

The Most Abused Gift

Introduction

1969 I was 8 years old. We attended First Baptist Church of Oak Cliff in Dallas Texas. Very conservative non- charismatic church. Gifts weren't discussed, taught or experienced.

There was a field next to our church that was full of high weeds, cockaburs and rocks. But just across the field was the Oak Cliff Assembly of God Church.

With the curiosity and innocence of an 8 year old my friends and I asked our Sunday School Teacher why there were two churches and not just one. My Sunday School teacher was a scary looking man on a good day. But he lowered his glasses....stared us down...looked around to see if anyone could hear him.....and then with sternness in his eyes...He said, "Boys don't you ever go over there. Those people...well....the Holy Ghost is over there. There's stuff happening over there that you don't want to see. Stay away from the AG church."

Two weeks later, two of my friends and I were ready to launch operation Ghost hunt. Some friends covered for us..The AG church started 30 minutes before our service and it just so happened that our Sunday School ended just in time...it was clandestine.

Now we wore suits to church in those days and by the time me and my buddies had crossed the field we were covered in cockaburs and dirt. We snuck into the back of the church and were ready for anything.We weren't sure that we would ever get back. So we waited and watched...trying to blend in.....and then it happened.....nothing. Their service seemed just like ours. Choir, hymns, drawn out teaching....nothing interesting to us at all. Not evidence of Holy Ghost events...we were devastated.

We ran back through the field and vowed to never tell anyone what we had seen.....which was nothing. But we were legendary for many months following. We vowed to secrecy and we were rewarded with undeserved fame.

So we all come to this topic with prior experiences and lenses that shape our view.

It is interesting to me how much interest there is in the demonstrable gifts of the Spirit. Tongues, Prophecy and Healing. Some churches spend all of their time focusing on these three gifts and miss the point and the relationship with the Holy Spirit Himself.

I have said before that many people seek these gifts in order to draw attentions to their own spiritual maturity and to reassure themselves regarding their salvation. But we have been discussing the importance of these gifts being used at the discretion of the Holy Spirit for His purposes. In fact, gifts are not a sign of spiritual maturity.....Spiritual fruit is.

The newest most immature believer in Christ can and often does manifest incredible gifts of the Spirit. Many believers who claim spiritual maturity lack any evidence of Spiritual fruit in their lives.

If you want people to see your spiritual maturity, it is not the gifts that you should seek....rather you should allow the Holy Spirit to grow love, joy, peace, patience kindness goodness and self control

We are warned in Scriptures to not seek the Gifts of the Holy Spirit for our personal purposes. Seek the gifts for power to advance the gospel of Jesus....not to advance your gospel.

We are going to look today at several examples of the use of prophecy in this church....Some very encouraging and uplifting....others no so much. Sometimes it is easier to see and learn through examples.

Prophetic Word when I was sick

YMCA at Kylie's dance class

The Word of Prophecy... Prophecy is speaking forth the mind and heart of God as revealed by the Holy Spirit. Prophecy means hearing what God is saying and communicating that revelation to the Church in an appropriate time and manner. A message of encouragement from God delivered through a human vessel to another person or persons.

Prophecy is NOT It is not.. Discouragement...correction...rebuke..or judgment The Spiritual Gift of the Word of Prophecy... Unlike OT warnings and rebukes Are words of encouragement and comfort The Holy Spirit...flowing through us... To encourage one another.. Literally putting courage into someone Paul said it this way... 1 Corinthians 14:3 (ESV) 3 On the other hand, the one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation.

Prophecy is a really simple concept in the Bible....much like praying in tongues or a prayer tongue....simple until man tried to redefine it. I believe that there is no longer an office of prophet. God has already revealed to us what He desires that we know. There is no new Scripture coming. False prophets have led many astray. Mohammed, Joseph Smith, L Ron Hubbard, Joel Olsteen, Oprah Winfrey, Deepak Chopra, Ann Voskamp, Eckhart Tolle, Benny Hinn and so many others have claimed to have special revelations from God. There are no new prophets with new revelations from God.

