

The Gift of Prophecy

by Chuck Smith

The gift of prophecy is the ability to speak forth God's word through the anointing of the Holy Spirit, with the purpose of building up the church through edification, exhortation, and comfort.

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 12:4

Topics: "The Role of the Holy Spirit", "The Gift of Prophecy"

Description

Chuck Smith discusses the gift of prophecy as a vital manifestation of the Holy Spirit, emphasizing its historical significance and its role in edifying, exhorting, and comforting the church. He explains that prophecy is not solely predictive but also involves speaking God's truth to His people, as seen in the lives of biblical figures like David and Agabus. Smith highlights the importance of exercising this gift in an orderly manner and judging prophecies against Scripture to ensure they align with God's Word. He encourages believers to seek and embrace the gifts of the Holy Spirit, recognizing their relevance in the church today.

Transcript

We are looking at the manifestations of the gifts of the Holy Spirit as they are listed in 1 Corinthians 12. Paul speaks of the gift of prophecy. Now we realize immediately that the gift of prophecy is not something new to the New Testament, but that the gift of prophecy has been exercised throughout the entirety of biblical history. Prophecy is men speaking forth the word of God through the anointing of the Holy Spirit.

Peter tells us,

For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. (2 Peter 1:21)

So prophecy is something that has been a part of God's ministry to His people. There are those men and those women who have been anointed by the Holy Spirit to speak forth God's word to God's people.

Now we usually think of prophecy as something that is predictive of the future. And it can be that because God knows the future and if God is speaking He can speak of the future. But it is not always just predictive. It can also be speaking forth God's truth--God's Word.

In the New Testament it is recognized that in the Old Testament there were men who were anointed by the Holy Spirit to speak the Word of God. 2 Samuel 23:1 says,

Now these be the last words of David. David the son of Jesse said, and the man who was raised up on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob, and the sweet psalmist of Israel, said, "The Spirit of the LORD spake by me, and his word was in my tongue."

Those were some of David's last words. "The Spirit of the Lord spake by me and His word was in my tongue." This is confirmed in the New Testament in Acts 1:16 as Peter is quoting David, he said,

Men and brethren, this scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas, which was guide to them that took Jesus.

He is acknowledging that David spoke by the Holy Spirit.

Acts 4:25 says,

Who by the mouth of Thy servant David has said, "Why did the heathen rage and the people imagine vain things?"

God spoke by the mouth of David saying, "Why do the heathen rage?" So David acknowledges, he recognizes that his words were anointed by the Holy Spirit. And I do not believe that a person could really read the psalms of David without recognizing that these are anointed words. Now some of the psalms of David are predictive. Many of the psalms of David were prophesying of the Messiah who would come. But many of the psalms are instructive and many of them are prayers. Many of them are just pure worship unto the Lord. And so, in the prophecy, it can be predictive, but not exclusively so.

In 1 Corinthians 14:3 Paul declares,

But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort.

Now Paul is making reference to this gift of prophecy. And in contrast to the gift of tongues, (which is addressed to God and which we will be looking at in a couple of sessions), the gift of prophecy is addressed to men. God is speaking unto men and speaking unto the church through this gift of prophecy, for their edification.

Now the word edification means to be built up in a scriptural sense. It means to be built up in your walk with Christ and in your relationship with Christ. And so the purpose of prophecy is just to build you up in Jesus and in the things of the Spirit.

The gift of prophecy is also for exhortation. And I do believe that there is a gift of exhortation. And of course it would be in line with this prophetic gift, whereby we are exhorted into action. There are a lot of things that we know we believe, but we are passive in our reaction to them. We know that we should pray, but we do not always pray. We know that we should be worshipping the Lord, but we do not always worship Him. We know that we should be faithful, but we are not always faithful.

So there is a gift of the exhorting of the church to pray, or to praise, or to trust the Lord, or to love as the Scripture gives us commandment. And I think all of you ladies who have been in the Friday morning services will concur with me that exhortation is one of my wife's gifts. And she gets you gals just fired up. She exhorts you into doing the things that the Lord has commanded you to do and she has a great gift of exhortation.

Pastor Romaine also has the gift of exhortation. I have the gift of teaching and I can lay out the principles of Scripture but then you need someone to come along and give you a kick to get you going. "Now do it! You heard what he said, just do it!" James was an exhorter, "Be ye doers of the word, not hearers only deceiving your own self" (James 1:22). And we need those who will spur us into action, motivating us to act upon what we know and to act upon the Scriptures. And so the gift of prophecy works spurring us to good works, to praise, to prayer, and to worship.

