

The Gift of Prophecy



Gifts of the Spirit (Part 8)
by Derek Prince

It's good to be with you again. Last week and this week also, I've been sharing with you about the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Up to now, I've dealt with the three gifts of revelation and the three gifts of power, but now I'm going to start dealing with the three vocal gifts: that is, the gifts that necessarily operate through human vocal organs. These three gifts are prophecy, tongues and interpretation of tongues. Today, I'll be speaking about the gift of prophecy.

First of all, I'll try to define it. Prophecy is the ability, granted by the Holy Spirit, to a believer, to speak forth words that proceed from God that do not come from the believer's own understanding or reasoning or education. I'll say that again. Prophecy is the ability, granted supernaturally by the Holy Spirit to a believer, to speak forth words that come from God that do no come from the believer's own wisdom or understanding or education, and so on.

Now this gift of prophecy has been in operation throughout the history of God's people from the earliest time. We find it several times in the book of Genesis. For instance, in the case of Isaac blessing Jacob, this is a remarkable case. Isaac, the father, imagined that he was blessing the older twin, Esau, but Jacob had impersonated Esau and presented himself to his father, Isaac, who was blind. Isaac, in his blindness, laid his hands on Jacob, supposing him to be Esau, and blessed him. Later on, it was discovered that he had blessed Jacob, not Esau. Esau pleaded with his father to reverse the blessing, but Isaac said, "I can't do that. I've blessed and he shall be blessed."

So we see how the words that Isaac spoke, prophetically, did not proceed from his own understanding and actually were above his own ability to reverse, to undo. We get a similar case with Jacob, later on, blessing the two sons of Joseph. Joseph had his ideas of which should receive the greater blessing; but, inspired and prompted by the Holy Spirit, Jacob crossed his hands and blessed Ephraim, the younger, more than Manasseh, the older. And, again, Jacob said, "I can't change it. It's God's doing, not mine."

So we see that through prophecy a believer can become a channel of the counsel of God; of the purposes of God, given forth in words that proceed from God and not from the

believer. They are given supernaturally by the Holy Spirit.

Now, the New Testament has a whole lot to say about the exercise of this gift. First of all, we look at the purposes for which it is given. These are stated in 1 Corinthians 14:3, where Paul says:

> "But one who prophesies speaks to men for edification and exhortation and consolation."

That is, the one who prophesies, speaks on God's behalf to men. And the end purpose is stated in three words: edification, exhortation, and consolation. You may say it a little more in contemporary speech. The purpose of prophecy is to build up, to stir up and to cheer up.

Definitely the gift of prophecy is not given to produce dictators. People who go around making arbitrary declarations about what other people ought to do. Let me tell you this very definitely and firmly: There are no dictators in the body of Christ and anyone who uses prophecy to make himself or herself a dictator is misusing the gift. We need to look into this.

For this reason, the Scripture states very clearly that all prophetic utterances are to be subject to judgment. For example, in 1 Corinthians 14:29, Paul says:

> "Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others pass judgment."

It's important to see that normally, though not invariably, in the New Testament, prophets operated together. They were fellow members of the same body. It wasn't a case of one man who was far above the level of the others making pronouncements that everybody else had to accept, whether they agreed with them or not. So Paul says, let two or three prophets speak and let the other prophets pass judgment. Let them determine on behalf of the body whether these utterances really are from God and we should give heed to them.

Again, in 1 Thessalonians 5:19–21, Paul says this:

> "Do not quench the Spirit; Do not despise prophetic utterances. But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good;"

Paul guards against two mistakes. The first is despising prophetic utterances and rejecting them altogether. The second is just believing all of them without any examination. He says don't despise them and don't quench the Spirit. But, on the other hand, when a prophetic utterance comes, examine it carefully and hold fast only to that which is good.

I'm reminded of something I used to say to the Africans when I was working amongst them some years ago in East Africa. I said to them, "Remember not everything that the missionaries have brought you is good. Some things are good, some are not so good. But," I said, "that's no big problem. When you Africans eat fish, you know what to do. You swallow the flesh and you spit out the bones. And," I said, "you do the same." And I say that again, today. We don't have to swallow all prophecy. We swallow the flesh, which does us good. We spit out the bones, which wouldn't do us any good.

I've said that prophecy needs to be judged. How are we to judge it? I want to give you now, three simple, practical, Scriptural tests. First of all, does the prophecy agree with Scripture? The Holy Spirit is the author of Scripture and the Holy Spirit never contradicts Himself. So the Holy Spirit will never say, through prophecy, something that is contradictory to Scripture.

The second test is this: Does the prophecy uplift Jesus Christ? The primary ministry of the Holy Spirit in the church is to reveal and uplift Jesus Christ. Anything that does not uplift Jesus Christ is not from the Holy Spirit. Revelation 19:10 tells us this, specifically:

> "The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."

