

# FALSE SIGNS AND WONDERS



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## Introduction

With the increase of the move of the Holy Spirit in churches around our countries with souls being saved, healed and set free from demonic influence, there are groups who set up websites and go around teaching about “the false signs and wonders that will appear in the last days” This teaching has “spooked” many godly folk away from wanting to ask for and receive the supernatural gifts of the Spirit for fear that they may receive something false and end of doing the devil’s work instead of being used by the Holy Spirit to strengthen the body of Christ in their region.

## The Genuine and the Counterfeit

It is fully accepted that where there is the genuine article, there is the counterfeit. The counterfeit can appear so genuine that it may take a qualified expert, as in the case of counterfeit currency, to detect what is genuine and what is false. In the same way, it will be the mature, experienced Christian believer who will be able to distinguish the false from the true: *“But solid food belongs to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil”* (Hebrews 5:14 NKJV).

## **The Wheat and The Tares**

Jesus gave a parable about the wheat and the tares, in which He said that after the good farmer had planted his wheat, an enemy came along and planted tares, a type of weed that looked exactly like wheat as it was growing in with the wheat. This made these weeds difficult to remove without damaging the good crop of wheat. When it came time for harvest, both types were harvested together and the weeds were then separated out and burned (Matthew 13:24-13:30).

This is to show that in our churches we have genuine converts to Christ, and religious ones who have just the “badge” of Christianity whose hearts are not renewed and their spirit is not recreated. But looking on the outward appearance we would not be able to tell the difference, because their outward demeanour could be exactly the same as the godly believers in the fellowship.

## **We Cannot Rely On Outward Appearances**

Samuel was commissioned to go and find a new king for Israel to replace Saul who had disobeyed the Lord and was about to lose his kingdom. He had heard of a successful farmer called Jesse, who had some fine looking sons who might be excellent candidates to be anointed as the next king. So he went and reviewed the sons, and God told him that none of these were suitable. And when Samuel, being puzzled asked God why, this is what the Lord said to him:

*“Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, because I have refused him. For the Lord does not see as man*

*sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart” (1 Samuel 16:7).*

Samuel was further puzzled because the Lord had told him to go and anoint one of Jesse’s sons! So he asked: *“Are all the young men here?”* (16:11), and Jesse replied: *“There remains yet the youngest, and there he is, keeping the sheep.”* And so the youngest son and the least likely candidate from the natural point of view, was the one God’s had chosen to be anointed as the next king of Israel.

So, things are not always what they appear to be. First impressions based on the outward appearance may not be the right ones. We can look around our church and see the attractive, handsome, talented folk who seem to have it all together and think that they are going to be the “movers and shakers” in the kingdom of God. Then we look at the unlovely, strange-looking, too young or too old folk and reject them because they are “goofy”-looking, immature or “past their use-by date”. But God looks at the heart, and He may use the most unlikely person to do a work in the Spirit that will totally transform that church for Christ.

## **The Greatest Christian Who Ever Lived**

I heard a preacher one give the story about what might happen in the Judgment. The announcement is made to acknowledge the greatest Christian who ever lived and who did the greatest work for God ever. All the big-name ministries of the centuries were standing around expecting one of them to be called out. The angel announced, “Gertrude MacGerkenshaw!” Out comes a little old lady with her hair in a bun and wearing tennis shoes. It turned out that she was a prayer warrior whose prayers empowered all the big-name ministries and as a consequence won millions to Christ. And yet, how many in her church would

have known that she was a woman of faith and power just by looking at her? You'd be surprised at looking at some of little old grandmas and grandpas in our churches, how powerful they were for God when they were younger, and how powerful their prayers are now!

## **Context Is Vital**

So, firstly, we must examine the Scriptures being quoted by teachers who are opposing the supernatural move of the Spirit to see the context, to whom and to what purpose they were written. Next we need to see how we can recognise false prophets, teaching, signs and wonders manifest in these modern times, and whether they are consistent with the Scriptures that are being quoted by those opposing the current manifestation of the supernatural gifts of the Spirit. Also, we need to look at the central issue that determines whether a miraculous or supernatural manifestation is genuine or false.

## Scripture Background to False Prophets

### The Old Testament

#### Inducement to Go After Other Gods

The first Scripture reference we will examine is Deuteronomy 13: 1-5:

*“If there arises among you a prophet or a dreamer of dreams, and he gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder comes to pass, of which he spoke to you, saying, ‘Let us go after other gods’—which you have not known—‘and let us serve them,’ you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams, for the Lord your God is testing you to know whether you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul.”*

Looking carefully at this reference we see that the prophecy, dream, a sign or a wonder, is one that encourages people to go after “other gods” which they have not known, to serve them and not the God of the Bible. These are the prophets that we should not listen to. It is interesting to note that the presence of these false prophets is for God to test the people to know whether they love God with all their heart and soul.

*“You shall walk after the Lord your God and fear Him, and keep His commandments and obey His voice; you shall serve Him and hold fast to Him. But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has spoken in order to*

*turn you away from the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt and redeemed you from the house of bondage, to entice you from the way in which the Lord your God commanded you to walk. So you shall put away the evil from your midst.”*

Here it is clear that the false prophecy, along with the associated signs and wonders are to turn people away from God. That is the purpose of them. When we are aware of the purpose, we can compare prophetic words on the basis of whether they strengthen faithfulness to the God of the Bible, or they weaken it in favour of other gods.

## **The New Testament**

### **Wolves in Sheep Clothing**

The next reference is found in Matthew 7:15-20:

*“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thorn bushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them.”*

This shows that there is a big difference between the outward appearance of the false prophets and what they are really like in their hearts and spirit. It is not that the function of prophecy itself is at fault, but the person who is giving it. If the heart of the person is bad, the prophecy will be bad. It is as simple as that. If

we are going to determine whether a prophecy is genuine or false, we need to look carefully at the person who is giving it. A bad person can give an accurate prophecy, but for the wrong reasons:

### *Demon Possessed Servant Girl*

*“This girl followed Paul and us, and cried out, saying, ‘These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation.’” (Acts 16:17).*

The servant girl was demon-possessed and was working for pagan employers who were making money from her “prophecies”. The prophecy was accurate, because Paul and his ministry team were in actual fact servants of God showing the pagans the way of salvation. But her heart was bad, so therefore her prophecy was bad, even though it was accurate. The fault was in the motivation and purpose for giving the prophecy.

