

To the family of Solid Rock Worship Center:

Some Thoughts Concerning Spiritual Gifts & Prophecy

by Pastor Jim Bradford

June 19, 2009

Scripture quotations are taken from the Holy Bible, New Living Translation, copyright 1996, 2004. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Wheaton, Illinois 60189. All rights reserved.

This past Sunday, we were blessed by a special moving of the Lord through the gifts of the Holy Spirit. As a church, we thoroughly believe that God still speaks to His church today. We know that the Lord is ‘the same yesterday, today, and forever’ (Hebrews 13:8 NLT). It only makes sense that the Lord would still speak to His church through the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

In order to familiarize everyone with the gifts of the Holy Spirit and their function, I want to share some thoughts with you. My focus for this writing will be specifically the spiritual gift of prophecy, through which we witnessed the Holy Spirit working last Sunday. My purpose is threefold:

- to share with you some ‘behind the scenes’ thoughts from Sunday,
- to help you develop a Biblical theology of the gifts of the Spirit,
- and to encourage you to seek the Lord for more of His presence in your life.

For clarity's sake, I want to submit to you a working definition of the word 'prophecy.' Prophecy, in a truly Biblical sense, does not mean 'fore-telling.' A much more accurate definition for prophecy is 'forth-telling,' in other words, speaking 'for' God. It really has little to do with predicting the future. Sure, the Lord does know the future and could share that with us. But more times than not, a prophecy to the church is a message in which the Lord uses someone to speak 'for' Him a word of encouragement and instruction to build up the congregation.

~

On Sunday after our time of singing praises to Jesus, I had a sense that the Lord wanted to speak to our church through a gift of the Spirit. I did not know who the Lord was going to use to speak through or if anyone would step up to share at all. All I knew was that I believed that the Lord wanted to speak to our church in a special way. I shared that impression with our congregation & instructed them to be sensitive to the Lord.

I told our church that if anyone had felt that the Lord wanted to use them in a gift of the Spirit, they should at this time step out in faith and share that gift. After a few moments of waiting on the Lord, someone who was impressed by the Lord took that step of faith and began to speak out. The message was an encouragement to trust the Lord in all circumstances. After hearing the message, I made the statement that I believe that we heard from the Lord in a very special way.

After service, I spoke to the one who was used in the gift of prophecy. This person told me that they knew that the Lord was giving them something to share, but they had no idea if there was going to be an opportunity. This person was also nervous because they had never been used by the Lord in this way before. She told me that when she began to speak, the Lord then gave her more words. And the result was that the church was encouraged and edified, or 'built up.'

It is awesome to try to comprehend that the same God who said “Let there be light” would speak a special word for the congregation of Solid Rock Worship Center. Mind-blowing. What a great God we serve!

~

I want to share with you a short excerpt from The Assemblies of God’s website, in which the writer briefly shares about how someone could observe the Spiritual gifts at work in our church:

Spiritual gifts

An interesting aspect of Assemblies of God worship is the operation of spiritual gifts. The planned service order may be suspended as individuals speak or share as prompted by the Holy Spirit, under the supervision of the pastor (1 Corinthians 12-14).

One may speak out in an unknown tongue, a Spirit-guided language other than that of the congregation. Another individual, or perhaps the same one, will then give the interpretation.

On occasion, the Spirit may prompt someone to speak out, to prophesy, in the language of the congregation. The gift of prophecy, the gift of tongues and the gift of interpretation, and other spiritual gifts bring the church immediate challenge and confirm Bible truths.

From “*What to expect when visiting an Assemblies of God church.*”

http://ag.org/top/about/what_to_expect.cfm

~

It is very important that we, as a church, hold to the Word of God. The Bible is our ‘all authoritative rule for faith and conduct.’ This means that the Word of God...

- is the only book that holds all the authority in our lives
- is the ‘ruler’ by which we measure our lives up against.
- tells us what to believe.
- tells us how to live.

The Bible has a lot to say about Spiritual gifts at work in the church. I want to share some Scripture with you, along with some thoughts of my own added in. I believe that you will see that the gifts of the Spirit (specifically the gift of prophecy for this writing) are supposed to be seen in churches today. Indeed, the risen Christ is still active in the world and still speaks to His church.

In the book of Acts, we see the beginnings of the New Testament church. After the Holy Spirit was given on the day of Pentecost, Peter preached the first sermon ever. During this message, he declared that what just happened was a fulfillment of what was predicted in Joel 2:28-32.

Acts 2:16 - 18

¹⁶No, what you see was predicted long ago by the prophet Joel:

¹⁷ ‘In the last days,’ God says, ‘I will pour out my Spirit upon all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy. Your young men will see visions, and your old men will dream dreams.

