26 - Things Learned about the Manifestations of the Spirit

While recently studying the manifestations of the spirit, I learned 5 major things that broke from my previous understanding.

1. Prophecy – It’s not Just for a Fellowship/Church Meeting

The first thing I learned is that Prophecy is not confined to a location, time or situation. I have previously believed that the only acceptable location and time for the manifestation of prophecy was in a Christian church/worship setting. The Bible precedents don’t agree.

1 Cor. 12:8-10 REV

For to one is given through the spirit a message of wisdom, and to another a message of knowledge by means of the same spirit,

to a different one trust by the same spirit, and to another gifts of healings by the one spirit,

and to another energizings of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to a different one various kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues.

To what location is message of wisdom or message of knowledge limited? To what time are trust, healing, and miracles proscribed? To what situation are tongues, interpretation and prophecy confined? There are no restrictions included in scripture with the other manifestations beside prophecy except that audible tongues should be interpreted in church. If there are no restrictions on the other manifestations besides prophecy, why should there be any with prophecy? I suggest He lists no limits because there are none. The only proscriptions on prophecy are on the manner it’s done in chapters 11 to 14 – with loving service to others. Perhaps because the manifestation of prophecy is highlighted so much in this section detailing the loving and unloving usage of the manifestations in a church gathering, I assumed this as the only place prophecy should be practiced. The whole Bible record doesn’t agree with that assumption.

Prophecy has a rich and varied history before the Christian church was born on Pentecost. Keep in mind that the only two manifestations of the spirit that were new to the church were tongues and interpretation. The others had been around as long as God had been putting His spirit on humans. The first mention of a prophet is Abraham in Gen 20:7. It never says what Abraham prophesied, but singers sing, painters paint, and prophets prophesy. Where and when did he prophesy? God never mentions it, demonstrating the emphasis He places on those aspects of prophecy. And Abraham for sure never prophesied in a Christian church or a Jewish synagogue because there were none!

The next mention in the scriptures is a wonderful description of a prophet and prophecy.

Ex. 7:1

Yahweh said to Moses, “Behold, I have made you God to Pharaoh, and Aaron your brother will be your prophet.

In response to Moses complaint to God that “I don’t talk so good” God describes the function of a prophet – one who hears from God and relays the message.

What God originally wanted:

God tells Moses (the prophet) –> Moses (the prophet) tells Pharoah

What God accommodated because of Moses’ reservation:

God tells Moses –> Moses tells Aaron (who becomes the prophet) -> Aaron tells Pharoah

Here is a basic definition of a prophet and prophecy in God’s own words. Note the absence of a time or place restriction. When we read the narrative of God’s many messages to Pharoah, they were delivered in varies locations, times, and situations. Even after Pharoah’s army perished in the Red Sea, on the victorious shore amidst the camp of those delivered, prophecy is mentioned again.

Ex. 15:20,21

Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a tambourine in her hand, and all the women went out after her with tambourines and with dancing.

Miriam answered them, “Sing to Yahweh, for he has triumphed, yes triumphed; the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea.”

Women are included in prophecy. And the message can also be sung while dancing, not just spoken. We will see later that God’s message can be written (as the scriptures were) or acted out. In fact, the flexibility of prophecy is perhaps highlighted in the instance of Balim. He prophesied accurately to an ungodly king despite his fleshly orientation and certainly not in anything remotely close to a worship setting. God even had a donkey prophesy to Balaam when he had head up his…donkey!

God wants everyone to prophesy.

Num.11:29

Moses said to him, “Are you jealous for my sake? I wish that all Yahweh’s people were prophets, that Yahweh would put his spirit on them!”

I’ve realized that includes both genders and all ages. In fact, in this instance in Numbers 11, 70 people prophesied around the tabernacle and two extra did it in the camp area, not the ‘religious’ area. Joel foretold of the time when everyone will prophesy in the future.

Joel 2:27-29

You will know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I am Yahweh your God, and there is no other; and my people will never again be disappointed.

It will happen afterward that I will pour out my spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters will prophesy. Your old men will dream dreams. Your young men will see visions.