A person in a church service may give an accurate prophecy revealing sin in the church and may actually identify particular members who are sinning, but it could come from a spirit of criticism, jealousy and envy instead of the Holy Spirit, and the purpose might be to discredit the good reputations of godly people, especially those in leadership.

Notice that the Matthew reference describes false prophets as been wolves in sheep’s clothing. These false prophets may be attractive, seemingly well-adjusted and charming people, and that can intensify the deception. Notice the next reference:

*“Keep watch over yourselves and the entire flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which He purchased with His own blood. I know that after*

*my departure, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from our own number, men will rise up and distort the truth to draw away disciples after them” (Acts 20:28-30).*

Paul was aware that after he had completed his ministry in that church, false prophets would come in as savage wolves, not sparing the flock. These false prophets come with their own agenda. They will have self-ambition and be unteachable. They won't care about the well-being of the people. He says that there will be those even among them who will rise up and distort the truth with false teaching and prophecy and will draw disciples after them and away from Christ. An example of this is found in 3 John 1:9:

### Controlling Spirit

*“I have written to the church about this, but Diotrephes, who loves to be first will not accept our instruction. So if I come, I will call attention to his malicious slander against us. And unsatisfied with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers and forbids those who want to do so, even putting them out of the church.”*

This is an example of a man who has arisen among the members of the church and has placed himself in the senior role and is distorting the authority of his role, asserting that he is right and everyone else is wrong, excommunicating anyone who disagrees with him concerning his attitude to John and his ministry team.

What this man is doing is drawing away disciples for himself and therefore bringing division into the church. How often have we seen this sort of thing happen in our modern churches, yet many don't recognise this as equivalent to being a false prophet.

### False Christs

*“Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and will deceive many...many false prophets will rise up and deceive many” (Matthew 24:4-5,11).*

This is a description of one who may come in the Name of Christ and who may assert that he is a special representative of Christ with secret revelation that he alone has received which makes him right and everyone else wrong. We need to be very careful of those who discredit godly ministries in order to put themselves forward and draw disciples after themselves. A pastor who will assert, “This town is mine, no other church here will succeed except mine” is one of those false prophets who, not in so many words but in attitude, is saying “I am Christ”.

### The Lawless One

*“The coming of the lawless one will be accompanied by the working of Satan, with every kind of power, sign and false wonder, and with every wicked deception directed against those who are perishing, because they refused the love of the truth that would have saved them” (2 Thessalonians 2:9-10).*

This describes the appearance of a particular person described as the lawless one, and he will be working with Satan’s power. We have already seen that the purpose of false prophecy is to draw people away from the God of the Bible to other gods. This reference refers to false signs and wonders which are manifested for exactly the same reason. They are to deceive “those who are perishing” because they have refused to

accept the Gospel of Christ. Therefore the ones who are going to be deceived by these false signs and wonders are those who are not genuinely converted to Christ.

## **The Strength of Genuine Converts**

But it does not necessarily follow that genuine converts to Christ will be deceived: *“For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect”* (Matthew 24:24).

It says that it may be possible to deceive the truly converted Christ, but not probable if the Christian is sober and vigilant:

*“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour”* (1 Peter 5:8).

We need to walk very carefully before God so that *“Satan should not outwit us, for we are not unaware of his schemes”* (2 Corinthians 2:11). We have to know our enemy and to identify when and where he is at work.

## **False Signs and Wonders Are To Lead The Unconverted Away From Christ**

### **Not All Professing Christians Are Converted Believers**

There is no clear evidence that the false signs and wonders will lead genuinely converted Christians away from Christ. But many church members may be deceived, because not all church members are genuinely converted Christians no matter how religious they appear to be. We see in one of the references how a false prophet can be a wolf in sheep's clothing.

### **The Counterfeit is Very Close to the Original**

This is the principle of the counterfeit: that it has to be so close to the genuine so that it easily deceives the unwary. In the Bank of England there are employees whose role is to know the difference between genuine and counterfeit banknotes. The training involves comprehensive study of genuine banknotes so that when they compare two banknotes they can detect which is the genuine and which is the counterfeit. When genuine

believers spend time in fellowship with God through prayer and the Word, they receive comprehensive knowledge of what is genuine Christian faith. This means when a wolf in sheep's clothing appears, the deception fails because the difference is plainly obvious to them.

## **Critical Spirits Can Harm Good Believers**

There are those who make a mission out of weeding out counterfeits by concentrating on the faults of false prophets and teachers but they don't have extensive experience and knowledge in genuine prophecy. They can end up being deceived themselves into operating from a demonic critical spirit instead of through the Holy Spirit. Some set up websites and make it their role to discredit the work of godly ministries. These could be wolves in sheep's clothing. Wolves in sheep's clothing may look and sound like concerned seekers of truth, but in reality they are working from a spirit of jealousy and envy. They are not genuine converts to Christ, therefore the fruit they produce is bad.

## **False Prophets Draw the Unconverted Away From Christ**

Let us be quite clear: False prophets and teachers seek to draw unconverted people away from Christ. Genuine prophets point people to Christ and display Him as Lord and Saviour. See what happens to a man who tries to interfere with Paul's preaching in order to turn a Roman official away from Christ:

### Elymas The False Prophet

*“Now when they had gone through the island to Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew whose name was Bar-Jesus, who was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, an intelligent man. This man called for Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God. But Elymas the sorcerer (for so his name is translated) withstood them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith. Then Saul, who also is called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him and said, “O full of all deceit and all fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease perverting the straight ways of the Lord? And now, indeed, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you shall be blind, not seeing the sun for a time.” And immediately a dark mist fell on him, and he went around seeking someone to lead him by the hand. Then the proconsul believed, when he saw what had been done, being astonished at the teaching of the Lord” (Acts 13:6-12).*

Paul’s words to Elymas are instructive when identifying a false prophet. A false prophet is full of deceit and fraud; an enemy of righteousness and perverting the straight ways of the Lord. So when these critics on their websites criticise a godly ministry and accuse them of being false prophets and teachers, what they are doing is very similar to what Elymas tried to do as he attempted to interfere with Paul’s sharing of the gospel with the proconsul, So, Elymas is set forth as an example of what a false prophet actually is.

### Prominent Ministry Criticized

One website accused a prominent lady Bible teacher of being a false teacher, because she mentions prosperity as a component

of her faith. In effect, the website accuses her mouth of being “*full of deceit and fraud*” (Psalm 10:7). Yet when I sat through four hours of her ministry through Youtube I found her one of the most honest and sincere teachers I have ever heard! The implied accusation is that she is “*an enemy of righteousness*” (Acts 13:10). But she encourages a strong commitment and trust in Christ. How can that be – an enemy and a friend of righteousness at the same time? How can she “*pervert the straight ways of the Lord*” (v10), when she preaches a totally Scriptural and genuine Gospel? Anyone who reads the comments on these websites and then views her preaching, unless they are blind, deaf and dumb, are able to see clearly that the comments are an ungodly attack on a godly woman!