¹⁸ In those days I will pour out my Spirit even on my servants—men and women alike—and they will prophesy.

Note that Peter was proclaiming, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, that the Lord will pour out His Spirit upon ‘all

people': sons, daughters, young men, old men, and even 'servants,' not just select people like in the days of the Old Testament.

Even though I am primarily addressing prophecy during this writing, there are many spiritual gifts. The Lord gives these gifts for the church to be built up.

1 Corinthians 12:4 - 11

⁴There are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but the same Spirit is the source of them all. ⁵There are different kinds of service, but we serve the same Lord. ⁶God works in different ways, but it is the same God who does the work in all of us.

⁷A spiritual gift is given to each of us so we can help each other. ⁸To one person the Spirit gives the ability to give wise advice; to another the same Spirit gives a message of special knowledge. ⁹The same Spirit gives great faith to another, and to someone else the one Spirit gives the gift of healing. ¹⁰He gives one person the power to perform miracles, and another the ability to prophesy. He gives someone else the ability to discern whether a message is from the Spirit of God or from another spirit. Still another person is given the ability to speak in unknown languages, while another is given the ability to interpret what is being said. ¹¹It is the one and only Spirit who distributes all these gifts. He alone decides which gift each person should have.

1 Corinthians 12-14 are filled with instruction about how spiritual gifts are to be used in the church. Right between chapter 12 and 14, we find chapter 13. This is known as the 'Love Chapter' and is read at weddings all the time. While it is true that this passage paints a great picture of love, in context we can see that it is referring to how the gifts of the Spirit are to operate in church: with love.

1 Corinthians 14:1

Let love be your highest goal! But you should also desire the special abilities the Spirit gives—especially the ability to prophesy.

This passage tells us the Lord wants us to desire the gifts that the Spirit gives, especially prophecy. What does this mean for me? It means that as the Pastor of the church, I should pray and desire to be used by God in whatever way He wants to use me. What does this mean for you? It means as a member of the church, you should also pray and desire to be used by God in whatever way He wants to use you.

1 Corinthians 14:3

But one who prophesies strengthens others, encourages them, and comforts them.

1 Corinthians 14:26b

... everything that is done must strengthen all of you.

Prophecy strengthens, encourages, and comforts the church. It is God's gift to edify, or 'build up' the church. If the gift of prophecy was not active in our church, then we would be missing out on some of God's provision for us.

But what happens if those who don't know Christ visit our church and see a gift of the Spirit at work? Will they think we're crazy? Don't forget that God is in control. If it is really God who gives the prophetic word to be shared, then God knows who is in attendance in the church and what is going on. And don't forget, he loves your unsaved family member even more than you do! He is wanting them to come to Him and find forgiveness, healing, and hope. You can trust Him!

Referring to what happens when unbelievers hear the gift of prophecy in action, the Apostle Paul says...

1 Corinthians 14:24b - 25

^{24b}they will be convicted of sin and judged by what you say. ²⁵As they listen, their secret thoughts will be exposed, and they will fall to their knees and worship God, declaring, “God is truly here among you.”

Isn’t that exactly what we want? Don’t we want to bring our unsaved friends and have them “fall to their knees and worship God, declaring, ‘God is truly here?’” Only a supernatural word from the supernatural Lord can do that! You can trust Him.

Romans 12:6

In his grace, God has given us different gifts for doing certain things well. So if God has given you the ability to prophesy, speak out with as much faith as God has given you.

If you honestly sense that the Lord is wanting to use you in a gift of the Spirit, I want to encourage you to step out in faith if and when the opportunity is given, in all humility & love. As the Pastor of the church, it is my responsibility to hear from God and provide opportunity for Him to speak to our church through a gift of the Spirit. Be open to the Lord. Trust Him.

1 Corinthians 14:32 - 33

³²Remember that people who prophesy are in control of their spirit and can take turns. ³³For God is not a God of disorder but of peace, as in all the meetings of God’s holy people.

God is a God of order. Everything within the church service should glorify God and build up the congregation. If you sense that the Lord is wanting to use you in a gift of the Spirit, you need to hold on to that and wait for the opportune time. This is precisely what happened last Sunday morning. The person felt that the Lord wanted her to speak out, and she humbly recognized that

if this prompting was truly from the Lord, the opportunity would be given. Then she prayerfully waited, and the Lord prompted me as the Pastor to give the opening in the service.

1 Thessalonians 5:19 - 21

¹⁹Do not stifle the Holy Spirit. ²⁰Do not scoff at prophecies, ²¹but test everything that is said. Hold on to what is good.

