

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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A Prophetic-Utterance

by Dan Trygg

“Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are varieties of servings, and the same Lord. And there are varieties of in-workings, but the same God, the One in-working all things in all persons. But to each one is given the disclosure of the Spirit for the common good (‘carrying together’). For, on the one hand, to one is given a word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another a word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; to a different person a faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healings by the one Spirit, and to another in-workings of powerful-acts, and to another a prophetic-utterance, and to another distinguishings of spirits, to a different person kinds of tongues, and to another an interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit in-works all these things, distributing to each one individually according as He wills.” 1 Corinthians 12:4-11

“Thus Samuel grew and Yahweh was with him and let none of his words fail. ²⁰ And all Israel from Dan even to Beersheba knew that Samuel was confirmed as a prophet of Yahweh.”

1 Samuel 3:19-20

“The Spirit do not y’all quench; prophetic-utterances do not y’all despise; but all-things y’all test-out-by-trial -- the good-thing y’all hold-fast; from every visible-form of unsoundness y’all hold (yourselves) away from.”

1 Thessalonians 5:19-22

“Knowing this first, that every prophecy of Scripture does not come to be by one’s own interpretation, for not by a will of man was a prophecy formerly produced, rather people being carried-along by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.” 2 Peter 1:20,21

We have been looking at the temporary gifts of the Holy Spirit, described by Paul in 1 Corinthians 12:4-11. I have mentioned that there is some disagreement whether spiritual gifts are given permanently, ...or temporarily to meet a specific need. There seems to be evidence for both. Certain gifts must be evidenced repeatedly over time in order to become recognized and to be effective. Others could be either a dominant regular expression of the Spirit, or a one-time manifestation. These particular gifts in this context seem to be distributed by the Holy Spirit as He wills on a particular occasion, the gathering together of the Body. The gifts listed here all have a revelatory element, which lends them especially to this temporary usage. **The question we all must ask is, “What is the Lord disclosing to me? What is it He wants to do, here and now?”** Among these temporary giftings listed is “a prophetic-utterance”.

What is meant by this label, a “prophetic-utterance”? We have little more to go on than the *names* of the gifts themselves, and possibly examples where they are used in the lives of Bible characters. There is no systematic definition given for most of the gifts listed in the NT passages dealing with spiritual gifts. Often the elaborate descriptions given by some are nothing more than personal opinion, some of it very imaginative and misguided. Some teach that prophecy is nothing more than preaching. Others emphasize the foretelling of future events. A study of the meaning of the term in the Greek language, and in the background of OT usage, reveals that *both* elements can be evident at times. **A prophetic utterance can embody either a *forthtelling* of God’s word, revealed to the prophet-mouthpiece for the recipient-hearers, ...or it can include a *foretelling* of something yet to come, which the recipients are to prepare for or be warned of. Generally, the predictive element of prophetic utterances is unconditional, i.e., they invariably *will* come to pass.** That is one of the ways to test a prophet. If his or her predictions do not come to fulfillment, then they are not speaking from God (Deut. 18:21,22). **Sometimes, however, the message may be conditional in nature**, meaning that if the recipient takes heed to the warning, the catastrophe can be prepared for or avoided altogether (Jer. 18:7-10). **The most significant quality of a prophetic utterance is that it is *not* the prophet-speaker's own invention. It is a revelation given to the person from God, which he or she is to faithfully pass along to the intended recipient.** In this way, a prophet is described as a spokesperson, or a “mouth”, for God (Jer. 15:19; cf. Ex. 4:15-17; 7:1,2). **The other significant aspect of prophecy is that it is *spoken, or communicated in some fashion.*** The word itself is from two Greek words which literally mean “to speak before”. The word “before” could refer to either “in front of” someone, or it could be taken as something spoken “ahead of time”. **Until it is *spoken, it is only revelation. Only when it is expressed is it truly “prophetic”.*** This is why I chose to translate the word as “prophetic-utterance”. It is important to say, however, that spoken communication is not the only method used by prophetic people. Sometimes they will “act out” their prophetic message in some way (e.g., Ezk. 4:1-17; Acts 21:10,11), or express it through music (1 Chron. 25:1), or write it in a letter (2 Chron. 21:12-19).

There are “prophets” and there are “prophetic-utterances” (prophecies). A prophecy is a revelation given by God to be spoken or communicated to another. You may experience this one or more times, and yet it may not be a regular, consistent way in which God works through you. This is to be a somewhat widely distributed experience under the new covenant (Acts 2:17). **A prophet, or prophetess, is someone who *regularly or repeatedly* receives and communicates such revelations from God. They become noticeable because they are used by God in this way, and the things they say are borne out in experience.** They are identifiable because of both the *source* of their revelations, and by virtue of the *outworking* of what they say (1 Sam. 3:19,20). God can reveal His message to

us in many different ways, but **typically a prophetic revelation is *not* an insight into, or an application of, a passage of the Bible.** Prophetic revelation comes through visions (e.g., the “opened eye” -- Num. 24:3) and dreams, an inner voice, or even through inspired music (Num. 12:6-8; 24:4; Acts 2:17; 10:9-16; Mic. 3:8; Ezk. 38:1; 1 Chr. 25:1-6). Often the communication from God can have elements that are obscure, and must be interpreted (Num. 12:6-8; Acts 21:10,11).