And then the gift of prophecy can be used to comfort believers. As a person is going through trials and tribulations, testings and hardships, it is comforting to know that God is on the throne. It is comforting that the Lord understands and knows your circumstances and that the Lord has not forsaken you. He is watching over you and He is going to bring you through victoriously. And Paul the Apostle speaks of the comfort that he is able to give to the Corinthians, calling God, "the God of all comforts," who comforts us with the comfort wherewith we are able to comfort others.

There used to be a little lady in Huntington Beach by the name of Mother Berg and she had this gift of comfort. She had a radio broadcast and she always began the broadcast with the words "God is on the throne, you do not have to worry." We sometimes forget that God is on the throne. We sometimes think that things are out of hand but we need to be reminded and comforted by the fact that God understands. God knows. God is in control. God is on the throne. God rules. There is a comfort we receive from knowing that God is in control.

Now the gift of prophecy in the New Testament was exercised by a man named Agabus. And it seems like Agabus exercised the gift in more of a prophetic way. We are told in Acts 11:28,

And there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the Spirit that there should be great dearth throughout all the world: which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar.

It was predicted by Agabus that there was coming a great dearth in all the world.

In Acts 21:8-11, Paul had come to Caesarea on his way to Jerusalem and was visiting with Philip the evangelist in his home. It declares,

And the next day we that were of Paul's company departed, and came unto Caesarea: and we entered into the house of Philip the evangelist, which was one of the seven; and abode with him.

That is one of the seven who was chosen to wait the tables earlier in the book of Acts when a dispute arose over the administration of the church's welfare.

And the same man had four daughters, virgins, which did prophesy. And as we tarried there many days, there came down from Judaea a certain prophet, named Agabus.

This is the same fellow that we met in Acts 11 who predicted the dearth.

And when he was come unto us, he took Paul's girdle, and bound his own hands and feet, and said, Thus saith the Holy Ghost, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.

And so in both cases, we find that Agabus prophesies; that is, his gift was exercised in a predictive nature.

In Acts 13:1 we read that there were certain prophets in the church at Antioch. Now as we look at the various gifts in Ephesians 4, there were apostles, there were evangelists, there were prophets, and there were pastor/teachers. It seemed to be one of the ministries in the church, the ministry of prophets or a man who had the prophetic gift. And so in Antioch there were certain prophets (plural) and teachers such as: Barnabas, Simeon, Lucias, Minain, and Saul. So these men, it seems, all possessed that gift of prophecy. And we read,

As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, "Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them." (Acts 13:2)

Now, how did the Holy Spirit say, "Separate unto Me Paul and Barnabas"? By the fact that in the previous verse it mentions these men with the gift of prophecy, I have no doubt that there was a prophetic utterance whereby God directed them to separate Paul and Barnabas for a special ministry. And so, when they had fasted and prayed, they laid hands on them and the Holy Spirit sent them forth and they began the first missionary journey, taking the gospel into Cypress and then on over into Asia Minor. So it was, no doubt, through the exercise of this gift of prophecy that the Holy Spirit spoke and directed the activities of the early church.

When Paul was writing to Timothy, he told him not to neglect the gift of the Holy Spirit. He said,

Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery [or the elders]. (1 Timothy 4:14)

So when Timothy came before the elders, they laid hands on him and there was a word of prophecy that indicated the gifts that the Lord was giving Timothy, in order to fulfill his ministry.

And so, prophecy played a very important part in the direction of the early church. It defined for them just what gifts God was imparting to them.

Now in the New Testament there are certain rules regarding the exercise of the gift of prophecy. There was one rule that seemed to apply only to women, when they prayed or prophesied. Remember Philip's four daughters did prophesy. The promise in the last days, saith the Lord, "And your sons and daughters shall prophesy"--shall speak forth the word of God (Joel 2:28).

There is no prohibition whatsoever for a woman exercising the gift of prophecy and speaking forth the Word of God. The only prohibition was to the Corinthian church and that is where Paul said if a woman prays or prophesies with her head uncovered she dishonors her husband. And so, he suggested that the women cover their heads. But then he went on to say that they did not have any such rule in all the churches. It seemed to be dealing with a local situation in Corinth. As Paul was speaking to them about chain of command; how the wife is in subjection to the husband, the husband to the Lord, and the Lord unto the Father. So if a woman would pray or prophesy with her head uncovered she dishonors her husband. What is he talking about?

