***The Gift of Prophecy
RO154-01***

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We are studying Romans 12:3-8. Our subject is "Service of the Body," and this is segment number 3.

**Apostles**

One of the spiritual gifts that was granted to the apostle Paul was that of apostleship. This gave him supreme authority over the local churches which he organized. Apostleship also gave the apostle special authority in guiding and teaching Christians everywhere in the known world at that time. Only men who had seen Jesus Christ alive after the resurrection could qualify for this gift of the Holy Spirit. You could not be an apostle unless you had seen Christ raised from the dead. For this reason, there are no apostles in the church today, and therefore there is no one with supreme authority over all believers everywhere. There is no such thing as apostolic succession because we don't have anybody today who has seen Christ alive.

**Arrogance**

The apostle Paul cautions the Christians in Rome, furthermore, against arrogance in terms of their spiritual gifts. These spiritual abilities are granted sovereignly by God the Holy Spirit at the point of salvation when a believing sinner is baptized by the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ, the church. Everyone who is a Christian has experienced the baptism of the Holy Spirit. If you have not, then you're on your way to hell. It is the baptism of the Holy Spirit that takes you out of Adam, and places you in Christ. That happens when you trust in Christ as Savior. And at that point in time, God gives you at least one of the nine spiritual gifts. Many of you obviously have more than one.

**Spiritual Gifts**

So, a spiritual gift is a special ability granted sovereignly by the Holy Spirit for the believer to use in Christian service during the church age. The same spiritual gifts, however, is used by the Holy Spirit in different ways in different circumstances. There are many people who have the gift of teaching – the spiritual gift of teaching, not the natural gift of teaching. The natural gifts of teaching is over here; and, the spiritual gift of teaching is over here. They are two different things. Somebody with a great gift of being able to teach reading, writing, and arithmetic couldn't make first base in trying to teach the realities of the Word of God. The spiritual gift of teaching, however, is applied under different circumstances to the degree of your own maturity of faith to the particular application. Some gifts of teaching are very apropos for children; for youth; or, for adults. There are great varieties within a single gift, almost without number. But God the Holy Spirit gives every believer the specific kind of spiritual gift he needs for the purpose and the plan that God has for that believer.

**Authentication Gifts**

You and I cannot serve God with a spiritual gift that we do not have then. And we cannot serve God with spiritual gifts which are not in operation today. There were more gifts in the early New Testament church, because there, there was the ability, not only of the apostle, but also the prophet, and of being able to speak foreign languages that you didn't know. There was the ability to have a word of knowledge of doctrine information that God would give certain people. There was a capacity to be able to interpret and to discern what was true and what was not. There were gifts of miracle healing that were necessary at that time. All of these were authentication gifts, and they were necessary until the New Testament had been written. There were authentication gifts, and there were the means by which God gave the information that's inside the Scriptures of the New Testament. Once all that had been collected, those gifts were discontinued. But certain just continued, and they were necessary, and are necessary for all Christian service today.

So, that is the background of what Paul is talking about here to these Christians in Rome. He is cautioning them to be very realistic about what they think they can do for God. One can engage in a very glamorous and impressive religious activity without any spiritual gift being in operation. You see a lot of that on religious television. It's just hype. It's showmanship. It's entertainment, but it has nothing to do with spiritual gifts of conveying God's viewpoints to people. There's an enormous amount of religious activity in which God has no part at all. And you should understand that. I realize that that causes you to recoil when you hear that, but there is an enormous amount of religious activity in which God is not involved at all. Some of the biggest churches in this city (in this metroplex) are religious operation that God is not involved with at all. All you have to do is be wrong on a very vital doctrine, like the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, and God walks out. And you have the biggest jumping, jiving operation going, with money pouring in, and people streaming in, carrying Bibles, singing praises; and, God's nowhere on the scene at all. It's just hype, entertainment, and super human promotion by an operator who has people conned into thinking that God is in their midst. This business of spiritual gifts is no little thing. If you're wrong on this, you will regret this as a Christian in eternity.

Paul's point is that we are all servants of God serving as He has equipped us to serve, and as He sends and enables us to do the job. So, there's no ground for anybody having a big head. There is only ground for spiritual humility. We have nothing, the Scripture says, but what we have received from another. There are no levels of superiority among Christians. There are only differences of spiritual gifts. And one spiritual gift is not more important than another spiritual gift. And one spiritual gift does not get more reward in heaven than another spiritual gift. This is one place that equality really exists. The believers are equal in terms of serving God. They all start on the same equal ground.

**Bring Glory to God**

Christian service, you should be aware, is not always glamorous, and it is not always a fun kick. Most of the time, it's pick-and-shovel work. The ultimate motivation in Christian service, of course, when it's properly done, is to bring glory to God. 1 Peter 4:11, therefore says, "If any man speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God gives, that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to Whom be praise and dominion forever and ever. Amen."