And also on my servants and on my servant girls in those days, I will pour out my spirit.

God loves everybody and wants everybody manifesting the spirit. Always has – always will. Anyone, anywhere, anytime. King Saul prophesied on the road entering into a town. Jonah prophesied as he walked through the city of Nineveh. Jesus told his disciples:

Mark 13:9-11

“But be on your guard, because they will hand you over to the courts, and you will be beaten in the synagogues, and you will stand before governors and kings because of me, as a witness to them.

And the good news must first be proclaimed to all the nations.

And when they arrest you and hand you over, do not be anxious beforehand about what you will say, but say whatever is given to you in that hour, because it is not you who is speaking, but the holy spirit.”

Jesus prepared his apostles to be in front of a judgement seat or throne because of persecution. He told them the holy spirit would give them the words for a response. This is prophecy as a response to an attack. And certainly, this was the opposite a church setting!

Perhaps because of the repeated instance of prophecy during Paul’s journey to Jerusalem in saint’s homes in Acts 21 and the abundant mention of the importance of prophecy in the church in 1 Cor. 11-14, our minds only associate prophecy with saints gathering together. That leap is not one afforded by scripture. Just as speaking in tongues is not limited to a worship setting, neither is prophecy or any of the other manifestations. I’ve realized that I self-imposed that restriction. Then I recall the many times I have spoken to people in and out of a church setting when my speech was inspired and held information unknown to me before speaking it. This was prophecy. At the time, I thought of it as “God working in the situation”, which He certainly was. Now I think it was (technically) prophecy.

What difference does it make what we call it? Not much, really. But this dawning has caused me to realize that every time I am with someone, I can be a spokesman for God for their edification, exhortation and comfort. And sometimes, even speak words from God toward their specific needs and situation. That is, of course, a “God thing” because as we know, “they…began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance.”

THAT we speak is our business. WHAT we speak is God’s business.

Is our speaking from God into each other’s lives limited to a church setting? No.

Rom. 12:6

But since we have gifts that differ according to the grace that was given to us, let us use them accordingly. If it is prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of our trust;

What limits prophecy is our trust in God. Because I have thought that prophecy was off-limits outside of a church gathering setting, I had no expectation to do it. Did I do it? Rarely. My “proportion of faith” was in the low percentile, if any. My high expectation to prophesy was in fellowship when called upon and/or when teaching the Bible. There was lots of inspiration for me there. But outside those two situations, I have not operated the manifestation as I could have and will do so from now on. Thank God for new insights!

1. The Manifestation of Prophecy Can Be Specific

I was taught and believed that the manifestation of the spirit – prophecy – was never specific to a person or situation. That was the job of a “professional” – a prophet. My thinking was that I was an “amateur prophesier”, and the prophet was the “professional expert” and the only one trusted by God to relay specific direction and details to others. This idea also does not stand up to biblical scrutiny. Certainly, there are many scriptural instances of prophets prophesying specifics to individuals, but there are lots of instances of those never called “prophet” or “prophetess” who relayed info from the spirit that was well beyond “generalized edification, exhortation and comfort”. As mentioned previously, Zachariah, Elizabeth, Simeon, and Ananias were disciples drafted into prophesying specifics to and for individuals. Certainly, the disciples who prophesied to Paul on his way to Jerusalem spoke to him specifically – “Paul, don’t go to Jerusalem!” That was exhortation – a specific exhortation to a specific person at a specific time about a specific situation - nothing generalized about it. It seems that non-prophets can relay specific information through prophecy too. When? Once again …

THAT we speak is our business. WHAT we speak is God’s business.

We can prophesy specific things when God has specific info He wants to share with a specific person or persons. That’s his option. My option is to speak or not speak the message. As I recall, there have been instances where I balked at speaking aloud the idea I had about a person or situation. I prophesied according to my proportion of faith – which was lacking because of timidity. I quenched the spirit. I think of it as pulling back from the spiritual flow. There have been times when I did speak it out and the widened eyeballs proved the source and genuineness. It’s almost as if the response was “God is in you of a truth!” I am learning not to shrink back from specific info about others and speak it out.