All true prophecy centers in the person of Jesus.

The third question: Does the prophecy edify God's people? We remember that that was the one primary purpose: edification of God's people. If the prophecy doesn't build up, doesn't strengthen, doesn't encourage God's people, then there's no reason to believe that it's from the Holy Spirit.

If we turn to the ministry of Jesus for examples of prophecy, interestingly enough, we can't find them. I believe the reason is that all that Jesus said and did was prophetic, so there was no particular situation in which He was specifically prophesying because His whole ministry was prophetic. However, there are other examples of prophecy in the New Testament which are interesting and helpful.

I'd like to look at one in the life of Timothy. In 1 Timothy 1:18, Paul writes as follows to Timothy:

> "This command I entrust to you, Timothy, my son, in accordance with the prophecies previously made

> concerning you, that by them you may fight the good fight."

Now, we have to fill in the background. Elsewhere in his epistles Paul says that Timothy was appointed to a special ministry by the laying on of the hands of the presbytery, with prophecy. In other words, it would appear that the particular course of Timothy's life that God had planned for him was indicated through the gift of prophecy and that through the gift of prophecy, Paul and the elders were moved to lay hands on Timothy and set him aside for his ministry. And it would appear, also, that those prophecies gave great encouragement and promise to Timothy of what God could do through him. But when Paul wrote this first epistle, he was warning Timothy against the spirit of fear, against giving up.

Now, one of the things he said was: "Remember the prophecies that went before you. Remember that God is with you, and though you may have opposition and trouble, nevertheless, God is going to fulfill what He has promised." Well, this is a very beautiful use of prophecy, which I have experienced several times in my own life. When I have been discouraged or oppressed or wondered whether I could make it through, I've recalled prophetic utterances that had been given in the past and they've encouraged me and strengthened me.

However, we need to say one word of warning about directive prophecy:

It should not be the only means of guidance in your life. In 2 Corinthians 13:1, Paul says:

> "In the mouth of two or three witnesses let every word be established."

Don't act only on a prophecy. Let it be one of the means which will guide you into God's will.

Now, I'll just close with a brief testimony from personal experience. Some years back, I was in England, preaching in a church that I'd never visited before or since. I was due to speak in the Sunday morning service, but I arrived there early and the people were having a prayer meeting before the services. So, I knelt down and prayed with them, and after a while I heard various people getting prophetic utterances. And they were speaking to a certain person, and about a certain person, and describing things in that person's past life; and suddenly I realized with a shock that I was the person. And I knew for sure that none of those persons knew anything about my past. Well, when God had got my attention in this way, then they began to make statements about what God intended to do through me in the future. In particular, a new kind of book that God was going to prompt me to write. And this really spoke to me, gave me encouragement, a direction at a critical moment in my life; and let me say that later on that particular kind of book I actually did write and it's now in print. So here's an example of encouragement, direction—stirred up, cheered up, motivated by the gift of prophecy.

All right, our time is up for today. I'll be back with you again tomorrow at this time. I'll continue to speak about the vocal gifts. Tomorrow I'll be dealing with the gift that many people find the most difficult to understand—the gift of tongues.

Radio Program

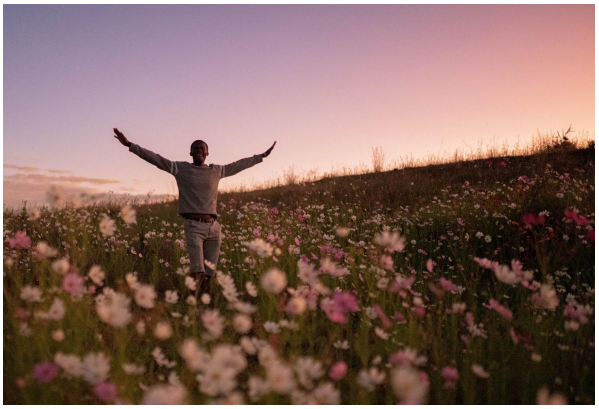
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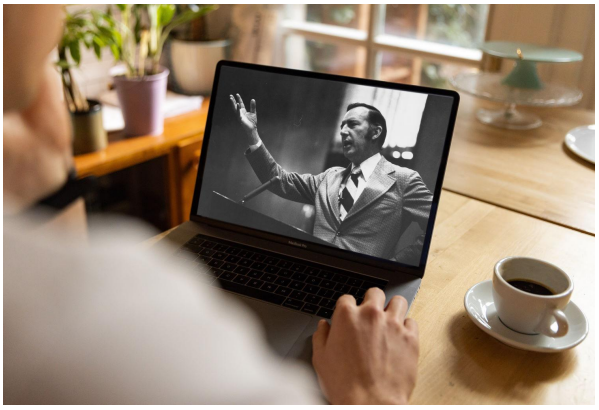
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