### The Unconverted Hoodwinked By Criticizing Websites

But the sad fact is that those who are unconverted, and uneducated in the ways of the Lord, can be hoodwinked by these websites and turned away from the ministries of sound, godly teachers. The outcome is that they lose what could have been excellent opportunities to hear the true Gospel, come to Christ and be genuinely converted!

### Criticizers Compared To Snakes

These criticizers are like snakes; but not like rattlesnakes that have a rattle in their tails to warn off the unwary. These are more like green poisonous snakes that are camouflaged in the green grass and unwary people may step on them and be bitten before there is the realisation they are even there.

They are like the viper that hid in the firewood and bit Paul on the arm when he went to put some sticks on the fire. They are like the mosquito that silently lands on our arm and we don't

know we are bitten until it starts to come up as a red, itchy lump. They are also like bed bugs that bite and suck our blood while we are asleep and we wake up with red welts all over our body and legs.

### Not Knowing One Church From Another

If you were like me before you got converted to Christ, you would not have known one religious group from another, nor one “Christian” website from another. I didn’t know the real difference between the Mormon, Jehovah’s Witness, Seventh Day Adventist, Baptist, or Pentecostal churches. To me, in my unconverted state, they were all the same. I could easily have been led away from Christ if I had been introduced to the wrong one!

## **Another Form of Falsehood**

We need to consider another area of falsehood that does not affect the unconverted as much as it affects true, godly believers. This is the misuse of the supernatural spiritual gifts.

## **The Misuse of Spiritual Gifts**

This is the manifestation of a good and genuine spiritual gift by someone whose heart is not right for it to be manifested in the correct way. The servant girl manifested a word of knowledge about Paul and Silas. The word of knowledge was accurate but the girl’s heart was not right. In fact, she was unconverted and demon possessed into the bargain! When Paul cast the demon out of her, she could no longer manifest the word of knowledge.

Any spiritual gift can be misused when manifested by someone who is not right in their heart before God. In the following paragraphs, we will examine several of the supernatural gifts and see how they can be used correctly or misused.

### **The one spiritual gift that has been discredited the most has been the gift of tongues**

This is because it is the least understood gift by those who have never experienced it, and not fully understood by those who have actually received it. Some teach that tongues is the primary evidence of being baptised with the Spirit, others say that tongues is essential to Christian conversion. Others say that because it declined and ceased as the Church became established and that tongues-speaking in our modern times is just meaningless “babble” and “gibberish”.<sup>[i]</sup>

It is not the purpose of this book to go into a comprehensive description of the use of tongues, other than to say that the examples in Acts where the Holy Spirit fell on groups of people tongues was plainly evident and Paul mentioned it as part of the supernatural gifts in 1 Corinthians 12, as well as giving a whole chapter on the correct use of the gift in the Church.<sup>[ii]</sup>

- **Unwise public speaking.** The main misuse of tongues can come from the speaking and praying in tongues during public church services without an interpreter of tongues present. Paul says that when this happens, outsiders unlearned in the use of the gift hear the speaking and are induced to think that the speakers are “demented”. He says that interpretation is vital for any tongues spoken out loud in a public meeting so that the hearers can understand what is being said. He says that if a person speaks or prays in tongues (out loud) and there is no interpreter present he

should speak to himself and God. The person praying out loud in tongues may be having a great time with the Lord, and Paul did say that the person is “*giving thanks well*”, in other words, the speaker is doing nothing wrong.<sup>[iii]</sup>

Unfortunately, the uninterpreted speaking of tongues in the public meeting can give ammunition for the critics to discredit the gift and to put good people off from considering as a useful gift to enhance their prayer life. This is made worse by the inappropriate recording of people while they are praising God in tongues during free worship times, and uploading them to Youtube in order to expose the worship to greater and more widespread ridicule.

- **There is nothing wrong with praying out loud in a prayer meeting.** It is not a public meeting where the unconverted would attend. There is nothing that makes a prayer meeting come alive than having everyone praying together in tongues. It can bring the Holy Spirit right into that meeting, and the life of the whole church can be enhanced, souls saved, sick healed and demons cast out in the Gospel meetings!
- **The notion that God has to take over the speech faculties** and cause the speaking to be involuntary. Okay, so in the early stages of the Church when the Holy Spirit fell on a group of believers, they spontaneously spoke in tongues and praised God. And in the early days of the Pentecostal movement, the same thing happened. Before the Holy Spirit came to the church, no one knew anything about a spiritual gift of tongues. But once things settled down, believers learned that they could ask for the gift and receive it by faith; and what they received was just as genuine.

When it is spoken as an involuntary act motivated by the “Spirit”, a person may have a burst of emotion in a hyped up meeting and burst forth in tongues in a way that doesn’t sound right. They speak from just their mouth instead of from their heart. So it sounds “off”. When tongues spoken in that way and observed by unconverted people, one can understand why they are put off the idea of receiving the gift for themselves!

- **Self control is vital.** Those who speak tongues as something involuntary that bursts forth outside of their personal control, miss the component of the fruit of the Spirit called **self control** (Galatians 5:23). Also, Paul made it quite clear that *“the spirit of the prophet is subject to the prophet”* (1 Corinthians 14:32), which means that the speaker is in complete control of when and where he speaks in tongues in the same way that he has control when and where he gives a prophecy. It is not surprising that some who wait to get some sort of involuntary movement of their lips and tongue received nothing, or get something false. This is because if someone is looking and waiting for a sensory experience, the devil is always there to give them one, or to fill them with disappointment when nothing happens!
- **The most powerful use of tongues is the speaking of it privately before God**, and if spoken out in a public meeting to ensure that there are those with the gift of interpretation of tongues to give the English interpretation so that the hearers can understand what is being said and be edified by it.
- **There have been attempts to try and share the Gospel to a foreign language speaker in tongues.** Although there have been times when this has happened successfully, as in the case of St Anthony who when he

preaching in Italy he spoke Italian and when in France spoke French, though he had never studied these languages.<sup>[iv]</sup>