What about the function of this gift in the Body? Again, **both the foretelling and forthtelling aspects can play a part.** In 1 Corinthians 14:3, Paul says that *a prophetic utterance in the Body is addressed to people for their edification, exhortation and consolation.* He also alludes to the fact that often *a prophetic-utterance will disclose the secrets of the heart, will convict people of their sin, and will call them to account.* The amazing revelatory aspect of the gift cuts through all defenses, and the person knows that God has done this (1 Cor. 14:24,25; cf. Jn. 4:16-19,28-30). In the two places in the book of Acts where a noted prophet, Agabus, appears, his messages were clearly about future events (Acts 11:27-30; 21:10,11). *These prophetic messages were given to prepare for a physical or emotional trial.* In both cases, *the information given was to prepare the recipients for what would take place.* (Note that Paul did *not* change his course because of this revelation. He said that he was “bound in the Spirit” to go to Jerusalem, yet the Holy Spirit was repeatedly warning him that bonds and affliction was awaiting him [20:22,23]. He must have been quite confident that he was on the right course. In this case, others felt that this was a warning not to go, but Paul knew otherwise.)

How is it to be used? In 1 Corinthians 14:26-33, **prophecy is one of the gifts to be exercised when the church gathers.** It is not to dominate the entire time. **There are to be only two or three speaking in the meeting, each in turn.** If one receives a revelation while another is speaking, the one talking is to be quiet and give place to the other person. The apostle specifically states that “the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets”, so there is to be no excuse for inappropriate over-zealousness in insisting on sharing “my revelation”. It is a matter of maturity and self-control. This also implies that often everything was *not* shared with the entire group, and the group was OK with that. In spite of the claim to have heard from God, **all prophetic-utterances are to be evaluated,** both for consistency with known revealed truth, and for the discernment as to how to understand what is being shared.

It is possible to hinder the expression of the Holy Spirit by making no room for the use of this valuable gift. Paul specifically warns against despising, or devaluing, this gift (1 Thess. 5:20). On the other extreme, an indiscriminating over-zealousness for this gift can lead a group into danger, as well. That is why all utterances are to be tested, by Scripture and/or experience. Without discernment, it would be too easy for the enemy to lead a group into error, foolishness, or moral compromise. For this reason, **Paul exhorts the Body to test things out, hold fast to what is good, but to steer away from anything that is visibly unsound** (1 Thess. 5:19-22). As we have mentioned in the past, one of the goals of maturity is discernment (Heb. 5:14; Eph. 4:13,14). Therefore, we must have the leeway to sort things out for ourselves, or we will never develop that quality. **Instead of inventing all kinds of protective “control measures”, Paul was comfortable entrusting believers to God and His word to build up the disciples and to give them the parameters they needed to find their way, in conjunction with the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the Body** (Acts 20:32; Jn. 14:26; Eph. 4:15,16).

What if I make a mistake? In the OT, people who claimed to be prophets were to be *stoned*, if they spoke presumptuously, or if their prophecy was wrong (Deut. 18:20-22). This is *not* advocated under the new covenant, but it definitely indicates that **it is a serious matter to claim to be a “prophet”.** There is a *very* high standard there. **In I Corinthians 12, the “disclosure of the Spirit” is *not* a permanent gifting, but a momentary revelation. We make no claim to be a “prophet”. All we do is report what we saw or heard, or what came to our mind. Beware of using “God-talk” too freely.** We should not say, “thus says the Lord”, or, “the Lord told me”, if it is *not* something He actually said. It is better to couch our words as “I heard”, or “I saw”, or “I think that God may be saying...” The need to evaluate and test prophetic utterances and “hold fast to what is good” (1 Thess. 5:21) indicates that **they are not necessarily always as precise as would be expected of an established prophet.** We need to discover *how* to use our gifts as individuals, and to understand how to facilitate the ministry of the Spirit as a group. **There must be freedom to take risks, and possibly be wrong, ...and even to learn from our mistakes..., without fear of condemnation.**

What does this mean in practical experience? Again, **there will be a disclosure of the Holy Spirit** to someone in the group. **If it is prophetic, this revelation is meant to be shared** with the person, or the entire group. **If we withhold the expression of this revelation, we quench or hinder the Holy Spirit's desire to work** in that situation. **We must be faithful to take the risk to step out and share what we may be hearing or “seeing”.** Only by doing so can we determine if it is from God, or not (1 Cor. 14:29). Only by doing so can the person it is meant for “have the secrets of his heart disclosed and will fall on his/her face and worship God, declaring that God is certainly among you” (1 Cor. 14:24,25). **It starts with the inner disclosures of the Spirit, ...then it is up to you to respond to what He is doing inside by expressing it outwardly.** Once it is communicated, then we can determine if (1.) it is consistent with the Scriptures; (2.) it is confirmed by others, or seems to fit the situation; (3) it is to be waited on in prayer; or (4.) it needs to be modified, clarified, corrected or rejected as erroneous. **We will all benefit through this process.**