Is it too late for a “geezer” like me to learn, obey God better and change? How can it be? Obedience and trust in God is as restricted as prophecy – not at all! Abraham was about 120 years old when God took him and Isaac on the journey to Mt Moriah. Moses was 80 when God called him from the “(burning) bush leagues” to the big leagues! The time to trust God is always an eternal “Now”.

1. Prophecy is the Bridge from Inspiration to Revelation

How do we learn to walk by revelation – message of knowledge, message of wisdom and discerning of spirits? One way is by growing in, and becoming proficient in, prophecy. If the message in prophecy is generalized for a specific individual or group (inspiration), it could also possibly contain specific info about a person or group (revelation). The difference is God’s option. When we prophesy generally, it really cannot be wrong. If the prophecy is “I, the Lord your God love you and have called you to be My children and to walk with Me.”, how can there be any chance of error or harm? Those words are true to scripture and the needs of every saint. Now, when we prophesy those words and God prompts us to add on at the end, “Now stop being intimidated, rise up and do what I’ve told you to do!”, now there is some pointed exhortation that will either be appropriate or potentially inappropriate and generate a reaction. That message will take courage and commitment to God to deliver. And it will generate results also – obedience and blessing or disobedience and resistance.

Sometimes prophecy is a believer’s first foray into revelation. God slips it in with a “safe” and “routine” prophecy. As soon as the word, the phrase, the idea, or the impression appears to us we have the opportunity to speak it out or shrink back in fear. This opportunity in prophecy gets us to “dip our toes” into the revelation manifestations and get comfortable with them. If we are prophesying correctly, we get the revelation on specific information right before we are to speak it out just like when we prophesy a general inspirational message. We allow it to “flow out of us” just as we do the non-specific, inspirational messages. Before we know it, we develop an experiential familiarity with revelation, just like we have with inspirational information as we operate prophecy and the interpretation of tongues. The manifestations are built to progress us from inspired action in tongues, to inspired action and mind involvement in the interpretation of tongues. Then prophecy includes the previous skills and adds on the possibility of receiving revelation and acting on it (speaking).

The revelation manifestations build on prophecy because God shares info with an individual saint and they need not speak it immediately out. The information can be for a current immediate situation (like prophecy) or for a longer-range benefit. It could be for the saint or for someone else. It could be just for the receiver’s knowing or for service to others. It could be to instigate trust, miracles and healing. Revelation is at God’s option to whom, what, where, when, why and how it’s given. The first three manifestations are the “tricycle of the spirit”. The next six are the “bicycle of the spirit” demanding spiritual balance on two wheels – you and God. All of these comprise “walking by the spirit”.

1. The Interpretation of Tongues is … the Interpretation of Tongues

I was taught that the interpretation of tongues was what I should do after I spoke in tongues during a believer’s meeting. I was also taught that it was the equivalent of prophecy and was a message from God to the believers present that edify by means of exhortation and comfort. I was taught that it was the equivalent of prophecy, except that speaking in tongues came first. I have operated this manifestation of the spirit this way for decades, until recently. I have come to realize that my understanding and operation may be incorrect. Why is that? Let me explain.

First off, what is speaking in tongues? Here is a list of the scriptural descriptions and benefits of speaking in tongues.

Descriptions and Benefits of Speaking in Tongues

Toward God

1. To worship God via the spirit – John 4:24.
2. To speak the mighty works of God – Acts 2:11.
3. To exalt God – Acts 10:46.
4. To share sacred secrets – 1 Cor. 14:2.
5. Giving thanks well – 1 Cor. 14:17.
6. Crying out, “Daddy! Daddy!” – Romans 8:15.

Toward Yourself

1. Proof God is there and at work in us now – Acts 2:4.
2. Speak in languages of men and angels - 1 Cor. 13:1.
3. Edifies us – 1 Cor. 14:5.
4. Builds us up – Jude 20.
5. The spirit bears witness with our spirit – Romans 8:16.
6. Proof that we are children of God, heirs of God, joint heirs with Christ and will share his glory – Rom. 8:17.
7. Strengthened with power in your inner man Eph. 3:16.
8. Praying in the spirit for yourself and others – Rom. 8:26.

