

The Gifts of the Holy Spirit—part 4

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Prophecy

As we continue our look at the gifts of the Spirit, we come to prophecy, which is a direct word from God, resulting in edification and exhortation and comfort (1 Corinthians 14:3). When someone is prophesying, they are speaking under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Those who teach and preach the Word of God in reliance upon the Spirit will often experience this gift. This does not mean that those who are not in a teaching position cannot receive the gift of prophecy. Any believer can potentially experience any of the gifts of the Spirit. Prophecy can come through someone simply quoting a Scripture or an idea that God has impressed on his or her mind.

In my experience, prophecy has often been God's way of confirming something that He has already put upon my heart.

For example, some years ago, I felt God was calling me to take a step of faith that could possibly change the course of my life. I was willing to do it, but I needed confirmation that it was actually God leading, and not just my imagination or desire. One Sunday morning, I felt the decision had to be made, so before I left for church, I cried out to God, "Lord, You have to show me what You want to do!" During each service, a few people would often gather to pray for me while I preached. That morning, one of the men who prayed for me asked if we could talk. While he prayed, he felt that God wanted him to tell me something. He then shared the very thing that God had put upon my heart. The amazing thing is that this man had absolutely no idea what I had prayed about earlier that morning. In fact, after he shared, he asked, "Does this make any sense?" I assured him that it did, and I thanked him for being bold enough to come to me. That was prophecy in action!

Prophecy is an incredible gift, and we can see why the apostle Paul said, "*Pursue love,*

and desire spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy" (1 Corinthians 14:1).

Prophecy is a wonderful gift, yet some in the charismatic movement have given it a bad name. As a pastor, I must address a few of these issues.

Among the charismatics, giving and receiving prophecy is a great obsession. Many want to give or to receive "a word" from the Lord. Sometimes the word is for an individual, sometimes for an entire congregation, and sometimes for the church universal. Often, these alleged prophecies contradict Scripture; some refer to God's plan to bring

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nations and kings groveling in repentance to the feet of a mighty spiritual army that will be raised up in the last days to usher in the kingdom of God.

Not only that, there are claims that God has raised up generals, or "mighty men of God," who are said to be a new generation of prophets to lead this mighty army. Some even say that this new generation of prophets is superior to the original apostles of Jesus Christ!

What conclusions are we to draw from all of this? Should we expect "a word" from the Lord every time we meet together in fellowship and in the study of the Word of God? Is there really a new generation of prophets being raised up today?

Let me begin answering these questions by sharing my own experience. After almost 30 years of pastoral ministry, I have probably received no more than 10 prophecies. By prophecy, I mean a word directly from the Lord through an individual. Now this does not mean that only 10 people have ever approached me with a word presumably from the Lord. I have had that happen many times over the years. Unfortunately, most of these acclaimed words from the Lord turned out to be nothing more than the imaginations of the person who approached me. And I am certain that the majority of "words" given in charismatic circles are just that. How do I know that's the case? I know it because many of those in charismatic groups lightly esteem the written word of God. They might deny this charge, but it is true. All you have to do is observe one of their gatherings to verify it. They will read a verse here and there, but it is merely a springboard into their favorite topics (prosperity, power, etc.).

God says He has *magnified [His] word above [His] name* (Psalm 138:2b); therefore, I

must conclude that God has nothing to say to people who have little interest in His Word! Lest you think that is merely my opinion, read what God has to say through the prophet Isaiah: "*But on this one will I look: on him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word*" (Isaiah 66:2b).

If we think God primarily speaks to us through other people, then we misunderstand His main method of communication, and we are setting ourselves up to be greatly disappointed and even deceived! But if we understand that God speaks to us primarily through His written Word, whether expounded by His gifted servants or by the personal illumination of the Holy Spirit, then we have every reason to expect God to speak to us daily. ☞