**Bible Study The Gifts of the Holy Spirit part 5, 6th July 2023**

Over the last few weeks we have been looking at the gifts of speaking in tongues and interpretation of tongues. We have seen that the main use of the gift of tongues is in our private prayers. When we speak in tongues in this way our spirit prays (1 Cor. 14.14) and as we speak to God we utter “mysteries in the Spirit” (1 Cor. 14.2). When we speak in tongues we edify ourselves (1 Cor. 14.4) but Paul encourages the Corinthians, when they meet together, to edify one another. So, he tells them to pray for the power to interpret (1 Cor. 14.13) and he also tells them to especially desire the gift of prophecy (**1 Cor. 14.1**).

Paul’s desire is that when the church gathers together that we are not selfish but seek to edify one another. The church is a body and every member of the church has a gift or gifts that are to be used for the benefit of the body. We all need each other and should use our God-given gifts for the benefit of each other. This is why Paul stresses the importance of love in 1 Cor. 13. Many people interpret this chapter as a comparison between spiritual gifts and love but as Harold Horton says, the comparison is actually “between spiritual gifts WITHOUT love and spiritual gifts WITH love.” (The Gifts of the Spirit p.84)

This week we are going to be looking at the gift of prophecy. Paul strongly encourages us to desire this gift because when we meet together it can be used for the benefit of others.
**Read 1 Cor.14.1-5**Paul says that the purpose of this gift is for
1. Upbuilding (also translated edify) – the Greek word oikodomeo means to build a building. **1 Cor. 3.9** says that we are “God’s building” and so that is why Paul encourages us to edify one another.
2. Encouragement – the Greek word paraklesis means to call to one’s side and is usually translated: encouragement or comfort
3. Consolation – the Greek word paramuthia means to speak closely. This word can also be translated “comfort” and it suggests a degree of tenderness.
Charles Ellicott sums it up as “building up, stirring up, cheering up”

 Unlike tongues and interpretation, we come across prophecy in the Old Testament. There were many great Prophets such as Moses, Samuel, Elijah and Isaiah, to name just a few. The Hebrew word for prophet is “Nabi”, which means someone who speaks on behalf of another. In **Exodus 4.10-16** Moses was making excuses about why he could not go and deliver the people of Israel, so God gave him his brother Aaron to go with him. Moses could speak to Aaron and then Aaron could speak to people on Moses’ behalf. In **Exodus 7.1-2** Aaron is referred to as Moses’ “prophet” because he would speak on behalf of Moses. So just as Moses spoke to Aaron and Aaron (as his prophet) then passed on the words of Moses to Pharaoh, in the same way God spoke to the prophets and they spoke on behalf of God.

There are also people in the New Testament that are referred to as prophets (**Acts 11.27-28; 13.1; 15.32**). These people are gifts of Christ to the church (**Eph. 4.11**). It is important that we distinguish between someone who is a Prophet and someone who has the spiritual gift of prophecy. In **Acts 21.8-9** we are told that Philip had four daughters “who prophesied” but if we carry on reading, in **v10-14** we read about a man called Agabus who was “a Prophet”. This man gave prophesies that predicted the future. (It is important to note that Agabus did not tell the people how to respond to his prophesies. In **Acts 11.29** the disciples determined to send relief to their brethren in Judea; that was their decision in response to Agabus’ prophecy. In **Acts 21.10-14,** in spite of the fact that Agabus had warned Paul about what would happen to him in Jerusalem, Paul chose to go to Jerusalem anyway.) There is a difference between a Prophet, such as Agabus, and someone who has the spiritual gift of prophecy, such as Philip’s daughters. When the Old Testament prophets and New Testament prophets such as Agabus predicted the future, there was a very simple test to determine whether someone was a true or false prophet – do their prophesies come true? (**Deut.18.21-22; Jer. 28.1-17**)
When Paul describes the spiritual gift of prophecy in **1 Cor. 14.1-5,** he makes no mention of predicting the future. Those who prophesy still speak on behalf of God but in order to build up the church rather than predict the future. Of course, if someone is a Prophet he will have the spiritual gift of prophecy and probably other gifts too.

**1 Cor. 14.29** as with tongues and interpretation there should be two or three prophecies. This is probably simply because in during one meeting there is only so much that we can take in.
The others are then to “weigh what is said”. The way to do this is to ask – is it in line with Scripture? Was it a message of upbuilding, encouragement and consolation?