But there have been instances, especially in the early days of the Pentecostal movement when well-intentioned believers, having just received the gift of tongues, felt a call to go to China and share the Gospel. They sold their homes to raise the money to go,. They were tragically disappointed that they could not make themselves understood by the Chinese. It didn't matter how hard they prayed and tried to replicate the language. They had to return to their home country broke and disillusioned.<sup>[v]</sup>

- **Tongues language has sometimes been understood.** There have been times where someone has spoken out in tongues, expecting an interpretation, and someone recognised their own dialect and was able to share a direct translation of what was said. The speech consisted in praise, worship and encouraging words from the Lord to the people, and to that person in particular.<sup>[vi]</sup>

A group of church members, including a visitor from Ghana was in a Wednesday night prayer meeting, and it was common practice for participants to pray in tongues, between individual prayers in English. A young man was praying in tongues along with the others, and suddenly the Ghanaian Christian stopped the meeting, turned to the young man and told him he was praying in his (the Ghanaian's) own village dialect. The young man had never been to Ghana nor had he ever met a Ghanaian previously, let alone know that man's rural village dialect! The Ghanaian told the young man exactly what he said, and it was praise to God for His wonderful works. That had an electric effect on that prayer meeting for sure!

- **Tongues is a very powerful tool in the Spirit** for those who use it the way it is meant to be used – for personal worship and praise, as well as for powerful and effective intercession. And in the church meeting, it can be very effective for releasing the Spirit to allow the word of prophecy to come forth, bringing the glory of God right into that meeting! That’s why the devil hates it and will do everything he can to discredit it. Therefore we must be very careful to ensure that we use the gift in the correct way to avoid giving place to the devil (Ephesians 4:27).

### **Another gift that is widely misused is the gift of prophecy**

Prophecy is designed to share “love letters” from God to the group as a whole or to specific individuals. One of the most powerful prophecies has been just simply “God loves you”, and that has totally changed lives because the prophecy has come just at the right time and place when a simple message like that was required.

- **The New Testament gift of prophecy is for the comfort, encouragement and the building up of Christian believers.** It is used primarily in the church meeting as Paul clearly pointed out in 1 Corinthians 14:19).
- There are two events where the prophet Agabus gave prophecies: (1) where he predicted a famine, which came to pass (Acts 11:27-30); (2) to Paul (21:10-12) where he warned him about what was going to happen to him if he went to Jerusalem.

These are **predictive** prophecies, and the evidence of authenticity is that they came to pass. In the one about the

famine, the text says that it came to pass in the days of Claudius. The effect of the prophecy was that Paul and Barnabas went around the Gentile churches collecting money to take to Jerusalem to enable the Christians in Judea to buy food at the resultant elevated prices caused by the famine.

The second prophecy came to pass when Paul went to Jerusalem for the last time and was imprisoned exactly the way Agabus predicted. The purpose of the prophecy was not to stop Paul from doing what he believed was God's will for him, as the Ephesian believers thought as they tried to persuade Paul not to go; but to prepare him for what was going to happen so when it did happen it was not unexpected.

- **Paul spoke a prophetic word as his ship was driven by a fierce storm onto the Maltese coast** (Acts 27:27-28:5). He predicted that if they stayed with the ship, not one life would be lost, and it stopped the sailors from getting to their lifeboat. It came true. All got to the shore safely. Here was a prophecy that included an instruction that resulted in safety and survival.
- **Another possible misuse of the prophetic word can be by people who think they have knowledge that they can't preach in the church.** If a person has a true preaching gift in the Spirit, the gift will make room for him (Proverbs 18:16). If the opportunity does not come right away, the godly man will be patient and wait on God in prayer and the Word until the way opens up for him. The one impatient to share what he knows, or his "special revelation", may use the gift of prophecy to convey it to the people. This use of prophecy does not come from the Spirit, but from the man's own impatient spirit. These

prophecies usually have little impact on the other members and can be forgotten by the singing of the next hymn.

- **Someone with selfish ambition who wants to be seen and heard**, and to show the people that he is a “man of the Spirit” with a special gift that will benefit the people. He will often give lengthy, involved prophecies in King James English. His aim is to show that he is in touch with God who is leading him to speak with his loud “built-in” amplifier, and with very important sounding language to show that “this is God speaking to you”. He doesn’t like having his prophecies written out beforehand for the pastor to evaluate, nor does he wish to have them recorded. This is because he has an unteachable spirit and does not wish to have his prophecies “judged in the flesh” by others who don’t understand his “special” relationship with God that is “unique” in the church. It is this self-importance that robs any prophetic gift he might have of any Holy Spirit unction or power.
- **Prophecy given by someone who spends little time in prayer and the Word.** He will excuse that by saying that he is “led by the Spirit” and “not by the letter of the Word”. The trouble with this is that he has no inner “monitor” to evaluate that what he is receiving is consistent with God’s written Word. He does not understand that the written Scriptures are God’s primary way of communicating with mankind, and every prophetic word in the Spirit must be consistent with what is written in the Bible. If he doesn’t have an extensive knowledge of the Bible and an intimate relationship with God in prayer, then there is no way he can confidently validate that the prophecies he gives are given by the Spirit. And if others receive his prophecies as God’s word to them, they could open themselves up to a deceiving

spirit that could cause them a lot of harm, leading to possible conflict in the church.

- **Wisdom is vitally important when giving personal prophecies to individuals.** Someone giving a prophecy in the flesh to the whole church can get away with making a mistake because most won't accept that word as being specifically for them. But a word given directly to a specific person had better be totally accurate and from a good heart, because immeasurable harm can be done to someone through a false prophecy given in the flesh, or even from a lying spirit!
- **Remember Ahab's prophets who gave a whole lot of thrilling and positive words to Ahab** about the great victory he was going to win. When he received the word from the prophet of the Lord, Micaiah, it was revealed that God had put a lying spirit in the mouths of all the other prophets in order to get Ahab to go out to his death in the battle (1 Kings 22). How many times have we heard the same type of motivational prophecies in our churches that these false prophets gave to Ahab? This is a great lesson to us that when we are moved to give a prophetic word, that we are giving the word through the Holy Spirit and not just saying what we in our own hearts would like to see happen.
- **Be careful about saying "Thus saith the Lord"**, you had better jolly well make sure that it is God saying it and not your own heart, because there is a stern warning that should make you tremble about asserting that your prophecy is coming straight from the Lord, when it might be just from your own desire.