Paul tells us to not stifle the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit wants to work in our services. We must be careful to not be so worried about misspeaking with a message from the Lord that we do not speak at all. And we must not treat prophecies as being a waste of time. While it is true that we are all human and are prone to make mistakes, this does not surprise the Lord. That is why the Lord says in His Word to “test everything that is said.” To what do we compare the prophecies? What is the standard that we hold prophecies against? That standard is the Bible: the Word of God, which is our “all-authoritative rule for faith and conduct.” We hold any prophecy that is given in a church service against the authority of the Word.

Paul says “test everything” and “hold on to what is good.” Where ever a prophecy is deemed to be Biblical and there is a sense within the congregation that it is from the Lord, it can then be considered worthy of reception. Where ever a prophecy is deemed to not line up with the written Word of God, it is to be disregarded.

It may be of interest to you to note that we do not write down a prophecy that is shared in church. Whenever a gift of the Spirit is shared, deemed to be Biblical, and has the sense of being from the Lord, that utterance is for those in attendance at that specific time. It is not to be written down for preservation and treated as on par with the Word of God. The Bible is our standard, and nothing else. As I stated before, the gifts of the Spirit can not contradict God’s Word. The Bible is infallible: it can never be

wrong. That can not be said of the gifts of the Spirit because none of us are perfect.

1 Corinthians 14:29

Let two or three people prophesy, and let the others evaluate what is said.

Does that mean that if a prophecy doesn't line up with Scripture that the person sharing it is evil? No. We are all human. Sometimes when someone shares, they may be sharing more of their own thoughts than those of God. If this is the case, than it is my responsibility to offer guidance and correction where it is needed. I would recommend to the person who shared to continue to seek the Lord in prayer with humility and desire to be used by Him. A great prayer would be, "*Lord, help me to hear You clearly. May there be less of me and more of You...*"

You may have noticed that when I share an impression upon my heart that I believe is from the Lord, I often say something like, "*I believe the Lord is saying...*" I do not want to ever claim that something is absolutely from the Lord without being absolutely sure that it is. I think it is safer to say, "*I think the Lord is saying to us today...*"

It may be good at this time to state that just because the Lord uses someone to give a prophecy to the church, this does not mean that they are now to be considered a Prophet and that they are now God's spokesperson on earth. I shouldn't even have to clarify that, as any honest person would realize that God, in His grace, uses ordinary people. Unfortunately, there are some false teachers in the world who would proclaim that they are now God's spokesperson for all time. To that, I would say that sharing a prophecy does not make you a Prophet anymore than someone thinking they are now a Healer because God in His mercy chose to heal someone who they prayed for. The emphasis should never be on the person whom God used, but rather on the God who actually has the Power!

In closing, I want to encourage you to seek God. If you are not a Christian, the first thing you need to do is call out to Jesus Christ, confess & repent of your sin, and ask Him to forgive you. If you are sincere, Jesus will save you and your new life in Christ will begin at that moment. You can find great resources about who Jesus is on our website at www.srworship.org/whoisjesus.html or you can share your questions with me.

If you are a Christian, I want you to know that the Lord wants to bless you in your walk with Him. He wants to fill you with the Holy Spirit. He wants to give you Spiritual gifts. And He wants to use you in those gifts. Seek Him. Read the words of our Savior, Jesus Christ...

Luke 11:9 - 13

⁹“And so I tell you, keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for. Keep on seeking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you. ¹⁰For everyone who asks, receives. Everyone who seeks, finds. And to everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. ¹¹“You fathers—if your children ask for a fish, do you give them a snake instead? ¹²Or if they ask for an egg, do you give them a scorpion? Of course not! ¹³So if you sinful people know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him.”

You do not need to be afraid. You do not need to be anxious. Just seek Him. When you call out to the Lord and ask Him to fill you with His Spirit, there is no fear of receiving something that is not of God. Your Heavenly Father will not give you something bad. He will only give you good gifts. He wants to bless you. Just trust Him with simple child-like faith. Ask Him, and keep on asking Him. Seek Him, and keep on seeking Him.

You can pray something like this,

"Lord, I do trust you. And I know that you love me and want to use me to change my world. You know that I can't do that on my own. I am glad that you don't expect me to. I know you don't want me to do anything on my own. You want to fill me with the Holy Spirit so I can serve you with your power.

So Lord Jesus, I ask you to fill me with Your Holy Spirit. I want to be used by you in whatever way you want to use me. Help me to be sensitive to what you are doing in my life and give me the faith to follow your leading. I love you. I trust you. I worship you. In the name of Jesus I pray, Amen."

If you have any questions, feel free to ask me. It is my prayer that Solid Rock Worship Center will continue to grow in Jesus Christ and be blessed by His presence. May we continue to be a Spirit-filled church that reaches up to worship, reaches in to grow, and reaches out to share and serve.

I am blessed to be serving the King along side of you.

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Pastor Jim Bradford".

Pastor Jim Bradford