1 Corinthians 14:12 (ESV) 12 So with yourselves, since you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit, strive to excel in building up the church.

1 Corinthians 14:26 (ESV) 26 What then, brothers? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up.

1 Corinthians 14:33 (ESV) 33 For God is not a God of confusion but of peace.

1 Corinthians 14:40 (ESV) 40 But all things should be done decently and in order.

Paul told those at Corinth, I don't want you to be ignorant about the gifts....and we understand that.

But just because Satan has twisted the truth about the Prophetic Word....doesn't mean that we should ignore the gift.

As we have said, if we are all in and the Holy Spirit wants to give us a gift, we should embrace that gift without fear or limitation with everything we have.

But for most of us, the demonstrable gifts of prophecy, tongues and healing are so maligned that we would just prefer to skip it.

The source of this confusion, I believe, comes from people who want to use the gifts....particularly the public gifts...to promote themselves.

Since the moment the gifts were first manifested, some have tried to own them and use them for their own financial gain and fame.

The gifts....particularly the gifts of prophecy.... have been used to separate people, destroy churches, lead people away from God and bring fame and fortune to many schemers in the name of God.

The problem with prophecy is that we think prophecy is future telling or fortune telling. We read about the Old Testament prophets who warned Israel in God's name and predicted future events.

Yet the gift of the Holy Spirit...that we call prophecy... has nothing to do with future telling or fortune telling.

Remember prophecy...the prophetic word...the gift given to us by the Holy Spirit is not to tell us the future...We know the future from the Scriptures. The prophetic word is a message of encouragement from God...through one believer to another. It is always to encourage and build them up. Always. It is never a rebuke....never a scolding..never a revealer of sin....never a word that implies God dissatisfied or pointing out our sins.

Usually the person prompted by the Holy Spirit to share a prophetic word has not idea of the situation or the meaning of the message. They are just used by God to share the message....Not interpret it....manipulate it or change it. They cannot help you interpret it and if they bring an action step to the process discount it but test it.

Usually the messenger and the receiver have no idea of what the word or phrase means when they first hear it. It doesn't make a lot of sense. It must be taken to God for processing and usually no action is ever required in the short term. In my experience, when people add an action to what they claim is a prophetic word from God....it is usually a manipulation.

When God gives you a prophetic word for someone else...He is not inviting you into the situation at all. You are not the interpreter or the problem solver....You are the encourager from God and nothing else. Don't you dare add to it or try to impose an action or an explanation. It is to your place. God will lead...he doesn't need you to mess it up.

Tell the story of the call to ministry and Bruce.

So if you believe that God has prompted you to share a prophetic word.....expect it to be received with a healthy dose of skepticism and don't be offended by it.

We are instructed by God to test what is given to us. If that offends someone who claim to have a prophetic gift...so be it.

If you are on the receiving end....no one speaks a word of prophecy OVER you. They have never been given that authority. They can share a word with you...They can speak a word of prophecy to you....but the term speaking over you implies that they have the authority to make something occur. I believe that such a claim is a red flag.

Some people have had their lives ruined because they believe a "Prophet" has spoken a WORD OF TRUTH over them that is from God and cannot be wrong. When someone wants to speak over you...in my experience they want control You have to know how to handle it....Pastor Ed is going to share one of his experiences.

Worship Team speaking over Ed

I once had someone try to speak over me in a language that I did not understand and then tell me what was said. I immediately rejected it.

In my experience, if God wants me to know something..He has many ways to get my attention and I hear the same prophetic word in different circumstances and from different people.

Prophetic Word (about Remnant) Many years ago at another church I was telling the story of how God reveals His will in our lives. I told the church that I believed God had revealed a word to me, but I had no idea what it meant. I told them the word and that it came with no explanation or action.