- **Spreading ungodliness through the church.**

*“Therefore, this is what the LORD of Hosts says concerning the prophets: “I will feed them wormwood and give them poisoned water to drink, for from the prophets of Jerusalem ungodliness has spread throughout the land. ”This is what the LORD Almighty says: “Do not listen to what the prophets are prophesying to you; they fill you with false hopes. They speak visions from their own minds, not from the mouth of the LORD” (Jeremiah 23:15-16).*

This is something that you don't want to happen as the result of your prophetic words – ungodliness to spread through your church.

An example of this is what happened in a church once. A stranger, unknown to the pastor came to the Sunday meeting, and during the worship time, he was seen going around to different members of the congregation, giving them personal words. The pastor saw this, and went quietly up beside him to hear what he was saying to the people. What he heard convinced him that there was something amiss with the prophetic words. The man was gently encouraged (maybe not so gently when he became obstinate with the pastor) to leave the meeting with the help of a very large but friendly usher. This is where this false prophet was prevented from spreading ungodliness through an otherwise healthy church.

- **An unteachable spirit.** It is interesting to note from the Jeremiah reference concerning a person acting in the role of a prophet and who has an ungodly heart, that God Himself can feed the poison that causes the ungodly outcome of his false prophetic words. This may come about through wilful unconfessed sin in his life, an arrogant, unteachable spirit, or a spirit of jealousy and envy.<sup>[vii]</sup>

- **Prophecy coming from an evil heart.** We often think that a false prophecy comes from a lying demon, but what if because of the false prophet's evil heart, the poison comes from God Himself to show that prophet up for what he really is? It may be to make the prophet overreach himself in the obvious falsehood of what he is saying that every converted believer who hears him will know without a doubt that the guy is a false prophet, and they should not listen to him! Because that is what God says to those who are honestly seeking Him for a good word from through a genuine prophet. He is saying, "You're not going to get a good word from these false prophets because I have made sure in no uncertain terms that you won't!"
- **Inspired preaching.** It is possible that Paul's definition of prophecy could have included sharing revelation in the form of preaching and teaching the people. Paul seems to be placing revelation at a higher priority than just straight Bible teaching. He says:

*"Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said. And if a revelation comes to someone who is seated, the first speaker should hold his peace. For you can all prophesy in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged" (1 Corinthians 14:29-31).*

What seems to be happening in early church meetings is a mixture of Bible teaching, prophetic words, and the sharing of revelation. So, it may be that a speaker was giving Bible teaching, and someone else indicates that they have received a revelation from the Holy Spirit. Paul says that the speaker should stop speaking and allow the person with the revelation to share it (1 Corinthians 14:30). He says that everyone can give Bible teaching, prophetic "love

letters” from God, and Holy Spirit revelation, in turn (v.31). This prevents one single speaker “hogging” all of the meeting with what he has to say. It implies that Paul’s view of prophecy may include all three types of speaking.

**Personal experiences:** I have been in “equipping meetings” and actually spoken at “prophetic days” when the speaker has been interrupted by someone sitting down. I think we have something to learn from the Scripture reference.

I was speaking at a prophetic day and was interrupted a few times by those who had something to share. One person spoke for around 15 minutes. It made my teaching session take over an hour when it should have just gone for 40 minutes. What I should have done is to sit down and allow the others who had “revelations” to get up and share in turn.

The morning session would have gone far better if I had been more humble and been less “self-important” and followed Paul’s teaching. This might be a good principle to follow in our churches. Many evangelical churches have “one-man” preaching, usually the pastor or minister, when the members might be more encouraged and built up in their faith if the preacher was prepared to make way and sit down if another member had a revelation from the Holy Spirit to share with the people.

- **Preacher speaking directly to my heart.** I have had several experiences where I have listened to a preacher and felt that he was preaching directly to me as if he knew the secrets of my heart. In one church where this happened the preacher had never met me, and I was just one person in a congregation of 400 people.

The preacher who preached on David and Goliath the night I first attended a Pentecostal church did not know that it was the only Bible story I knew, and that his preaching about it had a dynamic effect on me. When he conducted the altar call,<sup>[viii]</sup> every time I thought of an excuse why I didn't want to go up and receive Christ, he came up with the answer to it. When I ran out of excuses I knew I had to go up and receive Christ. The prophetic can break through many things that are spoken in a Christian service, and does not have to be limited to someone standing up and "giving a prophecy".

### **Another gift that can be misused and cause untold damage to vulnerable godly people is the Word of Knowledge**

The Word of Knowledge consists of a "slice" of knowledge about a person or situation that only God has revealed. The person receiving the Word has no doubt that it has come from the Holy Spirit because there is no way the giver of the Word can know it in the natural.

The best Word of Knowledge I have heard is from Rodney Francis in a meeting in Britain where he called out a gentleman from the congregation and told him that his faith is like a Morris Minor and that he should put his "car" in gear and move forward at a faster pace in the Spirit. The congregation got very excited and started praising God. Rodney found out later that the man was the president of the local Morris Minor club and had several Morris Minors in his collection! There was no way that Rodney could have known that, because he was a visiting preacher in that church for the first time.

My experience was in a house meeting where I had prophetic words for people, and I prayed for one man that God would give him a financial miracle. The group again got quite excited and I was told afterward that the man was facing bankruptcy in his business.

Another time, at a Christian youth camp, I got a word for a young lady and prayed for her to be released from the fear of the opposite sex. She broke down in tears, and I was told that she had counselling from a senior lady that afternoon for that very problem! I was very nervous about giving that word because I had only just met the girl and she seemed to be pretty confident in her demeanour and gave absolutely no clue to her fear.

- **The right use of the Word of Knowledge can greatly increase a believer's faith** and confidence that God knows exactly what he is going through. The misuse of the gift can cause untold hurt and damage and can drive good folk away from the church, and even away from Christ Himself!
- **The manipulation of vulnerable people not strong in the Word.** We should be suspicious of anyone who approaches people and says, "I have a word from God for you." Nine times out of ten it is not a true Word of Knowledge, but a manipulation to establish control over the person. This is the favourite strategy of someone with a controlling spirit.

It can happen with the pastor of a church who may sense discontent in his congregation and wants to strengthen their appreciation of him as someone who walks closely with God. It can also be used by a self-important person who is jealous of anyone else using spiritual gifts in his church. He announces to the members that God has told him that he is the only one who is to prophesy and give words of knowledge in the meetings, He will tell any woman who

attempts to give a prophecy that God has told him that she has a “Jezebel spirit” in order to quench her faith in the gift.

It can also be manifested through an elder wanting to have control over the pastor and the other members. He can advise the pastor by saying, “God wants you to do this or that.” If the elder wants to discredit the pastor he might go and say to the church gossip: “It has been revealed to me that the pastor is having an affair with the church secretary”. Gossip spreads like wildfire around some churches, and even if the word is false, the pastor can be discredited in the eyes of his congregation and his ministry ruined.

