

**PROPHECY, TONGUES, AND INTERPRETATION**  
**Opening Your Spiritual Gifts**  
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We're looking at the last in about a five-week series on "Opening Your Spiritual Gifts." Spiritual gifts of 1 Corinthians 12 are obviously divided into two major categories. Gifts which involve speech and gifts which involve action. The action gifts are faith, miracles and healing. The speech gifts are an utterance of wisdom and an utterance of knowledge. Discernment could probably fall in the category of both speech and action. Then three additional speech gifts – tongues, interpretation of tongues and prophecy, the three that we'll look at this evening.

I'm going to start out with the gift tongues and interpretation. Earlier this year, 1983, I spent several Sunday nights on the gift of tongues and it's association with the baptism in the Spirit. So I'm not going to necessarily cover that ground again this evening. More specifically I'll deal with tongues as one of the spiritual gifts to edify the whole congregation.

It can be tough to be different. I hated to be different many times as a kid. In those days the word "charismatic" had not yet been invented. The word "Pentecostal" was hardly used. But "Holy roller" the words associated with people speaking in tongues – but I have never been in a church where somebody *rolled*. Some of you maybe have. There were times in school I couldn't bring myself to say I attended the Assembly of God, the Pentecostal church. I imagined that people thought we did weird things there and I didn't want to be different.

And when people see speaking in tongues as an abnormal or unnormal behavior ranging from strange to odd to cultic to demonic sometimes it's a little tough to be different.

For New Testament Christians speaking in tongues was rather normal. I always like to say what it's not. Speaking in tongues is not gibberish. Somebody admitting guttural syllables or whatever. The general thought is the speaker and the person hearing the tongue do not understand what is being spoken. But in scripture when tongues are spoken on the day of Pentecost they are very clearly other languages that are spoken, recognized because there were a lot of people from different language groups represented.

Paul in 1 Corinthians 13:2 talks about talking in the tongues of men or of angels. Meaning that the tongues employed may not clearly be a recognizable early language. But nowhere in scripture does it indicate that tongues is gibberish or baby talk. Although sometimes when a person begins to express this gift it may be on a very elemental level like when a baby is beginning to learn to speak any language that's going to be their native language.

Speaking in other tongues is not preaching the gospel to the heathen as some people think that the gift of tongues is meant to preach to the heathen. We don't find reference to that in scripture. In fact on the day of Pentecost when people did understand what was being said their bottom line reaction was these people are drunk. They weren't at all convinced of anything until Peter got up and preached to them in Aramaic and then they were cut to the heart.

Some have held that tongues is a sign gift that has passed away. I can understand that point of view but I find it difficult to embrace since I speak in tongues. It's hard for me to be doing it as a spiritual gift and to realize it's passed away. But I never argue from experience on that. I argue from scripture. There is no warrant from scripture for that. The only reference that could ever

## PROPHECY, TONGUES, AND INTERPRETATION

### Opening Your Spiritual Gifts

be possibly cited is 1 Corinthians 13:8 that says tongues will pass away. But it also notes that knowledge will pass away and a few other things. It's clearly talking about a comparison between time now and time then when we are in God's presence. If tongues is passed away so is knowledge and I don't think anybody would admit that knowledge is passed away.

Some have also thought that maybe tongues was a gift about which the apostle Paul was embarrassed. He was not embarrassed about it. He was simply correcting abuses of the gift. There were two abuses at Corinth. There was too much speaking in tongues and no interpretation. Those were the two problems – too much and no interpretation in public. But he did not look upon the gift as something to be embarrassed. Don't ever look upon a gift from the Lord no matter what it is as something to be embarrassed about. If God gave it, it must be good. Are not all gifts good, which he gives? I never demean anything that he gives.

In terms of what tongues is not, tongues is not ecstatic speech. Out of being. No one in the scripture is ever seen as being out of being or in a trance when they speak in tongues. The spirit of the prophets is subject to the prophets.

What is speaking in tongues?

Scriptures gives us perhaps five things that speaking in tongues is. I say this as predecessor to the gift of interpretation. I think many times interpretations are not controlled sufficiently by what the gift of tongues are. If we know what tongues is in terms of its functioning in the body then we can perhaps correctly use the gift of interpretation.