For three years....the term God gave me a term came up in various manners at least 30 times. Often in ways not even related to church. But I would notice...there is that words again....God what does this mean?

Over time, I came to know that this word....shared with me in prophecy....repeated many times in conversations on all kinds of topics....and seemed to keep popping up in Scripture....was clearly in my Spirit coming from God. But I had no prompting to do anything or act upon it. It was clear to me that I was just to notice it and study it. Periodically the word would come up conversations and in my Scripture study. I would hear a sermon and they would talk about it. I noticed it, but didn't know if, when, or how to apply it. So I just kept praying and trying to understand.

Three years later....God...had been preparing me for three years...It is incredible. The word given to me was Remnant. For three years I had studied every scripture that included that word. I had come to understand that the Remnant was protected by God because they held on to the truth and trusted God when everyone else didn't.

Then one day, I was told to water down God's word in order to try to attract more people to church. God had me ready for that moment. I had already been prayed up and knew that if the moment ever came I would stand for God's truth no matter what. In this case, the price was high. But I walked away and God led us to start Remnant.

When the elders asked what we should name our new church....I had no doubt....Every time I hear or think about this church, I remember how encouraged I was by the prophetic word spoken to me some 9 years ago. When times get tough, I just remember that this church was God's idea not mine.

Let's rejoin Paul

1 Corinthians 14:1-5 (ESV) 14 Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy. 2 For one who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but to God; for no one understands him, but he utters mysteries in the Spirit. 3 On the other hand, the one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation. 4 The one who speaks in a tongue builds up himself, but the one who prophesies builds up the church. 5 Now I want you all to speak in tongues, but even more to prophesy. The one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets, so that the church may be built up.

Paul is saying... the public setting of a worship service... Prophecy is better than tongues
Well at least tongues without an interpretation

1 Corinthians 14:6 (ESV) 6 Now, brothers, if I come to you speaking in tongues, how will I benefit you unless I bring you some revelation or knowledge or prophecy or teaching?

Paul reiterates... If tongues are not interpreted..they are not beneficial in public worship

1 Corinthians 14:9 (ESV) 9 So with yourselves, if with your tongue you utter speech that is not intelligible, how will anyone know what is said? For you will be speaking into the air.

He continues..with a focus on others. Speaking in tongues may build you up..and that's ok
But it doesn't encourage or build up someone. Unless it is interpreted. Paul reminds them..in the public setting....the gifts are not about you...

1 Corinthians 14:12 (ESV) 12 So with yourselves, since you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit, strive to excel in building up the church.

Every public display of the Gifts should be focused on... Building up others in the room...not yourself

We looked at this verse a few weeks ago 1 Corinthians 14:22-23 (ESV) 22 Thus tongues are a sign not for believers but for unbelievers,

Speaking in a foreign language about God... Shares the message with those who don't know it. That is the tongue that happened at Pentecost

1 Corinthians 14:22-23 (ESV) While prophecy is a sign not for unbelievers but for believers.

But a word of encouragement... A perfect word..at exactly the right moment.. Builds up the believer

1 Corinthians 14:22–23 (ESV) 23 If, therefore, the whole church comes together and all speak in tongues, and outsiders or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are out of your minds?

But he notes that prophecy though for the believer May still reach the unbeliever.

1 Corinthians 14:24–25 (ESV) 24 But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or outsider enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all, 25 the secrets of his heart are disclosed, and so, falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you.

1 Corinthians 14:19 (ESV) 19 Nevertheless, in church I would rather speak five words with my mind in order to instruct others, than ten thousand words in a tongue.

The Paul moves to the structure of a Proper Service

1 Corinthians 14:26–28 (ESV) 26 What then, brothers? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up. 27 If any speak in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn, and let someone interpret. 28 But if there is no one to interpret, let each of them keep silent in church and speak to himself and to God.