This type of “word” is really an unsubstantiated accusation, and bypasses the requirement of the word being established by “two or three witnesses” (Deuteronomy 19:15).

- **Sharing of the Word with the person when it would have been to alert the “sharer” for intercession.** If the receiver of the Word feels strongly to share it, then he must ask the Lord for the Word of Wisdom to be able to share it in a wise and sensitive manner. The example is a word of knowledge received by an elder that a young man in the fellowship is addicted to pornography while ministering to him in an altar call. If he blurts it out in front of everyone, it could shame the young man so much that it may turn him away from Christ and never come back to the church. So the elder asks for the Word of Wisdom, and the Holy Spirit informs him that he should tell the young man that the Lord wants him to be clean before Him. That way there is no mention of pornography, but the young man may very well come under conviction and later receive personal and private counselling. Once released from bondage to the addiction, he exclaims, “I have never felt so clean in all my life!”

- **There is a good rule to apply with any Word that reveals a sin in a person.** Often an intercessor will get words of knowledge about situations in church and people. The word is not given to be shared publicly, but for the intercessor to press into God for the Holy Spirit to resolve the issue.

The problem with getting a word concerning sin or a potential embarrassing habit pattern is that there is a chance that it may not be true. This is because it comes from an impression and these can be unreliable. Using the word just for intercession is safe, because nothing is shared with the subject person and the knowledge is kept in the secret prayer closet. But if it has to be shared with the subject person, then:

- **The Word of Wisdom will convey the knowledge in a way that will connect with the subject's personal conviction** if the Word is correct, but not openly accuse him of the sin. If the Word is incorrect, then no harm has been done. Let's say the word involves domestic violence at home. Sharing that would be very damaging to everyone, so there needs the Word of Wisdom. Perhaps the Word of Wisdom enables the person to say, "If Jesus was here, He would say to you that your wife and children need your love and care so that there will be a greater level of peace in your home." If this word is accurate, the husband and wife may come for marriage counselling and have the issue resolved. If not, all that has been shared is general advice about loving your wife and children in a greater way. No offence has been given in either case.

- **There are cases where the sin has to be publicly exposed through the Word of Knowledge:**

*“Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property. With his wife’s full knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself, but brought the rest and put it at the apostles’ feet. Then Peter said, “Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land? Didn’t it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn’t the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied just to human beings but to God.” When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard what had happened. Then some young men came forward, wrapped up his body, and carried him out and buried him. About three hours later his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. Peter asked her, “Tell me, is this the price you and Ananias got for the land?” “Yes,” she said, “that is the price.” Peter said to her, “How could you conspire to test the Spirit of the Lord? Listen! The feet of the men who buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out also.” At that moment she fell down at his feet and died. Then the young men came in and, finding her dead, carried her out and buried her beside her husband. Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events” (Acts 5:1-11).*

In this case, Peter had no natural knowledge about the price the couple got for their land and the difference between it and the amount they laid at the Apostles’ feet. It was revealed to Peter by the Holy Spirit. It was one of those times where it had to be publicly dealt with to give the clear message that lying to the Holy Spirit was not to be tolerated. It reminds of what Paul said about the immorality

in the Corinthian church: *"A little leaven, leavens the whole lump of dough"* (1 Corinthians 5:6).

It is interesting that Peter does not initially accuse the couple of the sin. He gives them "enough rope to hang themselves", He asks the question about the amount of money, and they condemn themselves out of their own mouths. Once they, in turn publicly tell the lie, it was then that Peter reveals what the Holy Spirit has told him.

- **Paul had a word of knowledge concerning the servant girl** (Acts 16:17). He did not know the girl's background and the nature of her employment. As he heard the repeated loud announcements about their mission, the Holy Spirit revealed to him that these came from a demon within her, and so, he turned around and cast the demon out of her.
- **The Word of Knowledge and Discerning of Spirits** can work together. The correct use of the Discernment of Spirits is to show what spirit is motivating a person. It can be a sweet, godly spirit, or a wrong spirit. The problem is that many who are ignorant of this tend to concentrate on "exposing" wrong spirits.

Once this happened to me. I have no difficulty in expressing my disagreement with suspect doctrine or practice at times. One of those times, I had a lively discussion with another young guy about certain practices that seemed a bit "shonky" to me. He then got angry with me, turned on me and said, "You have a spirit of variance!"

There are certain fellowship groups that teach the notion that if a person is not quite right in their walk with God, they have a "spirit" of this or of that. It implies that the person they are accusing is influenced by a demon. It is like accusing your mother-in-law of having a "spirit of

disapproval” because she might think that you are the wrong choice of a husband for her daughter!

- **One of the most hurtful accusations is one directed toward assertive women in the church.** There is nothing wrong with assertiveness. It is maintaining one’s right and refusing to submit to manipulation by controlling people. But an assertive woman can be accused of having a “Jezebel spirit”. It is a nasty accusation because Jezebel was an idol worshiper, the wife of an evil king and the murderer of the prophets of God.

So to accuse any woman in the church having a “Jezebel spirit” is to accuse her of being an idol worshiper, and a prophet killer. Do you know any women in your church like that? I don’t.

The fact is that the accusation can be directed toward women who are seen as not being submissive to their husbands. But the accusation is misdirected because Jezebel was submissive to Ahab. He was the king. There is no way that she would not have been submissive to him. Yes, she might have influenced the king to worship Baal, but the king had an evil heart anyway and would not have objected to it.

- **Accusing folk of having other types of “spirit”.** There are married couples who got married without taking enough time to ensure that they were compatible in every respect. If a couple love each other, even though they find themselves incompatible, they will make compromises so that they live with each other in harmony and have a happy marriage. But if they cannot compromise, say in the area of marital relations, the wife may accuse the husband of having a “spirit of lust: and the husband may accuse the wife of having a “spirit of frigidity”!

A husband may be accused of having a spirit of “laziness” because he would rather sit and watch the football on Saturday afternoon instead of tending to the garden, and he might accuse his wife of a spirit of “compulsive housework” if she keeps on using the vacuum cleaner in the room while he is trying to watch the football on the television.