When it comes to weighing what is said, there is always a possibility that someone could come to a meeting and “prophesy” but their prophecy is not inspired by the Spirit of God. In **1 Cor. 12.3** Paul gives an extreme example and in such an instance it would need to be corrected publicly.
However, something that can also happen is that someone may start off with an anointed word of prophecy but go on a bit too long. Sometimes the person will realise themselves or it may be that they need a gentle word privately. When someone prophesies for the first time it is not unusual for them to be not especially fluent or eloquent. That is why it is important that we heed Paul’s words in **1 Thessalonians 5.19-20** “Do not quench the Spirit, do not despise prophesying”. I like the New English Bible translation which also links the following two verses to this: “Do not stifle inspiration, and do not despise prophetic utterances, but bring them all to the test and then keep what is good in them and avoid the bad of whatever kind.” (1 Thes. 5.19-22)

Because we are human channels, even when inspired by the Holy Spirit, we may sometimes get our words mixed up, so it is always best to speak in the third person rather than the first person when prophesying.

**1 Cor. 14.23-25** – there may be times when a prophecy contains an element of supernatural revelation. Harold Horton understood such instances to be a Word of Knowledge operating with the gift of prophecy (The Gifts of the Spirit p.164). David Petts, on the other hand, says that “the gift of prophecy in itself has the potential for revelation of a supernatural character”. (Body Builders p.141)

He also wisely adds a footnote that says “It is important that we avoid the temptation to classify the gifts too rigidly. Some gifts may well “overlap” others in the way they function.”

e.g. About 40 years ago when I was working in a children’s home and going through a particularly stressful time at work, I became convinced that God wanted me to leave that job. I started asking God what the next move should be but no answer came. After a while I got frustrated and gave God a bit of an ultimatum (not something that I would advocate!). It was Sunday and I told God that I’d been praying and praying with no answer and that He must speak to me today. I remember vividly that the Pastor, Fred Howell, gave a prophecy right at the start of the Sunday morning meeting: “You have said that the Lord must speak to you today. The Lord says to you that you must seek Him in the night watches.” That was what I did and for about two weeks prayed and sought God into the early hours of the morning. Eventually God spoke to me from Isaiah 52.12 “For you shall not go out in haste, and you shall not go in flight, for the Lord will go before you, and the God of Israel will be your rear guard.” God showed me that I was wanting to run away and that the time was not right for me to leave.

**Romans 12.6** tells us to prophesy “in proportion to our faith”. Harold Horton says “And more inspired courage is necessary for prophesying than for interpreting tongues, for the interpreter has a flying start, so to speak, from the unction accompanying the message in tongues, while the prophet must launch out on to an unction of his own. A greater measure of faith is, for those reasons, necessary here…”

As someone uses the gift of prophecy their faith will grow. Sometimes we need to stir up or rekindle the gift of God that is within us (**2 Tim. 1.6**) but the flames can also be fanned by people giving encouragement. If someone steps out in faith and gives a word of prophecy that edifies, encourages or comforts you, then make sure that you, in turn, encourage them. If someone gives a prophecy that contains an element of revelation that is for you then make sure you let them know because it will strengthen their faith.

David Petts gives an example of this (Body Builders p.147). The prophecy was very short: “David, it’s all right.” But nevertheless it was very powerful.

**1 Cor. 14.1** tells us to “earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy”. Anyone who earnestly desires this gift will spend time asking God to them and give them a message for God’s people. When I come to prepare a sermon, I often pray “Lord, what do you want to say to Your people?” There is, of course, benefit in expounding God’s word in a systematic way but sometimes a preacher can feel that God has spoken to him and that he has a word from the Lord.

In a similar way, a prophecy is a word from the Lord but through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit rather than the exposition of Scripture. Of course, if a prophecy is from God it will be in line with Scripture.

So, in summary: David Petts defines the gift in this way:
“Speaking on behalf of God by the supernatural inspiration of the Holy Spirit for the strengthening, encouragement and comfort of the church. It may at times contain elements of revelation or even prediction, but must be distinguished from the ministry of the teacher whose message comes from God by way of the Scriptures.” (Body Builders p.143)