Satan and his demon angels, of course, are always on the prowl, seeking to prevent Christians from using their spiritual gifts in God's service, either through neglect or through leading that Christian into sin, so that his gift is neutralized.

So, today, we begin at Romans 12, picking it up at verse 4. Paul says, "Let me give you an illustration of what I'm talking about. This business of doing God's work through spiritual gifts that different Christians have. And, by the way, you notice that I used the word "Christian," which means that those of you who are new in the Christian life, you have a spiritual gift. Those of you who are old-timers, you have a spiritual gift. Those of you who are young people who are born-again, and you are but children, and you have been born-again, you have a spiritual gift, and your gift is operational at your stage of life commensurate with your circumstances and your situation.

**Many Members in one Body**

Verse 4 says, "For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office." Paul says, "For," which introduces an explanation of what he said up in verse 3 about Christians not being big-headed about themselves, and not thinking arrogantly and more highly of what they can do for God than they should be thinking. He says, "Just as," and he makes the comparison to the human body. The human body has something in the very nature of the case. The human body has a variety of things which the Greek Bible calls "melos." And that simply means "parts" of your body. Now, that's a self-evident fact that everyone understands: "For as we have many parts in one body." He uses the word "soma," which here refers to the human body. It is obvious that the human body is literally made up of thousands of intricately coordinating parts that make that body function.

However, he says, "Though it has all these parts, all of them do not have the same office." The word "office" in the Greek Bible looks like this. It's the Greek word "praxis," which means "function." The human body has different parts and the parts have various functions. There is no rivalry. There is no disharmony between the parts of the body, and they are dependent upon one another. If a part malfunctions, then the whole body is going to suffer. If a part decides to cut out and refuse to work, the body is going to be handicapped, and the body may die. Now, you keep making the application in your mind. You know where he's going. He's going to say that what is true of the human body is also true of the local church, and the body of Christ as a whole. If a part decides to cut out, the body is going to be handicapped. A Christian in in that body where God has placed it. And remember that your mother did not go to the baby store and say, "I'll take that nose. That's a nice pair of eyes. I'll have those eyes, and that's good hair. I'll have that hair. Oh, I love those toes. Let me have 10 of them." She didn't put all the pieces together. God put it together. God put all the parts of the body there, and you got what you saw. What you saw is what you got. What you saw is what you have. That's what God put together. That's a very important point about this comparison.

The local church is not people who are walking in and out, and deciding, "I'm going to be part of this, and I'm not going to be part of that." It's not people looking out there and saying, "Hey, we want you; and, we don't want you." It is God in His marvelous sovereignty bringing people into contact with a local church, and drawing them in by marvelous means. And we could spend the rest of this service of having one of you after another stand up and give us hair-raising, terribly exciting testimony on how, of all things, you ended up at Berean Memorial church. That was absolutely unbelievable. But it was clearly a guidance of the hand of God sovereignly patching you to this body.

Now, if God puts you in, it is not your right to say, "I don't like this arm that my mother bought me, and I'm going to cut it off," because you will handicap the body. And if you say, "I just don't like the way my heart beats. It sounds too rock-n-roll for me. I'm going to jerk it out. If you do it, the whole thing will die. You do not have the option to decide that you're not going to be part of something. And God puts you in a local church body, you better think twice when you decide that you're going to cut out. You better think twice when you're going to lay back and not be functional. The body is going to be hurt. You better think twice when you decide that you're not going to show up for the church services. That's part of the functioning of the body.

You can see the impact of absences, not only upon the individual who is absent, but on the rest of us, when you're not here. You better think twice when you decide to incapacitate us in some way such that you do not function within the body under a responsibility that you have, and that you've been called by God to perform here. In the physical human body, there is no rivalry and no disharmony. It all meshes together for the good of the whole body. And the body parts mutually seek to help and support each other, and carry their load. If you hit your finger with a hammer, your other hand will come over to comfort that finger, and to try to make it feel better. Your body is there to help itself so that one member reaches over to assist another member in its time of need. There is no competition for preeminence.

In the book of 1 Corinthians, the apostle Paul goes into greater detail about the ludicrousness of the parts of your human body deciding that they're going to be chief in the body. The body can't decide: "I want to be nothing but a mouth. I just want to be one big mouth, and that's all. I want to be just a hand. I want to be a hand. I just want to be a big eye that looks and sees everything. And Paul says, "Isn't that ridiculous? What kind of a body would that be, and how could it function?"

So his point is that God puts together coordinated parts. Don't try to be something you shouldn't be in the body. Only when a part goes insane, like a cancer cell does, then it begins attacking the body, and thereby it destroys itself. And when a Christian goes insane spiritually, he becomes a cancer cell in the local church, and he starts destroying everything around it. It works exactly the same way. So, this is a very significant analogy.