The city of Corinth was an extremely wicked city. In fact it was associated with total debauchery. And to say that a person lived like a Corinthian would say that the person was just a debauched person, reveling in drunkenness and partying. It was known for being an extremely wicked city. It was basically a seaport, where east met west. Because the ships coming from the east with the goods for Rome would come to Corinth, the ships would be unloaded and the goods carried across the two-mile isthmus there, and then

loaded on to ships going to Rome. So it was a seaport that had a bunch of sailors passing through and the place was just wild.

At the top of the hill above Corinth, there on the Acropolis was this huge temple to Aphrodite--the female goddess of love. In the evening a thousand of the priestesses of Aphrodite would come down into the city and they were prostitutes. And thus they would fill the city and prostitution was rampant there in Corinth. These prostitutes would not wear veils in order that they might be identified. And so, an unveiled woman was thought to be a prostitute, and thus, she was approachable by a man.

Whereas the women Paul was addressing would generally and customarily wear veils. So Paul is saying if a woman prays or prophesies and does not have a veil it is sort of dishonoring to her husband. But again, we do not have any such custom in all the churches. But it was one that Paul did apply to the women in Corinth--if they were to exercise publicly the gift of prophecy in church. In 1 Corinthians 11:16 he said,

But if any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God.

Now the second rule for prophecy is that the services are to be conducted decently and in order. God is not the author of confusion. And the services ought to be conducted with a mind towards the response or the reaction of an unbeliever.

1 Corinthians 14:23-25 says that if the whole church be gathered together and there be unbelievers present, and if everybody is getting up and speaking in tongues the unbelievers will go away saying, "They are crazy." But if everyone could prophesy, then the secrets of people's hearts would be revealed and the unbelievers would go away saying, "God is in them, they speak of truth"--because the secrets of their hearts had been revealed through the exercise of the gift of prophecy.

But even then it is to be done orderly.

Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the other judge. (1 Corinthians 14:29)

Many times in the Pentecostal circles, prophecies or utterances are made ostensibly in the name of the Lord. They have a tendency to begin a prophecy by saying, "Thus saith the Lord." And often it is interspersed, during the body of the prophecy itself. "Thus saith the Lord." And maybe at the end of it they will say, "Thus saith the Lord."

Well, did the Lord really say it? Is it in keeping with what God has said? We are to judge prophecy. You are not just to accept it. If I come up to you and say, "Brother, the Lord has been showing me something about you. He wants you to go to Africa as a missionary." You should seek the Lord for yourself, rather than just taking off saying, "Well God has called me to Africa." You should seek the Lord for yourself. Judge it. Is this bearing witness with your heart?

Now it is interesting, I have often had people come up to me and say, "Chuck, it seems to me that the Lord has been speaking to me and you should do this or that." And interestingly enough, often it is something that I have been mulling over in my own mind wondering, Is this really what the Lord wants me to do? And it comes as more or less a confirmation.

Now I have other people who come to me and say, "You know the Lord said this." I say, "Ah. I do not accept that." They will come up with all kinds of condemning things. With a "Thus saith the Lord, you have been leading the people astray..." I say, "Wait a minute. The Scripture asks the question, 'Who is he that

condemne? It is Christ who has died, yea rather has risen again, and is even at the right hand of the Father making intercession.' And you are coming to me with condemnation in the name of Lord?" Jesus said, "I did not come to condemn. I came to save" (John 12:47). So if someone comes to me with some terrible condemnation, I shrug it off. Jesus did not come to condemn me. He came to save me.

So the prophesying in the church is to be judged. And then he said, "If anything be revealed to another that is sitting by, let the first hold his peace" (1 Corinthians 14:30). In other words, do things orderly. And there is room for others.

It is interesting that many times as a person is speaking, the Spirit will begin to amplify, in my own mind, the things that are said. He will be giving me illustrations or amplifying what is said. Sometimes if it is a guest speaker and the Lord has spoken to my heart and amplified certain parts, I will get up afterwards and expound on this one point and amplify it as the Spirit had amplified it to my own heart.

So let the first hold his peace. "For you may all prophesy one by one." In other words, it is to be in an orderly fashion. You do not all get up and start prophesying at once. It would be mass confusion. But you may all prophesy one by one that all may learn and all may be comforted. So the prophecy was used as a teaching method.

We are not studying the tongues yet, but let me just say that tongues was never used as a teaching tool in the church. Because the gift of tongues is not addressed to man, it is addressed to God.

Howbeit in the Spirit he is speaking unto God divine secrets. (1 Corinthians 14:2)

But prophecy can be used for instruction in the church. The gift of prophecy is for learning, that all may be comforted. "And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets" (1 Corinthians 14:32). Make note of that because I have had people say, "Well, I just had to say it." No, they did not. The spirit of the prophet is subject unto the prophet. The Spirit of God does not take over control and make you like a robot and force you to do things. The spirit of the prophet is subject unto the prophet. We will get to that more emphatically when we get to the subject of tongues.