- **Some useful techniques are available for dealing with demonic bondage.** Neil Anderson and Dr. Ed. Murphy, as part their counselling of those suspected of having demonic oppression or other influence in their lives, will take them through a checklist of possible traumatic events, sinful practices, and occult involvements that may have invited the demon[s] in. If the subject acknowledges involvement in certain items on the list, renounces them, and accepts their freedom from bondage in the Name of Jesus, he or she often feels the release without even having the particular spirit identified. If in the process, the demon manifests, it can be successfully cast out if the garbage it is feeding on has been removed.<sup>[ix]</sup>
- **Accusing a person having mental health issues of being possessed by a demon,** when the issue might be medical or emotional. Depression can arise out of a situational crisis like a bereavement, redundancy, divorce, miscarriage, or financial difficulty. Often this can be resolved by good counselling and ‘cognitive therapy’.

There are also developmental crises, such as childhood to adult (adolescence); adult to middle-age; (middle-age crisis), middle-age to old age; old age to approaching death. These can cause depression, and can also be resolved by good Christian counselling. But if these crises involve prolonged stress, they can alter the chemical

balance in the brain and so the depression becomes a medical issue which can be resolved through medical intervention. Treating depression by saying it is caused by a demon, can further deepen the depression and could drive a person to suicide. If that happens, an ignorant religious person may accuse the person of having a “spirit of suicide” and try to cast that “demon” out of them.

The proper way of treating depression and any other mental illness is to determine the cause, and the most appropriate method of treatment, whether it is counselling, or medical. Resorting to medical treatment through antidepressants is not sinful at all. It is just a resource for treating a distressing mental condition just like any other sickness that requires medication.<sup>[x]</sup>

- **Some mental health issues can be the result of demon oppression**, obsession, or possession. If counselling doesn't work, and medical intervention doesn't work, then the issue could be spiritual, and we go back to Neil Anderson's checklist to determine what activity invited the demon into that person's life. It is quite possible that once the spiritual issue has been resolved, counselling and/or medical resources then may be more successful.
- **We need to use the Word of Wisdom if a demon spirit has been identified** in conjunction with the gift of Discerning of Spirits. If we detect that a person has a particular spirit that is not of God, then we need to ask the Lord for a word of wisdom on how to deal with it, so that dealing with it is in the context of the fruit of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, kindness, and self-control).

## The misuse of the gifts of Healing

This is another issue in the Church. There are two sides to the gift of healing. (1) There is the instantaneous miracle of healing that occurs along with the preaching of the Gospel to the unconverted; and (2) there is the anointing of oil for healing by the elders of the church for converted Christian believers.

The reference in Mark 16 shows that laying on of hands brings recovery for the sick person. This may happen quickly or over a period of time. The principle is that they don't get sicker, but start to improve their wellness.

- **We can't heal people.** Only Jesus, through the power of the Holy Spirit can cause the actual healing. Our role is to pray the prayer of faith in obedience to God's Word: "*They will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover*" (Mark 16:18); "*And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up*" (James 5:16). We pray from obedience and not for results. We depend on the power of the Holy Spirit for the results.
- **The difficulty is that many who minister to the sick pray to God to heal the person.** If we examine the Gospels, nowhere did Jesus every pray for a sick person. He commanded healing by telling a lame person to take up his bed and walk, and a blind man to go wash in a pool. He told the fever in Peter's mother-in-law to depart and it did. Nowhere did Jesus or the Apostles every pray, "If it be thy will" to get a sick person healed. One man did come to Jesus and said, "You can heal me if you want to", and Jesus said, "I want to" and the man was healed (Luke 5:12).

When Jesus brought Lazarus back to life, He did not pray for it, although He did pray, but that prayer was to give the reason why He was going to bring the man back to

life. Lazarus came out of the grave when Jesus said in a loud voice, “Come out of there!” (John 11:40).

- **Requiring the sick person to have faith for healing.** Jesus celebrated faith for healing when He encountered it and acknowledged that the faith of the woman with the issue of blood got her healed (Matthew 9:23). Jesus never told a sick person, “You need to have faith before you can be healed.” Jesus commanded healing whether the sick person had faith or not.

A minister or preacher who says to a sick person who does not receive healing, “It is because you didn’t have enough faith”, he is not being totally consistent with how Jesus approached the healing of sick people. We cannot blame the sick person for not being healed. It is either a lack of faith in the person commanding the healing, or that there were other facts that prevented the power of the Holy Spirit from bringing the healing. One has to consider that it might have been the sovereign will of God at that particular time for that person to remain sick, and healing would come at a later time at which it certainly should.

- **Our role is to command the healing because God’s Word commands us** to do it. But the results are in His hands, and the Scripture says:

*“What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Certainly not! For He says to Moses: “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.” So then, it does not depend on man’s desire or effort, but on God’s mercy” (Romans 9:14-16).*

- **If a person doesn’t get healed**, and the person commanding the healing has all the faith in the world, and that the Holy Spirit has not revealed anything in the church

that would block the power of the Holy Spirit to heal, then we must give ourselves up to the sovereignty of God. He doesn't have to answer to us or anyone else about the reasons why He heals one and not another. We don't know why in Kathryn Kuhlman's Gospel meetings, one person gets out of his wheelchair totally whole and the person in the next wheelchair doesn't. Shall the clay tell the Potter, "Why have you done it this way?" (Isaiah 45:9).

- **Some use it to enhance their reputations and to increase their wealth.** The reason why Jesus was so powerful in His ministry is that He made Himself of no reputation and came as a Servant (Philippians 2:7-9). Jesus was healing people in accordance with the will of the Father. He said that His Father works and so did He (John 5:17). In other words, He did the works of the Father (John 9:4), implying that if the Father was present, He would be healing sick folks too! In actual fact, He said, "I am the God who heals you" (Exodus 15:26).
- **Jesus never asked for money to support His ministry.** It is true that there were supporters who had money and they provided support for His ministry, but that was their choice. He never solicited funds. It could be true that part of the proceeds for the two large catches of fish at the start of His ministry provided some financial support, but we are not actually told that in the Gospel record. When He and Peter needed money to pay tax, He got Peter to throw a fishing line over the side of the boat, catch a fish and take a coin out of its mouth.

But the preachers who teach that "if you give to the ministry, you will be more likely to receive your healing" are misusing the ministry of healing, and this does not do their reputations much good, and it harms the divine healing ministry. Simon the sorcerer offered money to receive the

baptism with the Spirit, and Peter told him: *“You have no part or share in our ministry, because your heart is not right before God, For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and captive to iniquity”* (Acts 8:21,23). If that was what Peter said to a guy who offered money for the power, what do you think he would have said to someone who **demanded** money to impart the power?