Tongues first of all is speaking to God. Paul says, "The one who speaks in an unknown tongue, speaks unto God." 1 Corinthians 14:3. I compare speaking to God in this manner to certain Old Testament passages that use the phrase "pouring out my soul." There are four passages in the Old Testament that use this term – pouring out my soul – which appears to be a form of address in the Old Testament that is deeper than words, knowledgeable words can express. Psalm 42:4 *"These things I remember as I pour out my soul."* Psalm 62:8 *"Trust in Him at all times O people. Pour out your heart before Him. God is a refuge for us."* Lamentations 2:9 *"Arise! Cry out in the night. At the beginning of the watches pour out your heart like water before the presence of the Lord."* 1 Samuel 1:15 a reference to Hanna, Samuel's mother, when she was in the place of worship at the tabernacle where Eli the priest resided. It is said that he noticed her lips move but her voice was not heard. When he asked her what was going on, the strange manifestation of prayer – her lips were moving and no words were being articulated – she answered "No, my lord [he thought she was drunk]. I am a woman sorely troubled. I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink. But I have been pouring out my soul to the Lord." She denied being drunk.

It's interesting that Peter had to make the same denial in Acts 2 when everybody was speaking in tongues. He had to deny they were drunk. I would suspect that there is such a cathartic emotional release that is involved in pouring out your soul in the New Testament context of speaking to God in an unknown tongue that frequently one becomes so relaxed or so intense that one can be mistaken for being momentarily in a non rational state.

Tongues is speaking to God.

## **PROPHECY, TONGUES, AND INTERPRETATION**

### **Opening Your Spiritual Gifts**

The section function is prayer, which is a form of speaking to God. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 14:16 “I will pray with my understanding. I will pray in the spirit. I will sing with my understanding. I will sing in the spirit.” Here he is blessing God in an unknown language. Unknown to himself.

Speaking in tongues may also be a way of expressing to God in a way that is not articulated so that the mind or reason understands. Paul for example says to those speaking in tongues “Without interpretation in the body [1 Corinthians 14:16-17] if you’re praising God in your spirit [and he uses spirit here as a substitute word for tongues] if I’m praising God with my spirit how can one who finds himself among those who do not understand say Amen to your thanksgiving since he does not know what you are saying?” In other words one of the things that was happening when the Corinthians in public worship service were speaking to God in other tongues Paul says they’re saying thanksgivings to God. You just can’t let this go without being interpreted because nobody can say Amen to it because they don’t understand it as a thanksgiving. So when we are praying to God in other tongues we may also be giving thanksgiving.

Another form that tongues takes is declaring the mighty works of God, which is praise, another aspect of prayer. Acts 2:11 when they heard them speaking on the day of Pentecost they heard them [the 120] declaring the mighty works of God.” That word “mighty works of God” can mean magnificent, splendid, great, grand, sublime. Acts 10:46 when the people at Cornelius’ household are described as speaking with other tongues they are seen as extolling God. Singing God’s praises.

I think a fifth thing that tongues may accomplish in terms of prayer is intercession. Romans 8:26-27 “Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness for we do not know how to pray as we ought. [How many times have we faced that in our prayer? We run out of advice to give God.] But the Spirit prays for us with words too deep to be uttered.” Another way of translating that would be “groanings inarticulate. [With sounds coming out of us that do not bear recognizable speech patters.] But he who searches the hearts of men knows what is the mind of the Spirit because the Spirit intercedes for the sakes according to the will of God.”

So this is kind of a critical question. What is tongues for? It is language of prayer to God, which involves praise and intercession and thanksgiving and the like.

Another question that arises because Paul says “Do all speak with tongues? Do all prophecy?” etc in this Corinthians passage. Is speaking in tongues open to every believer? Notice how we’ve gone through the gifts of the Spirit. For example we’ve looked at the gift of faith and said, if you don’t have the gift of faith does this excuse you from being a faithful person? “I don’t have to have faith. Just the people who have the gift of faith in the congregation are supposed to exercise faith.... I don’t have the gift of healings. Therefore I don’t have to pray for anybody who is sick.... I can be stupid. We’ll just let the people who have the utterance of wisdom exercise wisdom. I don’t need knowledge. We’ll let the people who have the gift of knowledge exercise knowledge.”