All things in the Worship Service...should be done to build each other up Your prayer language of tongues...is between you and God And Paul says should stay that way in worship services You can pray to God in the Spirit later

He doesn't say...prophecy is better don't speak in tongues In fact tongues with interpretation do build up the body Rather he says...keep your prayer language to yourself..in public worship

Also note that the person with the tongue.. Has complete control of the expression of that gift The can control if and when it happens These are not seizures of unrestrained tongues

1 Corinthians 14:29–33 (ESV) 29 Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said. 30 If a revelation is made to another sitting there, let the first be silent. 31 For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged, 32 and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets.

Then Paul sums his entire argument up in one verse He looks at the Church gone wild at Corinth He looks at the culture trying to disrupt the church He hears about the church services that are beginning to look like Pagan services at the Temple of Aphrodite And he sums up his entire argument with this..

1 Corinthians 14:33 (ESV) 33 For God is not a God of confusion but of peace. As in all the churches of the saints,

Many criticize churches for not letting the Spirit run wild. They complain that doing so quenches the Spirit. When the Spirit is present... The supernatural presence of God is palpable But there is order..not chaos That is exactly NOT what Scriptures teach. There is a sense of Peace....not confusion

If someone is trying to stir up the crowd in order to build a frenzie....for the helaing or gift to manifest.....remember...God is a God of order not chaos. Those trying to make a circus of God's house are trying to get you to operate in your emotions instead of your Spirit.

God is not a God of confusion. When you receive a prophetic word and you have confirmed in your spirit that it is from God....you don't have cart blanche. You are still to test the Spirits. You take what you believe that you have heard from God and you engage other more mature believers and the leadership of your church to help you confirm before taking any action.

Sadly, some years ago, this church was severely damaged because this step was skipped. I am going to ask Pastor Ed to come up and share with us a story of why it is so important to seek Godly council before action even if you believe you have heard from God.

Ed tells story of funeral....

God is not a God of confusion. If you have heard from God it will resonate with others who have the Holy Spirit in them as well. Going ahead on your own, even as the lead pastor, can have devastating consequences.

Ed has another story to share with us about the importance of interpreting and applying the prophetic word of God in a manner that aligns with Scripture.

Ed tells story of the public prophet.

Message wasn't encouraging, didn't build up the believers and should have been dismissed before being shared.

Tell the story of staying open during Covid.

I knew that I had heard from God, but I prayed through it. Our elders understood it. It resonated with Scriptures.....It was in alignment with the direction of our church. Some have said that I was cocky and conceited....but I was just confident in what I knew God wanted us to do.

Even so, we weren't without caution and we did not try to force anyone to come or try to dare God to give someone Covid. We just knew that God wanted this church open....no matter what happened. I can't speak for other churches because God didn't speak to me about them. He just made it clear what He desired for Remnant.

So what does the mean for Remnant?

Our Worship Services will not be a place of confusion It will be a place where the gifts are expressed in a manner that honors God

The Grace of Tongues...the prayer language can be saved for your quiet time with God It is between you and God... Doesn't make sense to anyone..including you And is a distraction to those around you

The Gift of Tongues...a public tongue..will only be allowed in our services.. When there is interpretation.. And the interpretive gift must be evaluated as well

So if someone speaks publicly in our services in a tongue We will ask if there is an interpreter present If someone believes they have been given an interpretation We will ask them to share it privately with one of our elders or pastors So we can test it before it impacts the church If it passes that oversight they will be allowed to share it with the congregation.

If there is not interpreter present...we follow God's Word

1 Corinthians 14:28 (ESV) 28 But if there is no one to interpret, let each of them keep silent in church and speak to himself and to God.

If your tongue is disruptive without interpretation...we will silence it.