If therefore the whole church be come together into one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those that are unlearned, or unbelievers, will they not say that ye are mad? But if all prophesy, and there come in one that believeth not, or one unlearned, he is convinced of all, he is judged of all: And thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest; and so falling down on his face he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth. (1 Corinthians 14:23-25)

Now, in the exercise of the gift of prophecy we are told that we are to do it according to our proportion of faith. Romans 12:6 says,

Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith.

Now I believe that all of the gifts of God are exercised--received and exercised--by faith. You have a thought or an inspiration that comes into your mind. And you believe that it is an inspired thought of the Holy Spirit. And you wish to share that thought, then you do it according to the proportion of faith that you have. Now if you are doing it in such a way that intimates that it is the gift of prophecy from God, then the others are to judge it to determine whether or not it really is indeed of God. The basis, of course, of the judgment would be whether it is in keeping with the body of Scripture--the whole body of Scripture.

You see, God will not give you a prophecy or an inspiration that is contrary to the written Word. A lot of people make the mistake of saying, "Thus saith the Lord," when they are saying things that are actually contrary to what God has said. The Word of God is forever established and God is not going to give any revelation that would be in conflict or contrary to His already written Word. And so, the Word of God is the filter through which we put the prophecies in judging them whether they indeed are of God or not. Do they pass through the filter of the already spoken Word?

Now the Scriptures warn over and over again concerning those who would speak their own ideas in the name of the Lord. And I am afraid that this is a very prevalent practice. I get probably two or three letters a week of "thus saith the Lord" kinds of things in which a person is expressing their own ideas.

Jeremiah 14:14 declares,

Then the LORD said unto me, The prophets prophesy lies in my name: I sent them not, neither have I commanded them, neither spake unto them: they prophesy unto you a false vision and divination, and a thing of nought, and the deceit of their heart.

This is pretty heavy. God is denouncing those who would presume to speak their own thoughts and their own ideas in His name.

Jesus warned over and over concerning false prophets. In Matthew 7:15 in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said,

Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.

In His predictions of the events of the last days, Jesus said, "And many false prophets shall rise and shall deceive many" (Matthew 24:11). Jesus said, "Not all who say, 'Lord, Lord' are going to enter the kingdom of heaven."

He tells us in Matthew 24:24,

For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.

John warns us when he said,

Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world (1 John 4:1).

He is saying, "Try the spirits. Judge them. Test them. That is your duty."

God warned through Ezekiel,

Thus saith the Lord God; Woe unto the foolish prophets, that follow their own spirit, and have seen nothing! (Ezekiel 13:3)

Under the law God declared in Deuteronomy 13:1-3,

If there arise among you a prophet or a dreamer of dreams and gives a sign or a wonder and the sign or the wonder come to pass whereof he spoke unto you saying, "Let us go now after other gods which you have not known and let us serve them," you will not hearken to the words of that prophet or that dreamer

of dreams for the Lord your God is proving you to know whether or not you love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul.

You see the prophets should not tell you to do something that is contrary to the Word. They may show signs, they may sort of read your mind, and they may tell you what your name is, and tell you what your address is, and recall what happened to you this past week. However, if they would then say, "Now Jesus Christ is not the only way unto God. There are many ways by which we can reach God," then God is just testing you to see if you will hold true to the Word--if you will let the Word be the final authority of your faith and of your practice.

Deuteronomy 18:22 says,

When a prophet speaketh in the name of the LORD, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously: thou shalt not be afraid of him.

Sometimes they try to cow you with fear. "Brother, you better be careful. I prophesied to a man last week and he laughed at it and he fell dead when he walked away." The Lord says you do not need to be afraid of them.

I had an experience in the early years of my ministry where these fellows were into some false doctrines and they were so convinced that I was to espouse this false doctrine to my congregation that they called me out on a Saturday night and they began to prophesy over me a black coffin and I was in it. And they said God was going to smite me dead if I did not espouse their doctrine. I was not afraid. I did not go home and think, Oh my, am I going to die? I had the Word of God. Interestingly enough, the fellow who gave the prophecy died in two weeks. He just saw the wrong face in the coffin. I mean, his prophecy was correct, but...

We must never forget that the Word of God is superior to anything of prophecy that might be given. Paul said,

But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. (Galatians 1:8)

The Word of God--that is the touchstone by which everything is to be measured.