No. All along consistently we’ve said that these nine gifts of the Spirit function also in a way that everybody exercises. All believers are called to exercise faith. Some have a special gift of faith. All believers are called to exercise wisdom. Some have a special utterance of wisdom.

## **PROPHECY, TONGUES, AND INTERPRETATION**

### **Opening Your Spiritual Gifts**

All believers are called to be prophets. Some have the special exercise of prophecy. All believers are called to pray for the sick. Some have special gifts of healing.”

The same pattern holds true I think scripturally with tongues. That Paul for example says, “I thank God that I speak in tongues more than you all,” 1 Corinthians 14:18. 1 Corinthians 14:5 “Now I want you all to speak in tongues.” He’s referring on a personal level of course to our own personal prayer life.

But when it comes to exercise in the body, when the gift of tongues is used publicly just like the gift of healings as distinct from ordinary or common prayer for healing. We do not expect everyone to function in this gift in the public setting although scripture leaves it open that we all in a private setting exercise this. In fact on the day of Pentecost, all did speak with other tongues. At Cornelius’ house all did speak with other tongues. In Acts 19 at Ephesus, all spoke with tongues. It wasn’t that some had the gift of tongues, some had the gift of healing, some had the gift of knowledge, some had the gift of prophecy etc. There was first of all the liberal gift of this for every believer. That of personal edification. But when it comes to use in the body, not everybody exercises or functions in this gift.

When the gift occurs publicly it must have certain guidelines to it. Here’s what Paul is saying. First he’s saying that when the gift of tongues occurs publicly then it is to be accompanied by the gift of interpretation. The person is edified when he speaks in tongues but the church is not. If the whole body is going to be edified by someone speaking in tongues there should be an interpretation.

Paul lays down therefore two rules for the person who comes with an utterance in tongues. He or she must pray for the gift to interpret. Or he or she if they’re not sufficiently confident when they give the utterance in tongues that there is someone who may give the interpretation, they should have the recognition that before they give it, there ought to be some kind of understanding that they have the confidence that someone is there to interpret. For example Paul says in 1 Corinthians 14:28 “If there is no interpreter the speaker should keep quiet in the church and speak to himself and to God.”

That’s an interesting phrase. How would a speaker in tongues know whether someone was there with the gift of interpretation? Only by experience. Only by having watched this function in the body. Only by being aware of the fact that within the body there are people there present on that occasion who have exercised the gift of interpretation in the past. If the speaker in tongues is not sufficiently confident that within the body there is someone who can give the interpretation and is not sufficiently confident when they give the utterance that they themselves may interpret Paul says you’re to set on it. Not to give it.

The second kind of thing Paul says is not only must the gift of tongues be interpreted by the gift of interpretation but the gift of tongues with interpretation is limited to two or three utterances for each gathering. 1 Corinthians 14:27 – two or at the most three.

It’s because all of us have sensory overload. We can only take so many significant messages. And the word gets diluted when it begins coming from too many different sources. And too much begins coming at us.

## **PROPHECY, TONGUES, AND INTERPRETATION**

### **Opening Your Spiritual Gifts**

Also there might be a tendency to replace the gift of teaching in the church. I know that has been a tendency historically within the Pentecostal charismatic revival that so prizes this manifestation of the Spirit that we may diminish or demean the gift of teaching. I come out of a background that it was sometimes a badge of pride to say, The Spirit fell today and the pastor didn't get a chance to preach. That's ok if that happens. I think many pastors who never studied all week long were kind of glad that the Spirit fell. I'd be a little frustrated if I spent much time in prayer and study and didn't get a chance to preach. But I'm always open to the Spirit.

Sometimes the Spirit of God does fall so powerfully that no body can say anything. But it's always possible to counterfeit and fake things.

Another thing about the gift of tongues in terms of guidelines is that the interpretation of the gift of tongues proceed from a proper understanding of the function of tongues. I like the word "interpretation." And this is pretty much what all the translations of scripture use rather than strict translation the word "interpretation" is used. The spiritual gift, especially the verbal gift such as prophecy and tongues function very much on a visionary level. If you are interpreting, for example, a vision or a picture you read it in a much different way that if you simply read lines on a page.