Our Pastors and Elders have the Spiritual Gift of Discernment of Spirits The supernatural gift to be able to tell What is from God and what is not. God gave that gift to them..to protect the body

1 John 4:1-6 (ESV) 4 Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. 2 By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, 3 and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already. 4 Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. 5 They are from the world; therefore they speak from the world, and the world listens to them. 6 We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us; whoever is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

So at Remnant...we speak of being... Spirit filled with seat belts on... Our public worship services will not be circuses But the Spirit of God is welcome here.. With all the gifts, all the expressions, anything He wants to do.

We will test the spirits as directed in Scripture... Public tongues must have public interpretation.. A word of prophecy must be tested as well

The exercise of spiritual gifts in the church should always be done under the Authority that God has placed in order.

Women's Conference in Tampa

Woman who claimed the prophetic gift met with the elders.

Our worship services will be engaging and comforting for all who come Both seekers and believers... in a safe place to take their next step toward Jesus. Paul closes with...

1 Corinthians 14:37-40 (ESV) 37 If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord. 38 If anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized. 39 So, my brothers, earnestly desire to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. 40 But all things should be done decently and in order.

The same process will be in place for a Word of Prophecy If someone believes the Holy Spirit in them... Has a message to be delivered to the church family We will ask them to share it with one of our elders and pastors.

If it aligns with scripture..is a word of encouragement..and is done in order.. And if it is tested and passes, they will then be allowed to share it with the family

Why do we have those processes in place? Is that because the Elders/Pastors want to control everything? Sort of.. We want to ensure that false prophecy or tongue interpretations doesn't damage our church

We don't want to give Satan and opportunity to put lies in the mind of our folks We live in a culture not too dissimilar from Corinth Satan is always trying to destroy God's work at Remnant

Matthew 7:15 (ESV) 15 "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves.

They come looking like sheep...like us... Paul gave a very strong warning...

Acts 20:29-30 (ESV) 29 I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; 30 and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them.

They will arise from amongst our own selves Speaking Twisted things. Their attack will be verbal The spoken word misspoken Jesus said we will know them by their fruit They will try to lead you away with their lies...

Disguised as messages from God. We believe that those with a real Word of Prophecy... From the Holy Spirit to our church Will have no issues submitting their prophecy for testing.

Prophecy falls within the established authority structure of the church. Prophetic words come only from an heart of humility True followers of Christ should demand that their prophecy is examined and tested by others

With all the warning and confusion regarding Prophecy....you may be asking yourself....why would anyone want this gift? Doesn't feel like much of a gift to me.

The gifts should be sought because advancing the Kingdom of God is more important than anything else....and we know we need help to do it.

Just because certain gifts are misused....doesn't mean they can't be used correctly.

I think a major obstacle for us...is to decide why we want more of the Holy Spirit It is because we want to make sure we are saved? Is it because we want to be healed? Is it because we want to use that gift to promote us? Do we want the power of God to advance His kingdom..or ours?

Do you seek the power of the Holy Spirit... For your purposes...or His?

Closing

Some need to ask God to allow you to be open... To the gift of prophecy.. To not allow human error or influence... Prior experience or misuse.. As an excuse to discard this very powerful and favored Gift of the Spirit.

Some of you may come from churches Where disorder and chaos were used as evidence of the presence of the Holy Spirit Maybe you have judged other churches for maintaining order... And accused them of being less spiritual or quenching the Holy Spirit. When actually they were aligned with God's instructions

Others may have been suppressing their gift of a Word of Prophecy Out of fear that they might be wrong. You must trust that God will lead those who test the prophecy to truth IF the Holy Spirit speaks to you...be open to it. Those with a Word of Prophecy build up the body.. IF that is your gift..we need you to use it.

There is only one heart that receives the full measure of the Holy Spirit... It is the heart...fully surrendered to God... Repentant...broken...pursuing holiness... for the sole purpose of leading others to Jesus.

And desiring every bit of what the Holy Spirit wants to give you It is the heart of a Disciple...longing for everyone to know Jesus

Ezekiel 36:26-27 (ESV) 26 And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27 And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.

Acts 1:8 (ESV) 8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

Lets Pray