Finally Jeremiah said,

The prophet that hath a dream, let him tell a dream; and he that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat? saith the LORD. (Jeremiah 23:28)

You can come and tell me of your visions and dreams and I do not discount them. I believe that God can and does speak to man through visions and dreams. But God speaks to us through His Word as well. And visions and dreams are but as chaff compared to wheat, when you are comparing them to the Word of God. It is the Word of God that nourishes and strengthens. Chaff can choke you. The Word of God will sustain you and feed you.

The Bible tells us not to despise prophesying. It is interesting that the gift of prophecy was exercised many times in our church here. Much of my preaching is the exercise of the gift of prophecy. Years ago as we

were in a prayer group, hands were laid on me and prophecy was given that at that time seemed to be just something maybe of a dream, but nothing of reality, as the Lord spoke to me of the future ministry that He was going to give to me.

Now the background of this is that I had been spending about seventeen years frustrated in the ministry because nothing was happening. I just hung on because I knew that God had called me, but ministry was frustrating. Having been given the prophecy that told of how God was going to bless my ministry and He was going to make me a shepherd of many flocks and it was, at that time, a seemingly preposterous thing--yet God fulfilled it!

The Lord said He was giving me a new name. The name meant shepherd, for He would make me the shepherd of many flocks. The Calvary Chapel group that was meeting here in Costa Mesa decided to call me to come on down and to pastor and I had accepted the invitation. Then they called me and said, "Do not come. We are going to disband." And I said, "Well, I have already resigned here. I am coming anyhow."

So as they were praying, a prophecy was given that God was going to bless Calvary Chapel. That the little church that they were meeting in on Church Street would not be sufficient to hold all the people that were going to come and they would have to move to a new church on the bluff overlooking the bay. It was prophesied that the church would have a nationwide radio ministry and we would become known around the world.

Well, to a group of twelve people who were so discouraged they were ready to quit, it was sort of like the fellow on whom the king leaned in the Old Testament and said, "If the Lord would open windows in heaven could such a thing be?" I mean it seemed totally preposterous. They said that we would come down and I would be the pastor and that we would remodel the church immediately. And the interesting thing is that after the first Sunday service, we all went out to lunch together--our church was that small. And as we sat in the Sizzler Restaurant, I drew out the plans for the remodeling of the church and they all got excited. I did not know why.

And then as a year or so went by, we outgrew the little church and we had to look for a new facility and we found some property over on Bay Street in Costa Mesa. It was inadequate but we thought we could make it work. They then informed me about the prophecy and they said, "No, the church is to be on the bluff overlooking the bay." And I said, "Well, you know, prophecy... There can be, you know..." I said, "We are going to be overlooking Bay Street." And they said, "No, it was overlooking the bay."

The city of Costa Mesa rejected our conditional use permit for the property on Bay Street and we went into the planning department to get our plans that we had given to them. Actually it looked so good that we sold our church and so we were going to have to move out. And so here we were stuck. We thought we were going to be able to build a new church and meet there. But now we were going to have to move out because we sold the church. I thought, man, here we have a growing church and here the pastor sells the church out from under the congregation! They are going to wonder what in the world they got hold of with me.

So we went in to get the plans and the lady said, "You know, maybe you could move to our church." She said, "The state has bought it for the freeway and we are going to be building a new church. And you could probably get our church." She said, "You know, it is the Newport Harbor Lutheran Church. It is on the bluff overlooking the bay." And so, we were in the Lutheran church on the bluff overlooking the bay for two

years, while we were building the little chapel a block away. Then we went on the radio and one by one the prophecies were fulfilled.

Now the prophecy came as comfort to those people who were so discouraged and ready to quit. Prophecy is given for comfort, for exhortation, and for edification. I believe that the gift of prophecy is a legitimate, valid gift for today.

"And he that prophesieth, let him prophesy according to the proportion of faith that God gives to him," says Romans 12.

Father, we desire and covet earnestly the gifts of Your Holy Spirit, that they might be in operation in our lives and in the church. Lord, that even as in the church of Acts that was guided and directed by the Holy Spirit and often times through the use of the gift of prophecy, Lord, so guide and direct our church and our lives by the Holy Spirit. Lord, we want to be Spirit led, Spirit filled, Spirit directed. As a church, Lord, we recognize that Jesus Christ is the head of His body, the church. And we, in acknowledging that, submit ourselves Lord, to that which You have purposed and that which You desire for Your church. Guide us, Lord, by Your Holy Spirit. May we indeed become everything You want Your church to be--a light in this darkness and salt to preserve in this rotting world. Lord, fill us with Your Spirit. Open our hearts to all that You have for us. May we not come short in any good gift. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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