Peter talks about the gift of the Spirit being outpoured on the day of Pentecost. He associates with it dreams and vision. Visionary. Non rational side of our experience. This helps me understand why sometimes there is a difference in the time it takes to give an utterance in tongues and perhaps the time given in the interpretation. But in bona fide translations sometimes it takes longer to state something in another language or shorter.

In terms of looking at something pictorially, one person may take more time describing it than another.

Another thing about the gift of tongues in a public setting is that these gifts are enhanced in value when many in the church over a period of time – both men and women – manifest them. I've noticed that the gift of tongues seem to lose its strength if one person in a body always seems to function in this area. Then it becomes predictable. It's much better if it can be diversified and spread out. It adds to the credibility of the expression of the gift.

I think the scripture tells us to excel in the gifts. The problem with some of these expressions of gifts is there has been arrested development. The servant was frozen at a certain point and the gift never developed beyond that. Therapists sometime have to be courageous and help people on an individual level to learn to excel in the gifts.

I think another thing about the public expression of the gifts of tongues is that this gift is enhanced in value when it comes in appropriate moments and appropriate voice levels. To speak in the Spirit in other tongues does not mean that we have to suddenly become historical in our expression. Nor does it mean that we simply interrupt. The Spirit is a person and as a person he's always gracious. He knows when the gifts should be exercised. The spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. They can wait for the right moment.

The key to the speaking gifts, the key to the gift of tongues and interpretation as well as the gift of prophecy is all the time these gifts are complimented by faith. When we begin to feel a strong

## **PROPHECY, TONGUES, AND INTERPRETATION**

### **Opening Your Spiritual Gifts**

prompting of the Spirit step out with the word, the phrase, the sentence that we have and begin to exercise it. When we do this in small groups or when we're all together, let's be a supportive enough congregation that we don't cut people down. Since Paul said, "Excel in the gifts," I feel that the gifts can be developmental. As you learn to use them you become more proficient in them. So we need to encourage one another and step out in faith.

I think the moments when the Spirit speaks through interpretation or through an utterance of tongues or prophecy as moments in the service where the Holy Spirit has an agenda that was not on our mind when we prayed or and planned for the service. I make no apology for praying for and planning for worship services. I do not view as some that if there has not been an utterance of tongues or interpretation or prophecy the Spirit hasn't moved. I believe most times anointed preaching may be involving the utterance of wisdom or the utterance of knowledge or the gift of prophecy. So I have no qualms about saying if in the service there hasn't been a gift of tongues or interpretation or prophecy if it hasn't occurred I don't go away saying the Spirit didn't move today.

But on the other hand when these gifts do happen I set back and say thank the Lord. He is aware of some individual's situation here that nothing else has really addressed in this moment. He has taken this service and guided it like a river and this is the particular moment, the channel that he wants this service to flow in. We must always be open to that moving of the Spirit so that our plans and his plans can be one. We look at a service and we don't know whether it's the Holy Spirit planning it or our planning it where our natures merge the human and the divine.

The gift of prophecy. This gift is also for many. It's like all the rest of the gifts. We're all called to be prophets. Numbers 11:24-39 contain a passage of scripture where the seventy elders associated with Moses have been with him and have had a marvelous revelation from the Lord God. When they come back they find two prophets prophesying in the camp. And they're all shook about the two that aren't in the group that are prophesying. And they want Moses to do something about shutting these two down. Moses said, "Would that all the Lord's people were prophets and that the Lord would put his Spirit upon them."

Acts 2:17-18 indicate that in the day when the Spirit is being outpoured which is everything from the day of Pentecost until now. Your sons and daughters will prophecy and servants – men and women – will prophecy. Acts 2:17-18. Who are sons and daughters? They're teenagers. Who are servants? They're slaves. Who are the people nobody listens to? Teenagers and hired help. Hear that teenagers! They're the nobodies who are in the age of the Spirit are also given the function of prophesying. We'll look at what those functions are in just a moment. But this is something open to everybody.

Paul says in 1 Corinthians 14:1 and 14:39 "Make love your aim and earnestly desire the spiritual gift especially that you may prophecy." And 14:39 "So my brethren earnestly desire to prophecy."

One of the reasons why people perhaps don't see themselves as prophesying more often is that they may be functioning in the gift of prophecy and simply have called it something else. Our idea of prophecy is often a caricature of what the gift is rather than the reality of what the scripture teaches. As we did with the gift of tongues let's take a moment and look at what the gift of prophecy is not.