**Unity, Diversity, and Mutuality**

Paul is stressing, really, three things about the human body in his analogy with the body of Christ in the local church. He's stressing, first of all, that the human body is a unity. It has to function as a whole. The same is true for the local church. It has a diversity. It has many different kinds of parts to do the job. This is the same as the local church. And it has a mutuality. The parts of the body take care of one another. And this is the same in the local church. These features are now applied, in the next verse, to the body of Christ, the church.

Paul says, in Romans 12:5: "So," meaning "in like manner – applying this demonstration:" "We being many." The word "many" is two Greek words, "hoi polloi." That means "the many." Some people have picked the phrase up in English. When I was a teenager, I used to go around and talk about the "hoi polloi," and I meant the ritzy folks – the folks that lived up in these high-rises, and the important people, and the wealthy people. And I called them the "hoi polloi." Then I went to Greek school, and found that the "hoi polloi" are the common, ordinary Joes who are everybody. The "hoi polloi" is everybody – all the different folks. It's not the ritzy. It's the ordinary common people. And here it is reference to the mass of individual people – here, particularly Christians. All the mass of different believers are all members again of one body. All Christians in the age of the church are united in a single organism – not organization, but a single organism.

First of all, we are the body of Christ. All over the Metroplex area, part of our body in Christ is meeting. As we are meeting, all over this country they'll be meeting, and all over the world they'll be meeting. They are all part of that universal church, the body of Christ – the organism. We do have that organism expressed in local organizations. And that is another aspect and expression of the church. But Paul is saying something that is true about the organism, and therefore it must be true about the local organization as well.

"All of us," he says, "are members of one body. Even though we are individual Christians, we are one body:" where? We are one body in Christ. All church-age believers are placed into one body by an act of God the Holy Spirit, which happens at the point that you trust in Christ as your personal Savior. Now Satan has come along, and he has used this very precious truth to terribly distort it, and use it as an object to get Christians chasing rabbits again for things that don't exist.

Please notice 1 Corinthians 12:12-13, which tell us about how we are made a single body as believers in Christ: "For as the body is one (as the physical body is a single unit), and it has many members (many parts), and all the parts of that one body, being many, are still one body (they all coordinate as a single body), so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body." And he's speaking to Christians. And he's speaking in the past. All of us have been baptized by the Holy Spirit into one body: "Whether we be Jews or Greeks, whether we be bond or free. We've all been made to drink into one Spirit," which means that we've all been indwelt by the Holy Spirit permanently.

So, the next time you're out slumming, and you're visiting a charismatic meeting someplace, and you hear them talking about asking people to come forward who wish to have the baptism of the Holy Spirit, right away you should understand that these people are terribly disoriented to the Word of God, and they're chasing something that doesn't exist. They're promising people great power if they'll come forward. And that powerful preacher will put his hands upon them, and give them the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit comes to every believer at the point of salvation, and the Holy Spirit baptizes every believer into Christ. That's why you're going to heaven. Individual Christians, then, form a living organism, and the head of that living organism is Jesus Christ. Christ as our Head is a principle which is taught in Ephesians 1:22-23, Ephesians 5:23, Colossians 1:18, and 1 Corinthians 12:27. It is no secret in the Bible. We are the body of Christ, and He is our head. Therefore, He runs it, because the head runs the body.

So, verse 5 says, "We, though being many individual Christians, are yet a single organism in Christ, and every one members (every one of us, individually, are members, or parts) of one another." And the word "one another" is the Greek word lone "allelon," which means individual Christians being attached, and indebted, and dependent upon every other Christian. Why is that the case? Because each of us has a spiritual gift that the other believers in that group need. This mutual dependence is very clearly evident in the local church organization. God the Holy Spirit sovereignly brings together the different spiritual gifts in the local church so that church can execute its mission. Just because you are a local church doesn't mean that you have the same mission as the church down the block, or around the corner. Every local church has a distinct calling in God's vineyard. In order to execute that distinct calling, God then puts certain specific spiritual gifts within that local organization.

It is a serious matter, therefore, to cut out from the local church where God has placed you. Amputation is always traumatic, even when it's self-inflicted. And it may lead to the death of the member, and even to the death of the body. When God puts you in a local church, He has really led you there, and he has put you in the right place. You are the right member in the right church. We Christians in the local church congregation, then, belong to one another, and we had better take care of each other, and be loyal to one another. Every Christian profits spiritually from the ministry of the other believers in the congregation. We are mutually edified, and thereby, mutually take care of each other.