Toward Others

1. Sign to unbelievers – 1 Cor. 14:22.
2. Interpretation of a message to God for the hearers – 1 Cor. 14:5.
3. A witness to others of the new birth – Acts 10:44.
4. Praying in the spirit for yourself and others – Eph. 6:18.

If speaking in tongues is primarily prayer and praise to God in a language we don’t know, then what should the interpretation of that be? Should it be prayer and praise to God or a message from God to others? By the simple logic of word use, an interpretation is giving the gist, the sum and substance of what was spoken in another language. So, if the original message in an unknown language is prayer and praise to God, the interpretation should be that too. If I have been speaking in tongues and then offering a message from God to the assembled saints, I have been prophesying after speaking in tongues, not offering an interpretation of tongues. Was anyone hurt? Of course not! God wants us all to speak in tongues, interpret and prophesy! Always has – always will! We saw in Num. 11:16ff that God’s answer to incomplete prophecy was more prophecy! The manifestations – each and every one – never hurt anyone and are guaranteed beneficial as 1 Cor. 12:7 says.

1 Cor. 12:7

Now to each one the manifestation of the spirit is given for the common good.

So extra prophecy never hurt anyone, but I missed the blessing of hearing what I was saying in tongues for decades. When I spoke in tongues and interpreted what I had spoken in tongues, it blew my mind! I was praising God and then asking God for stuff! All this time while I ignorantly spoke in tongues, I was telling God how much I appreciated Him and loved him. And I was also asking for Him for stuff. No wonder I’m so blessed! I’ve been praying perfectly for decades!

You might say, “Steve, you’ve been saying this for decades. How can you say you just realized this?” Good point. My answer is that I knew it intellectually, but not experientially. When I heard what I have been saying in tongues to God in English, it was like being punched in the heart and lenses taken from eyes. I’ve realized more deeply that there is something in me that loves God on its own, without my help or hindrance. There’s a part of me that is perfect and God has made it available to tap that spirit to help and augment my body and soul ability. In addition, I really understand this verse I have read for years…

1 Cor, 14:14

For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my understanding is unfruitful.

When I speak in tongues, my spirit prays. The body and soul part of me is clueless and unhelpful. In other words, I can’t mess it up. I can’t pray amiss. I can’t pray for the wrong thing. I can’t pray unfruitfully. Let me say it in the positive now. As I speak in tongues, I pray perfectly to God about the right things and people with spiritual understanding.

1 Cor. 14:15A

What, then, is to be done? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also.

We can pray two ways – with the spirit and with our human mind. Both are valid and valuable. Somehow or other I have subtly discounted tongues because I never understood what I was saying. When I heard it in the interpretation, I’ve realized it’s not mundane mumblings, but God’s gift within me giving God the worship He deserves and petitioning Him for my benefit. This insight has renewed an intense desire to speak in tongues as much as possible.

1. The Mind of the Spirit

Another revelatory insight to me is the “mind of the spirit”. What do I mean by that?

1 Cor. 2:16

For who has come to know the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ.

I’ve always taken that verse as symbolic, or mystical, or something ethereal. After listening to what “my spirit prays”, I realize that I really do have the mind of Christ. The spirit in me has thoughts expressed in the senses world as I speak in tongues and interpret them. It seems like speaking in tongues is releasing the “mind of Christ” in prayer and praise. Interpretation of tongues lets me and others know what those thoughts of the spirit are. It’s more proof that I have a perfect spirit within. And if I have the mind of Christ, I also have the love of Christ, the peace of Christ, the ability of Christ… ! I am really two persons – flesh and spirit. Both have thoughts, urges, and orientations. I know so experientially. I heard “the spirit” say so!

Gal. 5:17, 18

For the flesh sets its desire against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh; these are opposed to each other, with the result that you are not doing what you want.

But if you are led by the spirit, you are not under the law.

The interpretation of tongues has given me a closer understanding of what qualities, character, desires, and aspirations the “new spiritual man” within me has. It’s no longer an ethereal, ghostly entity, but a real thoughtful creation within which wants to glorify God and live abundantly. What an awesome realization!