophets. These types seem to feel that *any thought or stirring* of their emotions is the Spirit of God giving them a “prophetic word”. All this does is produce confusion within the Body of Christ.

Various ones are running around the various assemblies of God's people to “bring the word of the Lord”. This usually means some “personal” word to be prophesied to each one in attendance. Does anyone actually think that this is a pattern of how prophecy worked in the early church? I think that what is being done today in terms of giving prophetic words actually grieves the Holy Spirit of God. I know by personal observation that it hinders, even stifles, what the Lord is doing in local assemblies where He is trying to bring forth the work of the Spirit.

Now that we have Internet access, anyone can call themselves a prophet and post the most outrageous and erroneous “words” on their site. Anyone can build an email list and put out “prophetic words” that are, supposedly, for the Body of Christ. Most of these are simply a “piles of garbage”, sites filled with “feel good” words and “commendations” from God. Many, if not most, of these sites become tools to “market the anointing” making “merchandise of the word of God”. You can “sign up now” and receive weekly, or even daily, “prophetic words” that will have “a powerful, spiritual impact on your life”; and, of course, don't forget to buy the latest book by the prophet that is full of “deep prophetic insight” that will “revolutionize your relationship with God”. This is hogwash. Do you really think that the Holy Spirit operates like that?

What has happened to our understanding, our discernment, concerning the things of God. Why do we think that God has given us His Holy Spirit?

1 Corinthians 2:12 NASB

(12) Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God,

Jesus told us explicitly that the Holy Spirit would speak to us, not just to prophets, what He wants to say to us *when we can bear it*.

John 16:12-15 NASB

- (12) "I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear *them* now.
- (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.
- (14) "He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose *it* to you.
- (15) "All things that the Father has are Mine; therefore I said that He takes of Mine and will disclose *it* to you.

The way that many who are calling themselves prophets are operating effectively bypasses the work of the Holy Spirit for us individually. We cannot mature in the things of God if we allow the Holy Spirit to be bypassed by anyone, even a so called "prophet".

Let's look at what the scriptures say about this and examine the difference between operating in a gift of prophecy and being a prophet.

The Gift of Prophecy

The gift of prophecy is one of the gifts (*charisma*) or manifestations of the Holy Spirit. It is distributed according to the will of the Holy Spirit to whomever the Holy Spirit desires to give it.

1 Corinthians 12:8-11 NASB

- (8) For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit;
- (9) to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit,
- (10) and to another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another *various* kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues.
- (11) But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills.

Verse 7, which is just prior to the scriptures listed above, says "*But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.*" All of the gifts of the Spirit are for the good of all believers and that includes the gift of prophecy. It should be self-evident then that the gift or prophecy is given to believers for believers, that is, the gift is exercised by a believer for the benefit of other believers. The benefit to us of the gift of prophecy is so important that we are told to earnestly desire to prophesy.

1 Corinthians 14:1 NASB

- (1) Pursue love, yet desire earnestly spiritual *gifts*, but especially that you may prophesy.

However, the gift of prophecy, which operates when we are assembled together to provide the benefits of the manifestation of the Spirit, has strict limitations on its function and use.

1 Corinthians 14:3 NASB

- (3) But one who prophesies speaks to men for edification and exhortation and consolation.

The meaning of these three words are very close in the original even to the point of almost overlapping. “Edification” is an architectural term that means “*building up*” like you would build up a building. “Exhortation” means, according to Thayer's Greek Definitions, “*a calling near, summons, (especially for help), importation, supplication, entreaty, exhortation, admonition, encouragement, consolation, comfort, solace; that which affords comfort or refreshment*”. “Consolation” means, again according to Thayer's Greek Definitions, “*any address, whether made for the purpose of persuading, or of arousing and stimulating, or of calming and consoling*”.

