

1 Corinthians #23
Charismatic Gifts for the Great Commission
Ephesians 4:1-12

We come now to look more directly at "spiritual gifts" as they relate to the Church as the "body of Christ." To see this first group of "gifts" we will look outside of 1 Corinthians to the book of Ephesians. In this passage of scripture Paul names for us the ministering gifts of Christ to His church. **The first one, "apostles," is named also in the list of Spirit gifts in 1 Corinthians 12:28. The second one, "prophets," is named also in the list of Spirit gifts in Romans 12:6 and in 1 Corinthians 12:10 as well as in 1 Corinthians 12:28. It is the only one listed in all four places where the spirit gifts are named. The third one, "evangelists," is named only here. The fourth one, "pastors," is also named only here. The fifth one, "teachers," is listed in two other places; namely, in Romans 12:7 and in 1 Corinthians 12:28.**

These five gifts to the churches named in Ephesians 4:11 are basic to the evangelization of the world and to the ministry of the Word. Without them the churches would not be, and the body of Christ would have no existence. They are vital to the carrying out of the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19-20. There we are told to disciple all nations, to baptize our converts, and to teach them the words and the commandments of the Lord. For that tremendous assignment of conquest and training, the triune God in whose name we are to baptize bestows five gifts upon His churches.

The first of all the gifts of the Spirit is that of apostleship. The Greek word used here for "apostle" was an ordinary word for "messenger," "one sent forth." In Hebrews 3:1 our Savior is called "the Apostle and High Priest of our profession" because He was "sent forth" from heaven to make atonement for our sins. **From the equivalent Latin word "*missio*" we gain our English word "missionary."** The Greek word "*apostolos*" is used in two ways in the New Testament: *first*, in a limited, technical sense, referring to an office; and *second*, in a general sense referring to a missionary.

The technical sense of the word "*apostolos*," referring to an office, is used as a designation for the twelve apostles of Christ. In Luke 6:13, we are told, "And when it was day, he called unto him his disciples: and of them he chose twelve, whom also he named apostles." On special grounds the word was also used as a designation for Paul, as seen in Romans 1:1, "Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle." It was also used to describe the office held by James, the pastor of the church in Jerusalem and the Lord's brother, as seen in Galatians 1:19, "But other of the apostles saw I none, except James, the Lord's brother."

We need to be careful that we do not get our thinking wrong, when we speak of "apostles," because we are not speaking here of "The Twelve." These are those spoken of in Ephesians 2:20, where Paul speaks of the foundation of the church, "And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone." They formed the link joining the Old Dispensation with the new, as seen in Acts 2:41-43, "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized; and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. And fear came upon every soul; and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles." **Through them is found unity and continuity in God's purpose of grace.** Their roots were in the Old Testament, but their ministry was in the New.

But, to the church today, our Lord gives the gift of "apostle" to preach forth the message of Jesus Christ.

The second gift of the Spirit to the churches is that of "prophet." The Greek word used here means to forth-tell, to speak out concerning divine things.

In all of my years as pastor of Southern Baptist Churches, I have received many brochures from evangelists offering their services to the churches where I was serving as pastor. But I have never, however, received a brochure from a "prophet." This seems strange since Paul listed both prophets and evangelists as gifts to the church in the same passage (Ephesians 4: 11). **If evangelists are still useful to the church, why not prophets?**

There is no doubt that the New Testament provides for prophets to function in the church. There are 187 different references to prophets or prophecy in the New Testament; at least 30 of these refer to prophets or prophecy within the church. The rest refer to Old Testament prophets. We are told in Acts 15:32 about these New Testament prophets, "And Judas and Silas, being prophets also themselves, exhorted the brethren with many words; and confirmed them."

A biblical prophet had exceptional insight into the nature of things. Early prophets were called "*seers*." **First, the prophet sees into the nature of God's purpose and plan.** This insight assumes cosmic proportions. He comprehends this intellectually and is struck with wonder; he comprehends it emotionally and is filled with "passion."