Some Christians don't leave the local church body, but instead they stay there, but they go into paralysis – a paralysis of inactivity. And that creates an incapacity in the church ministry. Here's a Christian that has a spiritual ability. He has one of the gifts, and it may be a critical gift that is very much needed. But he goes into paralysis. He goes about his own life. He goes about his own business. He does not get involved in doing the Lord's work with the ability that God has given him in that local church service. The only thing that preoccupies him is the next thing on his social calendar, and the next objective that he wants to reach in life.

Christians who use their spiritual gifts and fulfill their role in the local church are those who are spiritually enriched, and they are spiritually strengthened. Christians are not to seek unity, of course, in the local church. They're not to seek to ensure that everybody is nice to one another, but to recognize that unity already exists. It is God the Holy Spirit who has created the unity. Our job is not to create unity in the body. You don't have to create unity in your body. Generally, that's not the case. Now, you may have a brain malfunction, and then your body is uncoordinated, and it does not act as a unified whole. But generally the human body has a unity about it, and you don't have to create that unity. What you have to do is to be careful not to disrupt the unity of your body. You don't take drugs to blow out your brain so that the body cannot be coordinated in its function.

The same thing is true of the local church. We're already a unity. And the thing is that we are not running around seeking unity. What the Bible tells us is: "Don't do things to injure the unity that God the Holy Spirit has already created when He put you into that church."

Romans 14:19 says, "Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things with which one may edify another." You shouldn't do things that degrade and tear down other Christians. You should do things that build them up in spiritual things.

Ephesians 4:3 says, "Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace." Our job is to maintain the unity that God has already created.

The Word of God also tells us that: "As much as lies within us, we should live at peace with other Christians." I'm glad it says, "As much as lies within you," because it is not always possible to be at peace with other Christians. Some Christians are so far out of step with the Word of God, and with the Spirit of God, that the Bible says, "How can two walk together except they be agreed?" And you find that instead of being able to walk in unity with that person, though, he is part of your body, you are in conflict with him. And what you have is a sick member. This is when you have part of your body that gets sick, and you have to treat it and care for it accordingly. You can't throw it away. You still need it. But you have to try to get it healed. But you have to recognize that you will not have the peace that God has created and intended.

**The Judgment Seat of Christ**

The Judgment Seat of Christ is the time when you and I will be called to account for what we did with our spiritual gifts. We did not choose our own gift, but we must account for what we did with the gift that God the Holy Spirit decided to give us, as per what He intended for us to do in our Christian service. 2 Corinthians 5:10 is very clear about that: "For we must all appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ." That's what takes place after the rapture, and we are all caught up to meet the Lord in the air, and to go to heaven to meet our other brothers and sisters who have gone before us, to stand before His Judgment Seat (His Throne). And what will we do there? "That every one may receive the things done in his body, according to what he has done, whether it be good or bad – to receive rewards (we find from other Scripture), or to suffer loss of rewards, according to what you did in your body." What's he talking about? According to what you did with your spiritual gift? That's the issue. No gift is a cause for pride. Every gift is a cause for raising Jesus Christ to preeminence.

Assuming that you have a gift that you do not possess results in serving in the power of the old sin nature; producing human good; and, spewing arrogance on everybody around you. One proud, arrogant, bullheaded person in the local church, thinking that he has a spiritual capacity and a calling which he does not have, causes great injury to the cause of Christ, and to the effectiveness of that local body. And I can tell you that the devil is always stomping around in the bushes, seeing that he can get some Christians just that disoriented and that arrogant. We Christians are simply nothing apart from the Word of God that we know, and from the Holy Spirit, Who uses that word in our lives. So, stay cool, and let Jesus Christ, the Head, control His body.

Having said that, he is cautioning us not to think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think. That means don't think that you have some ability that you don't have for Christian service, and at the same time recognizing that the abilities of all other Christians are important, and recognizing that you didn't put yourself in that body. God put you into that local church. Therefore, you are there for a function. You can sit there in paralysis and hurt us all, or you can cut out and go someplace else, and hurt us all. And if enough of you do that, the whole body will die. The apostle Paul says, "This is serious business. You are members one of another. You are in the body of Christ." Therefore, he then proceeds, in verse 6, to be very specific about what he's talking about so that we don't misunderstand. And what he proceeds to tell us is: "Here's what I'm talking about. This is what I'm talking about in terms of spiritual gifts and Christian service."

In verse 6, he says, "Having then gifts." The word "having" is the Greek word "echo." It simply means "to possess something" – something which is a constant possession of the individual Christian. He is saying, "Now, since all of us do have a spiritual gift, since all of us are parts of the local church body, like we have parts of the human body," he says, "since all of us then have gifts (having then gifts)." The word "gifts" looks like this. It is the Greek word "charisma." You can see the word "charis" here which is the word for "grace." So, "charisma" is a grace gift. It's a special word used by God the Holy Spirit to describe an ability that God gives for Christian service. Paul is now going to describe some of those abilities.