## PROPHECY, TONGUES, AND INTERPRETATION

### Opening Your Spiritual Gifts

The gift of prophecy is not speaking from a trance. It is not working yourself up into some sort of hypnotic state. Then delivering mysteries from the other world. The pagan prophets were like that. The oracle of Delphi, the girl prophetess, waited until she was in a trance to deliver her prophecies. Paul says the spirit of the prophet is subject to the prophets. No one in the scripture speaks from a trance when prophesying that I've been able to find.

Prophecy is also not telling somebody's future or fortune. It is not having the gift of prophecy so that *I know what's going to happen to you!* Sometimes God does through the prophet disclose unusual knowledge and the like. But it's very clear that throughout the scripture whenever prophecy looks to the future such as the major Old Testament prophets, it is always a message that stems out of the present. When the prophet Isaiah or Joel or Amos were speaking their fundamental message was not to give them some idea of what's going to happen in the future. Their whole message was get your life right now with God. And they said if you don't, this is what's going to happen. They could read the implications. Anybody who is halfway a student of human nature can look at a rebellious child and tell you what his future is going to be like if he doesn't straighten up. And anyone who really sees on God's behalf can look at a whole group of people and say if *that* problem isn't corrected this is where they're going to go. This is the fruit they're going to harvest from the seeds they've sown.

Being a prophet is not being a great moral or political leader. A lot of people today are saying Ghandi was a great prophet. Being a prophet is not being a great moral and political leader from a biblical sense.

Neither is being a prophet engaging in end time speculation. It is not writing a book about amazing prophecies. Or amazing speculations. Or who the antichrist is or how many toes are on the beast and what nations they represent and the like.

Being a prophet is not bring revelation that exceeds or contradicts the scripture. 1 Corinthians 14:37-38 clearly says if anybody comes along and purports to be a prophet or spiritual gifted take heed of what I'm telling you of the Lord's command. If he ignores the commands I'm giving about the use of this gift then he is a false prophet.

Galatians 1:8 "If anyone should bring you a message other than the one I preached to you, even if he's an angel from heaven, let him be anathema."

What is a prophet? Fundamentally a prophet from the scripture sense is two things.

A prophet is one who sees. That was its earliest definition. As you look at the historical books in the Old Testament before the writing prophets, the prophets in Elijah and Elisha's time. 1 Samuel 9:9 gives us the name of what a person was called before they were called prophets. They were called a seer. 1 Samuel 9:9 says "Formerly in Israel when a man went to inquire of God he said 'Come let us go to the seer.'" He who is now called a prophet was formerly called a seer.

Within this vantage point of seeing there was a wide continuum of seeing that the prophet may actually see. Some aspects of seeing as a prophet simply involve an ability to astutely read human character. That's one side of the continuum. As you progress another aspect of seeing is

## **PROPHECY, TONGUES, AND INTERPRETATION**

### **Opening Your Spiritual Gifts**

to be able to see into a moment when God is doing something very special and what it means and nobody else at the time even sees it.

In another dimension on this continuum of seeing is to be able to look predictively at what is coming and see that on the horizon of the future.

Let me give you an example from scripture about all these on the continuum.

First simple astute observation as a part of seeing. Titus 1:12, Paul speaking to this young pastor who is on this island of Crete. "One of themselves, a prophet of their own, said, 'Cretans are always liars, evil beasts and lazy gluttons.' This testimony is true." Paul is saying that some of their prophets had astute observation into Cretan character. That statement is true.

There are some people in the body of Christ who can only see outward appearances and aren't able to see in deeper levels. The one who functions in the area of prophecy is very frequently a character reader.

But then sometimes there's a person who in the gift of seeing is able to see that that particular moment is a turning moment. We ought to seize upon that. There's something very redemptive that is going on. Luke 2:36-38 Anna is such a woman. She is a prophetess. An old woman, a prophetess. When the parents of Jesus bring him up into the temple and Jesus has been blessed by Simeon, this older woman, Anna, comes up and at that very hour she gave thanks to God and spoke of Him to all who were looking for the redemption of Israel. That's remarkable. Anna had to have seen hundreds and hundreds of babies in that temple. I suspect in a year, she saw thousands of babies go by her every year, year after year. Because parents were required at the end of 40 days for a boy, at the end of 80 days for a girl, to bring an offering and sacrifice to commemorate the birth. So anybody who was anybody in Israel that had a kid had to come for an offering and she saw these babies go by. Continual dedication.