Second, he sees into the nature of God's people as it relates to their contemporary circumstances. This insight fills him with consternation, for he

observes that God's people do not understand the purpose and are not prepared to participate in the plan. The pressure of this wise-like position forces the prophecy from him, as seen in Amos 3:8, "The lion has roared, who will not fear? The Lord God hath spoken, who can prophesy?"

The false prophet, unable to tolerate this pressure, compromises the message and soothes the people with flattering words.

If the church were a ship, the prophet would be the navigator. He would know without doubt the destination of the ship, the course of the ship en route, the present position of the ship, and he could read the stars. Without a prophet, the church drifts off course and is not aware that it has drifted.

When there is no one aboard who can read the stars, the church cannot know where it is in relation to its destiny. Because the church has neglected the office of prophet, the church has allowed itself to be guided by the norms of contemporary culture rather than by the purpose and plan of God.

The danger of the church is not overt rebellion but unconscious drifting. God sends prophets to awaken His people from their slumber and draw them back on course.

The predictive element of prophecy is secondary but vital.

Unparallel lines will eventually intersect. If God's people are not in line with God's purpose and plan, judgment is inevitable. The message of the prophets was not, however, entirely negative. There was assurance God could not be permanently defeated by the disobedience of the people and in time the Messiah would come with a glorious future.

There is a danger that our understanding of the role of prophet will fall short of the biblical picture. Simply preaching about the Second Coming of Christ, even with the evidence that the time is near, does not make one a prophet. The real prophet must have insight and understanding into the meaning of movements and events beyond mere prediction.

In our metaphor, the stars represent the eternal purpose and plan of God – the biblical world view. The Christian does not see the world merely as raw materials and markets. Nor does he see it as just a battleground where nations struggle for supremacy. He sees the world rather as the arena where God is creating a Christlike people in whom He can be glorified.

The prophet plays an indispensable role in keeping God's people aware of His purpose in calling them to be a people.

When the church drifts into the ways of the world, it measures itself as the world measures itself - by size, wealth, power, success of programs. But when the church is called back to its purpose, it sees itself in terms of Christlike character - the only means by which God can be glorified in His people. God sends prophets to call people to this high calling.

Prophets are still needed in the church because God still has a corrective message for His people. The message is not a new revelation, but the old revelation renewed. The prophet declares where the people are in relation to where God has revealed they should be.

Who should be a prophet? Certainly not one who needs to be popular. If a man needs the approval of those to whom he ministers for his own self-worth, he cannot be a prophet. **Like a doctor, he cannot always give the patient good news.**

The prophet must be able to stand stress, for his message will imply that contemporary successes are superficial. This may awaken resistance in the people and alienate him from other church leaders. The prophet must be willing to have it this way and continue in his obedient role.

Although he longs for fellowship with others, he must be able to walk a lonely road. If he needs others too much, he may compromise his message to win their friendship; if he shuns others, pretending that he does not need them, he may develop a self-righteous attitude.

Needing the acceptance of the people while being committed to deliver God's message at all costs, he suffers. This, however, is not the selfish suffering of a sick soul. It is the redemptive suffering of love.

The prophet must have the long look. He must be willing to plant seeds which he may never see germinate and bring forth a harvest. He must be willing to forego the quick result. **He is this way because he believes God has called him, and he looks only to God for results and rewards.**

The prophet can nullify his work with attitudes of superiority and anger. He must be humbled by his calling. His anger may flash forth at times, but his compassion finally wells up. **In this he is like his Master.**

You know, after all has been said and done, I really think that that is the kind of preacher that I want to be my pastor. Why? Because a preacher who

gives forth the message of God in the wisdom and power of the Holy Spirit, is the only kind of preacher that God can really use for His honor and glory.

In our next study, we will look at the rest of this list of ministering gifts of Christ to His church.

If you are not saved, tonight is a good time for salvation.