These, furthermore, are sovereignly bestowed by God the Holy Spirit at the point of salvation. I stressed that last time, and I reiterate that again this week. This is not something that you can seek and decide for yourself. 1 Corinthians 12:4 says, "Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit." There are many different spiritual gifts, but one Holy Spirit who controls them. 1 Corinthians 12:11 said, "But all these work that one and the very same Spirit, dividing to every one severally as He will." That very clearly tells us that God the Holy Spirit decides what you can do in the way of spiritual service.

**Natural Abilities**

I caution you that this is not the natural abilities you have with which you are born. Some of you have natural abilities of every imaginable kind. Some of you have talents that are just spectacular. You can just do things. You have a natural ability. That is not what we're talking about.

Every Christian, however, does have at least one of the nine spiritual gifts which are in operation today. And all of these spiritual gifts that God places in a local church are to be used in a team function. It is a team effort. So, you how hard it is for us to play a football game, spiritually speaking, when two of you decide to cut out. And that leaves nine of us to play the game against a full stack on the other side of Satan and his forces. The spiritual gifts are a team effort, and we need all of them. And it is legitimate that we pray for certain spiritual gifts. We have one or two currently that we are very much short of. We are very much lacking. And it is an enormous hindrance to us because God the Holy Spirit has not left us with that particular gift that we need to take up the slack in this particular area of this ministry. Every Christian in the body of Christ has a position on the team.

Paul says, "Having then gifts differing" – these gifts are not all the same. The word differing looks like this: "diaphoros." This means "varying in kind." It refers to different spiritual gifts within the body. He says, "We have these according to the grace that is given to us." It is the favor that God has exercised through the Holy Spirit to give us, at some point in time, a spiritual gift. The word "give" looks like this: "didomi." This means "to receive something." But I want to point out to you that this is in the aorist tense, which means that it happened at some point in time. That's when you got the spiritual gift. You didn't always have it. That point in time was when you trusted in Christ the Savior.

I want to point out to you that this in the Greek language is a passive word, which means that you didn't take it, but someone else gave it to you. God the Holy Spirit decided to give you this gift. We have a spiritual principle laid out here. Spiritual gifts are not natural abilities. They are supernatural capacities provided for God's work. That is indicated to us in several Scriptures: 1 Corinthians 12:6; Ephesians 4:7; and, 1 Peter 4:10. These are gifts (or capacities of service) given to us by God's grace.

**The Gift of Prophecy**

Then he starts listing them. First he says, "We have different gifts in the local body, as God the Holy Spirit decides to give us gifts, whether prophecy." Some people have the gift of prophecy. Now in the Greek Bible, verses 6-7 are one long sentence, and there is no main verb. This is a way that the Greek language has of making things stand out. That's why those italic words put in there to fill out the sentence. But it's very crisp statements here now. And the first one is on prophecy. The word looks like this in the Greek Bible: "propheteia." The word "pro" means "for." The word "pheteia" comes from the verb "feme," which means to speak. So, what this word means is "to speak forth." What is a prophet? A prophet is a person who speaks forth a message from God. In the Old Testament, a prophet was understood as one who would interpret the will of God on the basis of a message which God provided.

Notice, for example, Deuteronomy 18:18. I'm taking the time to do this because, as you know, we have a lot of people running around today claiming to be prophets. Did you ever hear anybody say, "The Lord said to me," or "the Lord told me to do this?" "The Lord told me to tell you I have a word of prophecy." And I have heard it most often preceded in that way. Before a person gets up to say something: "I have a word of prophecy." Well, let's just see what a person who says that really has." This is because I don't want you to be conned as thousands upon thousands of Christians are being conned, and as they are finding, almost daily, to their great regret, how much money and effort they have poured down a rat hole for which they will never get any benefits, blessings, and rewards in heaven, because they were suckered by people who were standing up and saying, "I am a prophet with a message from God."

**Prophets**

Well, there were such things as prophets. There was such thing as an ability to prophesy. Here is what a prophet did. Deuteronomy 18:18: "I was raise them up a prophet from among their brethren like unto you. And I put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him." God here is speaking to Moses. God tells Moses: "Down the centuries, I'm going to raise another great prophet. He will stand in the supreme authority with the Jewish people that you do. And I will give him a message. I'll put My words in his mouth. And when he speaks, he will tell you what I think." And He's referring here to Jesus Christ.

So, number one, a prophet is the person that gets a direct revelation from God. God says, "And you deliver the message." That's prophecy. You get a communication from God, and you are the mouth of God.