But in one baby she saw significance. She had the ability to see. This baby who had no visible trappings of divinity, who had no external expressions of royalty or supernatural power, this child was the child. Marvelous ability to see.

A third way of seeing is predictive. Acts 11:28 and 21:10-11 share with us the story of one remarkable prophet in the New Testament named Agabus who makes a prediction that here's going to be an earthquake and famine in Acts 11 and who in Acts 21 predicts that if Paul goes to Jerusalem is going to be taken captive and a prisoner.

Because those who function with the gift of prophecy are seers they're often out in front of the rest of the body. They are seeing things before other people see them. They're noticing trends. They're noticing directions. They're noticing consequences. That is why they're often so unpopular or poorly received. Because they are out ahead, out in front.

The prophets of Israel for example saw the downfall of the nation. As Daniel they saw it before anybody else saw it. So a prophet is one who sees.

Second function of a prophet is to speak for God.

## **PROPHECY, TONGUES, AND INTERPRETATION**

### **Opening Your Spiritual Gifts**

Exodus 4:15-16 shows us the nature of a spokesman because Aaron is to be Moses' spokesman. "You shall speak to him and put the words in his mouth and I will be with your mouth and with his mouth and will teach you what you shall do. He shall speak for you to the people and he shall be a mouth for you and you shall be to him as God. "And the Lord said to Moses, 'See I make you as god to Pharaoh and Aaron your brother will be your prophet.'" Aaron's function as a prophet was to speak for Moses who in turn knew God's mind.

As one who speaks for God several things characterize the prophet.

One is certainly the knowledge that in speaking on God's behalf the person who prophesies reflects the intense desire of God to speak to his people. God is a communicating God. God is a speaking God. God has not created the world and withdrawn into some distant corner in the universe. He is a God who communicates. And because he seeks to communicate he lays his message upon people.

What happens when we don't communicate? We don't have knowledge and if you're in a relationship with somebody and you don't communicate it really hurts the relationship. The Lord intensely desires to speak to his people. One of the real differences in function between the gift of teaching and the gift of prophecy is that the gift of teaching frequently is a systematic discourse.

Like when David sinned with Bathsheba the person who had probably the gift of teaching would have maybe given David a teaching on helping the army become better men of God. Or five rules for a happy home life. But Nathan the prophet, no teaching. Just "Thou art the man." Because prophecy, inevitably when it comes to us has our name and address and zip code on it. Whereas teaching tends to be more diffused and then you find where you are in reference to the message.

The prophet reflects God's intense desire to speak to his people. The prophet therefore is acutely aware of the reality of God's presence. His immediate presence. That's why the prophet often says, "Thus says the Lord!" or "I the Lord they God say to thee!" If you're unaccustomed to that kind of language being used and you're in a worship service and someone stands up to utter a prophecy and they begin saying, "I the Lord God say to thee!" At first it sounds blasphemous, doesn't it? But it's not blasphemous. It's in the Spirit of the Old Testament prophets who knew God so intimately and were so possessed in that moment of his presence that they could speak confidently in the first person because they were simply a vehicle in which God's voice and personality was coming through.

In the New Testament church the gift of prophecy serves three basic functions. Perhaps four. The gift of prophecy has different functions or believers and unbelievers.

For believers the main function of prophecy is to build up. 1 Corinthians 14:3 "Everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening." The word "strengthening" there means up building, edification. The prophet builds up.

It's interesting to go through the book of Acts and note the times when the gift of prophecy was functioning in the early church and how it builds the body up.

## **PROPHECY, TONGUES, AND INTERPRETATION**

### **Opening Your Spiritual Gifts**

Acts 11:27-28 it built the body by stimulating concern of one part of the body for another. Agabus the prophet said there's going to be an earthquake and a famine. We need to start doing something about helping the Jerusalem saints. The gift of prophecy provoked concern of one part of the body for another. Therefore it built the body up.

