

## Prophecy And Discerning Of Spirits

"and to another prophecy; and to another discerning of spirits ..." (1 Cor. 12:10).

Out of nine gifts there are four couplets: gifts which are peculiarly and distinctively related to each other. These are "word of wisdom and word of knowledge," "gifts of healings and miracles," "prophecy and discerning of spirits," and "tongues and interpretation of tongues." The third of these couplets is the subject of our present examination.

Some are disposed to equate a prophet as a teacher. Indeed prophets ARE teachers but the equation is NOT THE SAME. A teacher might, or might not have been inspired, but a true prophet was always inspired. The word from which "prophecy" comes means "to bubble up like a fountain," thus moved by the Holy Spirit. This is aptly expressed by Peter's words "men spake from God being moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Pet. 1:21). In Moses' exchange with Pharaoh, Aaron was Moses' prophet. Aaron's role was described by God Himself, and in calling Aaron, Moses' prophet, God defined for us the word. "And thou shalt speak unto him, and put words in his mouth ..." (Ex. 5:15; 17:1).

Three words, close in meaning, are found in the New Testament: "prophet" (prophetes, Acts 13:1), "prophecy" (propheteia, 1 Cor. 12:10), and "prophesy" (propheteuo, 1 Cor. 13:9). The "prophet" is the man (prophetess, woman) who receives and speaks; prophecy is the message he receives and gives; prophesy is the actual act of speaking the message. When Jesus ascended on high and "gave gifts" to men, one of those gifts was "prophets." There were prophets in the church at Antioch, as well as at Corinth (Acts 13:1; 1 Cor. 14:29).

Prophecy could be either foretelling or forthtelling. When the prophet "foretold" he opened the curtain to the future such as the prophet Agabus when he predicted a famine would occur in Judaea and that Paul would be bound in Jerusalem (Acts 11:27-28; 21:10-11). When the prophecy was forthtelling, it explained the past, such as Paul's explanation of David's words from Psalm 16: "Thou wilt not leave my soul unto Hades, neither wilt thou give thy holy one to see corruption" (Ps. 16:8-10; Acts 2:25-32). Because the prophet was moved by the Holy Spirit, his message was inerrant; no mistakes could be there, else the "prophecy" was false and no "prophecy" at all!

Because the genuine almost always is copied and counterfeited, this holds true with prophets and prophecy. There were true prophets but there also were those who were false. We remember the false prophets who advised Ahab, king of Israel and Jehoshaphat, king of Judah to do battle against the Syrians at Ramothgilead, promising them "glorious victory" (2 Chron. 18:10-11). They lied and their "prophecy" was proven false. Moses gave guidelines whereby one might determine who was or was not a true prophet (Deut. 18:21-22).

But when a prophecy was uttered and its outcome was in the future and one was denied the ability to judge it true or false by the consequence of its outcome, two immediate guidelines could be utilized, one of which is available to man today, that is God's word. We are to "try the spirits, whether they be of God" (1 Jn. 4:1). If a "prophet" spoke or speaks something contrary to God's known message, we know that man to be a false prophet for it is written, "Let God be true and every man a liar" (Rom. 3:4). But, in the first century before the New Testament was complete, sometimes Christians needed an immediate, inerrant way to know whether the prophecy was true or false. That need was satisfied by the gift "the discerning of spirits." A man who had this gift could immediately know whether a prophet spoke truth or falsehood. That gift was needful for in that era, as in olden days "false prophets arose the people even as among you shall men arise, speaking perverse things to draw away disciples often them" (2 Pet. 2:1-2).

There was a need in the first century church for both these men: prophets to unveil to Christians God's will and discerners of spirits who could instantly tell whether a man spake from God or from himself. As in every age, God supplied that need with these two gifts: "prophecy and discernings of spirits."

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