Notice in Amos 3:7-8: "Surely the Lord God will do nothing. But he reveals His secret unto his servants, the prophets. The lion has roared. Who will not fear? The Lord God has spoken. Who can but prophesy?" So, in the Old Testament, it is clear that a prophet was somebody that got a message from God, and I don't mean that they read the Bible, and then had a message from God. We stand up and we talk about preaching as delivering the message. Well, that's a message that comes out of the written Scriptures. We're talking about somebody who has a direct communication from God. In the New Testament, we had that same thing. A prophets was a person who delivered God's message.

Acts 15:32 illustrates that: "And Judas and Silas, being prophets also themselves, exhorted the brethren with many words, and confirmed them." Here were two men. They had the gift of communicating information from God, and they spoke to believers on that basis.

In 1 Corinthians 14:29: "Let the prophets speak, two or three, and let the others judge." This is a local church assembly: "If anything be revealed to another that sits by, let the first hold his peace." The spiritual gifts were being abused in the congregation at Corinth, which was not surprising, since this was such a carnal church. And the apostle Paul says, "Now look, you do have prophets who sit in the congregation. You do get messages from God. The New Testament is incomplete. So, God has to speak to you directly. But do it in an orderly fashion. Two or three of you are standing up and talking at the same time, trying to out-talk each other, about a voice and a message from God. If God is speaking to you as a prophet, do it one-at-a-time so that we can hear what God has to say." But the point is that God is delivering a message to certain men who then pass it on to the people of God.

Let's look at one more illustration in the New Testament of what a prophet does. 2 Peter 1:21 says, "For the prophecy came not at any time by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." When the Prophet spoke, it was the Spirit of God that was moving him.

So, a prophet, in Old and New Testament times, was a man (and sometimes a woman) who had received direct communications (revelations) from God. The message of the prophet could deal with two things. That's an important distinction. The message of the prophet could deal with current events – God's information about something that the people of God were to do now, or how to meet a situation; or, it could deal with something that was revealing a future event. Remember that a prophet did two things. He got messages from God. Sometimes those messages were to what people should do right now today. Sometimes those messages were to reveal what was going to happen hundreds of years in the future. Both of those came through the prophet.

First of all, we'll look at the current application. We can describe that as forth-telling. All of us think about a prophet as foretelling something, but this is telling forth something from God. He received new revelation from God for the current guidance of the believers. These revelations from God are now the contents of Scripture. Paul says, "The day is coming when the New Testament Scriptures will be completed, and then the gift of prophecy is going to cease.

**The New Testament Scriptures**

Notice 1 Corinthians 13:8-9. Paul says, "Love (or being filled with the Holy Spirit) never fails. But whether there be prophecies, they shall be done away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part." Now, there, the apostle Paul says, "The time is going to come when the prophecies are going to be done away with." When? Verse 10 tells you when: "But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away." We've been getting revelations from God: a little piece here; this man tells us something; and, this man tells us something. We record it and we remember it. We get part here and part there – piecemeal is what this "in part" means. But here the Greek Bible comes to our salvation again: "When that which is perfect is come (when that which is completed is come)." And it's neuter. It is not masculine, as if a person were going to come. It is not feminine, as if some woman was going to come. But it says, "When that thing is matured and complete, then that which is in part will be done away with." What is the thing? The New Testament Scriptures. When the canon of New Testament Scriptures was completed, then all of these supernatural, exotic kind of gifts that brought information from God, like prophecy and tongues and so on – all those were going to cease. So, the point here is that the gift of prophecy is clearly something that is destined to be brought to an end.

**The Gift of Prophecy has Ceased**

1 Corinthians 14:3 tells us why God gave us prophecy: "But he that prophesies speaks unto men to edification; to exhortation; and, to comfort." It is what the Word of God can do for us. There is, I say today, no one who receives revelations directly from God. So, the gift of prophecy has ceased. If anyone ever stands up, and you have the gall to do it, if you're in a meeting, and they say, "I have a prophecy from God," stand up and say immediately, "Brother, please hold it just a minute until I get a pencil and a paper. I wish to recall this revelation from God that you are about to give us, because that is Scripture." A prophecy from God is what made up Scripture. Here is brand new revelation.

Now, they really do mean that. And when the Mormons say, "Our prophet speaks new revelation from God," they really do need that. They're getting direct new information from God beyond the Bible. So, all the claims today of receiving the word of prophecy from God are totally false. Nobody is a prophet today in the sense of getting any of these communications of new information (new revelation) from God.

1 John 4:1, therefore says, "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but the spirits, whether they are of God, because many false prophets are gone out into the world." And you can count on it that the world is full of false prophets.

The prophet was a very important gift. In Ephesians 4:11, it is listed second only to the gift of the apostle: "And He gave some apostles and some prophets." We have the same thing in Ephesians 2:20. It's the second in line gift: "And He built upon the foundation of the apostles and the prophets" – Jesus Christ Himself, being the chief cornerstone. So, the New Testament church was built upon prophets and apostles – upon their ministry. The primary use of the gift of the prophet was to deliver current information to the people of God.