Acts 13:1-2, the gift of prophecy thrust the church into missionary expansion. "While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Spirit said 'Separate for me Barnabus and Saul to the work that I have called them.'" It wasn't that the voice of the Holy Spirit suddenly materialized ethereally in the room and a loud speaker went on. But when the Spirit spoke it was evidently through one of the prophets who was worshipping and fasting. It's time to set apart Barnabus and Saul. That led into a thrust of missionary expansion.

The gift of prophecy thirdly in the book of Acts strengthened the church in a time of divisiveness. Acts 15:32 after the Jerusalem counsel these Gentile believers in Antioch had been made to feel so badly by the Judaizers, two prophets Judas and Silas, go up and they prophecy to the church. What are they doing? They're building people up who have been torn down.

Prophecy fourthly imparted a profound sense of spiritual authority to newly baptized believers. Acts 19:6 at Ephesus. "They speak with tongues and prophecy." They were unlearned and they were outnumbered at Ephesus. They'd never done anything prior to the Spirit's coming upon them but when the spirit comes and when they begin to function in prophecy the situation rapidly changes.

Another function of prophecy in the book of Acts in building it up is the prophets sensitized the church to the coming of false teachers and the emergence of defectors. Paul in his farewell to the Ephesians. Acts 20:29 warns them through the function of the gift of prophecy. The false teachers are going to come in and there's going to be defectors in their midst and he sensitizes them to this occurrence.

In Acts 21, the sixth use of prophecy in up building the body is seeing that the prophet Agabus in this case provides assurance to Paul that the Lord is aware of the deep valleys we walk through in our life. So prophecy builds up.

Another function of prophecy is to encourage. That's why Paul in 1 Corinthians 14:3 says "He who prophecies speaks to their up building for their encouragement." The word for encouragement there is the same word used for the Holy Spirit in John 14-16. The paraclete. The one called alongside to help, the literal meaning of the word.

The clearest example in scripture of the function of the gift of prophecy for encouragement is the book of Revelation. The book of Revelation is written to a church that is on the ropes. It's smashed by Domitian. Prophecy as John is in the spirit on the Lord's day reminds this church that behind the visible world is the invisible world of God. Babylon, that is Rome, which seems so mighty and so strong is already seen from heaven's vantagepoint as fallen. But He shall reign forever and ever and ever.

In every meeting someone has said there are those who are depressed and discouraged. Dreams will not come true. Efforts seem to have achieved so little. Self-examination serves to show us

## **PROPHECY, TONGUES, AND INTERPRETATION**

### **Opening Your Spiritual Gifts**

nothing but our failures and our inadequacies. So when we're gathered together there ought to be those prophetic words of encouragement to one another.

Too often we thought of prophecy as only corrective. Of course it may be corrective as part of its function to build up – sometimes you have to tear down in order to build right of you've built wrong. But Paul speaks of prophecy fundamentally from the standpoint of a positive nature. To build up, to encourage and to console.

Again 14:3. The prophet speaks for comfort. In the heartbreaks of life Jesus is here. We have to be especially sensitive to people walking through rough times that we can pray and perhaps have some encouraging word of comfort from the Lord. "Comfort my people! Comfort my people!" says your God." Isaiah 40:1. "But now says the Lord, 'He who created you O Jacob, he who formed you O Israel fear not for I have redeemed you. I have called you by name. You are mine. When you pass through the waters I will be with you. And through the rivers. They will not overwhelm you. When you walk through the fire you shall not be burned and the flames shall not consume you. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy one of Israel, your savior.'"

When you've been consoled by the prophetic word of God you are calm and pacified and led out of the ocean of your trouble into the great calm of God's rest.

Maybe a fourth function of prophecy could have for the believers is seen in Agabus' case is that it may also be predictive, as a warning to someone that an event is to happen in order to prepare them for that event.

For unbelievers 1 Corinthians 14:24-25 tells us that prophecy has a different function. If an unbeliever or someone who does not understand comes in while everybody is prophesying he will be convinced by all that he is a sinner and will be judged by all and the secrets of his heart will be laid bare so he will fall down and worship God exclaiming God is really among you.