As I understand it, the gift of prophecy operating within the assembly is limited in scope to the meanings of these three words. Now, that is a rather broad scope as it pertains to our growing up spiritually, but it has little to do with directive or judgmental “words”. It also appears to me that the gift of prophecy is not future oriented but is currently applicable to our physical, mental and emotional situations. We should be earnestly desiring to be of benefit to the Body of Christ by operating in the gift of prophecy as the Spirit wills.

There is also a function of the gift of prophecy as it relates to an unbeliever who comes into the assembly.

1 Corinthians 14:24-25 NASB

- (24) But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an ungifted man enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all;
- (25) the secrets of his heart are disclosed; and so he will fall on his face and worship God, declaring that God is certainly among you.

The goal being to lead the unbeliever to a place of believing and falling on his face to worship God.

Prophets

Prophets are part of the gifts (*doma*) of Jesus as mentioned in Eph. 4:8-11, which are different from the gifts (*charisma*) of the Holy Spirit. Prophets are *people* not manifestations. Jesus gives His ministry to us through gifts of people, selected by Him, to the Body. Jesus operates through these His ascension gifts as the Apostle, as the Prophet, as the Evangelist, as the Shepherd, as the Teacher. This means that we can prophesy by the gift of prophecy at every assembly that we attend and still not be a prophet given to the Body by Jesus.

Any attempt to model New Testament prophets and prophetic behavior after the Old Testament prophets is completely wrong. The writer of Hebrews tell us why.

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.

Under the Old Covenant, God spoke to His people through prophets that He called unto Himself. They brought the Word of God in varying portions, (minor prophets and major prophets), and in various ways, including speaking the word and illustrating the word by type. In those days, if you needed to hear a “word” from God, you had to find the prophet of God. However, that is no longer true.

In *these* days, God has spoken to us in His Son. He is the Word of God to us, fully revealing the Father, His plans and purposes. All of the *functions* of the Old Covenant prophets are now summed up and contained in Jesus. The functionality of all that God was doing in the earth was in the prophets of old. However, now, Jesus has chosen to *diffuse* and *distribute* these *functions* as gifts of men to His people. Now, the functionality of the Old Covenant prophets is contained in what we call the five-fold or equipping ministries, which means it is now spread across five functions instead of one. That is why New Covenant prophets do not act like Old Covenant prophets.

The Word

Now we can understand why the spirit of prophecy is the testimony (Word) of Jesus. Jesus is The Word spoken to us by the Father. Now, He has sent forth the Holy Spirit, who “*will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come*”.¹ The Holy Spirit hears what the Father is speaking in Jesus, the Word, and speaks it to us.

We can see from this that there is an unfolding disclosure of the Word that is continuing through the work of the Holy Spirit. Just as small child cannot understand things that relate to the adult life, we as spiritual babes cannot understand things that relate to spiritual maturity. As Jesus said, “*...you cannot bear them now*”.² In other words, we are not capable of understanding at the present level of maturity.

Part of the Holy Spirit's job is to bring us into maturity, both individually and corporately. As we grow we are become capable of hearing and understanding more of the Word; so, the Holy Spirit begins to speak to us what He is hearing from Jesus that we are now able to bear.

Does this mean that the Holy Spirit only speaks to us directly and never through another person? Of course not. As seen above, the gift of prophecy is given so that others can speak to us the words of the Lord that edify, exhort, and console us in our circumstances.³ These words put into perspective what the Lord is doing in our lives. Notice that, in context, these words come forth as we are assembled together and can come through anyone for anyone else. These types of words are primarily oriented

1 John 16:13

2 John 16:12

3 I Corinthians 14:3

toward the individual for the individual's benefit.

The Lord speaks to His Body through His ascension gift of a man as a prophet. These types of word are primarily to the collective, corporate people of God. The prophet speaks to the plans and purposes of God in the earth and how He is bringing His intentions to fulfillment or completion.

The next lesson will continue this thought on the functions of the prophets as they fit into the flow of God's plans and purposes.