However, it is true that the prophet also gave you information about the future. Predicting future events, as they were revealed to the prophet by God, was part of the work of prophecy. In Micah 5:2, this is indicated: But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall He come forth unto Me, that is to be ruler in Israel, whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting." 800 years before Jesus Christ was born in the city of Jerusalem, God spoke to the prophet Micah and gave him a long-range prediction. So, the prophet did give predictions of future events. The test, however, of a prophet, and whether he was truly speaking for God was very specific. A prophet had to be right 100% of the time. If God is giving him the information, he can't miss.

**Proof of a Prophet**

Deuteronomy 18:21-22 lay out this stipulation: "And if you say in our heart, 'How shall we know the Word which the Lord has not spoken?' When a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the thing follows not, not comes to pass, that is the thing which the Lord has not spoken, but the prophet has spoken it presumptuously. You shall not be afraid of him. He's not a prophet." Shortly after Joseph Smith had completed writing the book of Mormon, they had a great problem trying to finance the publication of this book as a new revelation from God upon which to start the new church, the Church of the Latter-Day Saints of Jesus Christ. Joseph Smith received a revelation from God. He told his associates, "Go to Canada to such-and-such a person, and they will provide the financing (the money) for us to publish the book of Mormon. They dispatched the men to do that, and they came back empty-handed.

When Joseph Smith decided that he was going to record, in the book called Doctrines and Covenants, all the revelations that God gave from him, one of the men said, "Are you going to include the one about our getting the money to publish the book of Mormon in Canada?" And he said, "No, that was a mistake." If Mormons knew Scripture, they would say, "That's it. Our prophet missed. He is not a true prophet. He is a false prophet. And it didn't happen just once. When they secured the property, which is known as the temple site in Independence, Missouri, which God said the city of Independence, Missouri will be the new Jerusalem on earth, and here the temple will be built, to which all the nations of the world will come, Joseph Smith said, "It will be built in our generation" – in his lifetime and the lifetime of those who were associated with him. All those people are now dead. The temple site is still vacant. There is no temple there. In fact, the main church of Salt Lake City doesn't even own the site. They're trying to buy it by any means that they can. Joseph Smith clearly did not have a revelation from God. He was a false prophet. Any Mormon who believes the Word of God would say, "That's all I need to know that this was not a prophet speaking for God, but a prophet speaking for himself.

The primary use of the spiritual gift of prophecy was indeed telling information for current needs. But the secondary use was to tell something in the future that God wanted people to know.

**The Evangelist**

Well, the apostles are gone; and, the prophets are gone. And in Ephesians 4:11, you have the next communicator in line: the evangelist; and, with him the pastor-teacher. Those two communicators are still left because that's all the church needs today. It needs someone to go out there and proclaim the gospel to lost people, and bring them into the body of Christ. And once they are born again (they're newborn babes in Christ), their minds are full of human viewpoint; they're completely disoriented to reality; and, they have to come into the local church ministry, and the care of that pastor-teacher, who will now teach them the doctrines of Scripture, to push that human viewpoint out of their minds and to fill it with God's point of view.

**The Pastor-Teacher**

So, the pastor-teacher, basically, has replaced the ministry of the prophet – not as one who delivers revelation from God, but who is an interpreter and an explainer of the revelation that the prophets have already recorded in Scriptures. Paul says in Romans 12, "If you have then the gift of prophecy (which some people then did), then use that gift, and prophesy." We have to add some words because there's no verb here: "Let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith." And here was one very important guideline to guide this gift. The word proportion is the Greek word "analogia." And you can see how this looks like the word "analogy." And that's basically what it means. It's a mathematical term in the Greek language: according to the measure of the standard. It is an analogy. It is a basis of evaluation.

So, this word means "according to a standard of some kind." And what is that standard? Faith. The Greek word is "pistis" – the standard word for "faith." Here the word "faith" is used in the same way that it is used in Jude 3, where it refers to what is standard through doctrine. Jude 3 says, "Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you and exhort you that you should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints." Jude said, "I sat down to write this letter to you, and I was going to write a letter to you about salvation, and about the issues of being saved. But as soon as I started writing, God the Holy Spirit said, "No, I want you to change the subject. I want you to talk to them about being champions of standard Bible doctrine truth, and champions of what is true in the Word of God." He's talking about the faith – the total composited Bible doctrine truth. This is the standard by which we judge what is right and what is wrong.