To the unbeliever, the word of God, the one who sees and speaks on behalf of God their words will be words of conviction. When an unbeliever comes he will be convinced. The word literally means to be pounced upon. To be hammered at, to be attacked – positive words. All the defenses for not coming to the Lord are being suddenly undermined in those times. It's been a joy in the worship services to see people who've come into this church body not knowing the Lord, coming from other religious experiences, but whom God has spoken a very real word to and have left this place having counseled with someone for prayer and totally surrendered their lives to the Lord. The Spirit moved. The Spirit spoke and he used prophetic words both from the pulpit and from people in the body that were praying for persons with the need for knowing the Lord. The Spirit picks up the sensitive and the soft spots in our life, the secrets of our heart. And because we as believers as we're gathered together as a community of the Spirit we are to be profoundly aware of God's presence. It's a spiritual tragedy if an unbeliever comes to a Christian service and never feels the presence of God. It's a tragedy. Someone to walk out and say, There's nothing there!

We always are to be praying that the unbeliever coming among us may feel, experience the conviction, be seized upon by the Spirit of God. Conviction results. The work of prophecy then leads to conversion.

## **PROPHECY, TONGUES, AND INTERPRETATION**

### **Opening Your Spiritual Gifts**

By the way, sometimes prophecy can lead to the opposite effect all together of conversion. In some cases where prophecy is functioned it has led to a person's being hardened. Pharaoh's heart was hardened at the prophetic words of Moses. Someone has said that the same sun that melts the butter hardens the clay. The same prophecy that may draw one person closer to the Lord when another person says No, is only being more hardened in their response.

Conviction and conversion. Secrets of the heart will be laid bare and they will fall down and worship God exclaiming God is really among you.

How is the gift of prophecy developed in our life? Paul tells the Thessalonians not to despise prophesying but to test everything and to hold fast that which is good. Meaning again that when we begin to function in the area of prophecy we are seeking to know what is the best from the better and we are sensitive to what God may want to do in our life at any particular moment.

Also the gift of prophecy comes as we are most of all a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ. Prophecy most effectively functions through a person who has a strong and consistent Christian life. They know God. Those who are most in his word, those that are most in prayer are in a better position through speaking the word of God, the function of prophecy to be a person who builds up, encourages and consoles.

If you're also going to develop the gift of prophecy you should be alert to when someone has a need or special occasion and pray that God would help you to speak a word on his behalf in that moment. I always pray when I'm in a crisis situation that God may give me a word that sees on God's behalf, that builds up, comforts or consoles.

We all face special moments when people are going through need and we need to speak a word of encouragement.

Another way to function in the gift of prophecy is desire to prophecy. Again, what is prophecy? It is building up, consoling, encouraging. It's not going in some freaky state. Many young people don't realize that the gift of prophecy is not something fluky, flaky or the like. It's going up to your friend and putting your arm around them when they're down and saying, "The Lord has given me a good word of encouragement for you." Then sharing that word. It's beginning on that level. And then moving out from that level.

Another way to function in the gift of prophecy is to always obey the impulse of the Spirit and exercise faith. How do you know it's the impulse of the Spirit? When you're in a state of care and openness before God and you begin to receive a strong impression to do something, the only way you're ever going to know if that impression is from God or just that you ate too much for supper, is to begin testing. Scriptures give us the latitude to test the spirits. I have found that in those times when I'm strongly compelled to do something it's amazing how time after time after time the Lord has ratified that action.

Prayer:

Too many times, Lord, we have thought of prophecy as tearing something down. Being a bull in a china closet setting everybody else straight. We realize Lord, that sometimes in your body there needs to be that moment of setting right what is not right. Lord, you want

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us to build up. To console. To encourage. Help us Lord through these simple words of teaching to be open to your word flowing through us. To learn to take the elemental steps of faith that begin to cultivate and develop a gift. We think of our general speaking, what we say to one another when we're not prophesying, that it's a helpful base of the gift of prophecy if all our language that we use to one another and all that one of voice that we use builds up, encourages and consoles. How much better that is than to speak with a knife, a razor edge, a threatening, angry, insulting kind of speech. Teach us Lord in our regular speaking to already begin to develop the lifestyle of a prophet. Then give us those special opportunities to speak forth your word that go beyond our own human understanding and reading into a situation. And truly speak on your behalf to need. Thank you Lord for the gifts of the Spirit. All the gifts. May they all be evident in this body. May they build up your church and make effective its witness in the world. We ask it in your name. Amen.