Speaking for God with the spiritual gift of prophecy must then be compatible with the body of revealed doctrine. It cannot be in contradiction to it. If someone stands up and tells you something that is in contradiction to what the Bible teaches, you know you have a false prophet. Oral Roberts loves to speak frequently about bringing prophesies. He brings prophecies. He is also claiming, obviously, to be a prophet. One man came to me. He was just amazed when Oral Roberts was telling the world that God was holding him hostage to raise (I think it was) $8 million for his ministry, or God was going to take Oral home to heaven. And I'm sure heaven wasn't too crazy about that. But there were more people on earth who were even less crazy for it, and they were crazy enough to deliver the money. But he was telling them that God was holding him hostage until this money was given. And this man who knew the Word of God was so shocked, because he knew that that isn't the way God acts, and that isn't how God raises money. He came to me and he said, "You know what? I think all Roberts is a false prophet." I said, "What else is new?" He finally caught on that this man was telling things that were not compatible with the standard of faith (with the standard of Scripture). That is your guideline.

When you hear some clown speaking to, and telling you something about the mind of God that is not compatible with Scripture, you know that he's a false prophet. Now, if you yourself do not know the Word of God, you're going to be a sucker. You're going to be a pigeon that's going to be shot down every time. It is the people who are well-versed in the Word of God that cannot be made fools of. They know when they hear a false statement being made concerning what God thinks, and what God wants us to do.

Speaking for God with the spiritual gift of prophecy will be confirmed by the fact that it does not contradict the previous teachings of the Word of God. The idea here is the analogy of faith; that is, comparing Scripture with Scripture. That was one of the principles of the Reformation. They finally realized that if they interpreted the Bible by what the Bible taught, they'd come to an understanding of what God thinks.

**Berea**

In Acts 17:11, there are some noble people with whom you and I here in Berean ministry have a very close connection. In Acts 17:11, there are a group of people who were living in the city of Berea. They were Jews, and when the apostle Paul came to their synagogue, and he pulled that the Old Testament Bible, and he proceeded to speak to them about the Savior Jesus Christ, who has arrived in fulfillment of those Old Testament Scriptures, he said, "These were more noble (these people in the city of Berea were more noble) than those in the city of Thessalonica (which had just kicked Paul out for his preaching), in that they received the Word (the teachings of Paul) with all readiness of mind, and they searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so. Therefore, many of them believed; also of honorable women, who were Greeks, and of men, not a few."

So, the people in Berea were on the right track. They said, "This man comes to us. He's telling us that he is speaking to us the Word of God. He is speaking forth the mind of God to us. How do we know that he is true? I mean, he's telling us something that's blowing us out of our seats here. He's telling us that the Savior from the line of David we've been looking for has come; that our people have crucified Him; that He's been raised from the dead; that He sits in heaven; that Judaism is dead; and, that God is doing a new thing and creating a new body out of Jews and gentiles called the church. How do we know that all this is true?" They went back to the Old Testament Scriptures. They were willing to listen and to be taught. Then they looked in the Bible, and they said, "Yep, that's exactly true. Jesus was born in Bethlehem. Sure enough, He was born in the line of David. Sure enough, He was born of a virgin. That's what they said he would be." And right down the line, they confirmed that this was the Christ, and they had confidence then in what Paul was teaching them. They believed it, and they were saved. And it wasn't just ordinary Joe Sixpacks. You notice that it says, "Many honorable women and men" – people in the higher strata of New Testament society.

So, the analogy of faith is the basis upon which we compare the declaration of prophets. New revelation from God through the gift of prophecy will never conflict with previous revelation from God. I have often pointed this out to Mormons. I had a group of Mormon women who came to see me one time because they didn't want our school to be antagonistic toward the Mormon children that were in it at the time. And my point to them was: "We are not antagonistic to your children, and they will not be abused. But you must realize that you are believing things that are not in keeping with the Bible. God never gives revelation, as time goes on, that contradicts previous revelation. God's revelation is always consistent with what has been taught before. And that is your problem. And you believe in many things that the Bible condemns, and which the Bible has clearly spoken on. And you're trying to justify that God has contradicted Himself."

So, new revelations through the true gift of prophecy will never conflict with the standard of doctrine previously revealed by God. So, a true prophet will never go beyond what God has revealed to him, and therefore he will never contradict the Word of God.

So, the apostle Paul, summarizing, has told us today: "All of you are part of one body. All of you have been put into this body of Christ, and into your local church, by God the Holy Spirit. You have been put in there because you have a gift that that church needs to function with, to execute His particular mission. Among you are some who had the gift of prophecy. And if that is your gift, don't be big-headed. Don't think of yourself as something other, but simply be happy to say, "I'm a prophet." And exercise that gift. And exercise it compatible with true doctrine. Then God will prosper and bless you. You will store treasures in heaven. And people will be edified under your ministry.

Then he proceeds, and in a very short order, piles up one spiritual gift after another, that we will look at quickly next time, and which give us a total orientation to how to go about serving God.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1988

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