I think that those who spiritually extort money from good people through false promises of healing in return for financially supporting their ministry are at least “poisoned by bitterness and captive to iniquity, and have no part in the healing ministry” and that is praising them!!

This is not to say that we do not provide financial support for gospel ministries. But we are led of the Holy Spirit to give to them. Paul said that we give what we have decided in our hearts (2 Corinthians 9:7).

- **I believe in the Oral Roberts’ principle of “seed faith.”** We reap what we sow (Galatians 6:7). If we sow tomato seeds, we are going to get tomatoes. If we sow tulip seeds we will get tulips. We won’t get carrots if we sow cabbage seeds.

The hypocrite who sows division and disharmony among brethren will reap disharmony with God. If he sows his wild oats through lust, he is likely to reap a sexually transmitted disease.

But if the godly believer sows kindness, he will reap kindness from others. Sowing encouragement will reap encouragement when he needs it. Sowing secret prayer will reap open reward from God. Sowing good prophetic “love letters’ from God will reap uplifting prophetic words from others.

If he sows money to support a ministry, he will reap prosperity. This is not the “Prosperity Doctrine” that some preach, but the “sowing/reaping” principle.

In a conference several years ago, the Holy Spirit told me to put my lunch money into the offering. I did that. At lunch time I was offered two lunches, I shared a large “love” offering with my two team members, and when I got back to work, I got a salary raise of \$12,000 a year. I sowed \$10 and God made sure I reaped abundantly more.

The Prosperity doctrine maintains that it has to automatically happen and makes out God to be a “vending machine” to give you money to buy a luxurious house, the most modern and expensive motor vehicle, and wear the most outrageously expensive high fashion clothes. This misapplication of the “sowing/reaping” principle can be a cover for covetousness – to gain wealth for personal use and pleasure.

My sowing just gave me enough financial foundation to pay all my bills, support my family, and have a reasonable standard of living. I still live in a 2-1/2 bedroom suburban townhouse and drive a 2001 Nissan car with 230,000 kilometres on the clock.

- **Sowing good deeds for your neighbours** will repeat good deeds from others when you need something done that you can't do. I sow guitar instruction to those who ask me, and my guitar playing improves. I sow support for my adult daughter and one day, when I am really old and infirm, I may reap support from her. God told me once that if He hears my voice a lot in fellowship with Him, I will be more sensitive to hear His voice speaking to me. That is sowing fellowship with God and I am reaping fellowship back from God.

- **If you want a miracle from God, you sow in yourself the promises of God** that pertain to His willingness to do for you what is impossible for you. *“Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires”* (2 Peter 1:4).

### **Another misuse of a spiritual gift is the gift of faith**

The gift of faith is the supernatural ability to have the faith to believe for miracles and perform actions that would normally be totally impossible for a person to accomplish.

**It took the gift of faith for Guy Bevington** to remain in prayer before God as long as it took for a miraculous healing to take place. Also, to remain in a hollow log in the woods for three weeks fasting and praying until he receive a vision of the schoolhouse which was locked against him, open to enable him to get the people together to hear his preaching of the Gospel.

It was the gift of faith that got an unconverted drunk, who staggered into his church at five to midnight, cleaned up, reclothed, delivered from alcohol, and totally converted to Christ through prayer and perseverance.

**Smith Wigglesworth had a specific gift of faith** to accomplish the remarkable healing that was a feature of his ministry. He thought everyone was supposed to have that kind of faith and taught about faith that way, but reality shows that very few have that faith that he had.

It was the gift of faith that had him praying all night beside the bed of a man close to death until in the morning the man got up out of bed totally healed. It was also the gift of faith that

Wigglesworth held a dead man up against the wall of the bedroom commanding the man in the Name of Jesus to come back to life, which he did!

**The Word of Faith movement** is a genuine revival of the principle of faith commanding things that are not into being. It is called the Word of Faith because those who are genuine in this take a promise of God and speak it out to God in faith, and often the promise is fulfilled. Basically it is believing God's Word and making in real in your life.

If I believe that I am blessed with every spiritual blessing in heavenly places, then I live it as a truth in my life. If I believe that I am the righteousness of God in Christ, then I am going to live as a righteous person, and I am going to stand before God without any sense of guilt, shame or inferiority, because God sees me not as a sinner, but as a righteous person because of the righteousness of Christ bestowed on me. That's how the Word of Faith works.

**But some have corrupted it, through the misquote of the Scripture:** *"Woe to him who says to his father, 'What have you begotten?' or to his mother, 'What have you brought forth?' Thus says the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, and its Maker : "How dare you question Me concerning My sons, or instruct Me about the work of My hands?"* (Isaiah 45:10-11). In these verses, God, through the prophet is rebuking Cyrus for thinking in his arrogance he can tell the Living God what to do.

What some have done is to take verse 11 out of its proper context and turned the question into a statement, implying that we can command God to do what we want Him to do. That is not the case, and it is inconsistent with verse 9: *"Woe to those who quarrel with their Maker, those who are nothing but potsherds among the potsherds on the ground. Does the clay say to the potter, 'What are you making?' Does your work say, 'The potter has no hands'?"*

**The truth is, we don't command God to do anything for us.** We bring what we desire in our hearts to God and we **request** Him through prayer and supplication (Philippians 4:6). We have the promise that *"The fervent effectual prayer of a righteous man avails much: (James 5:16).*

**We can command healing for sick people** and we can command demons to leave people because Jesus has given us that authority: *"Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you" (Luke 10:19).*

But we can't command God to give us a bigger bank balance, a larger house, or a more modern motor vehicle, as some misguided "word of faith" folk believe. That sort of "faith" can come from a covetous spirit, and it can show arrogance that God can and should be commanded to provide those things.

Sure, we have the promises that *"My God shall supply all of your needs according to His riches in glory" (Philippians 4:19).* But these are for our **needs**, not our **wants**.

**We have the promises that "His divine power has given us everything we need** for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness" (2 Peter 1:3). Covetousness is not godliness. We don't need a large mansion, enormous wealth, or the latest Rolls Royce motor vehicle to walk in the Spirit and live a godly life.

It is not surprising that there are those who say that preachers who preach a combination of the Word of Faith and the Prosperity doctrine are false teachers when they see the numbers of sincere folk apparently being led astray from what godly living and true faith really is.

The tragedy is that many could turn away from Christ because they believed in faith they could get these material blessings and then, when they didn't receive what they wanted, believed that

God did not love them and didn't care about them. This has led too many good folk to "tar and feather" Christian preachers, and say the whole thing is a fake. This is a deception that plays right into the hands of the devil to corrupt the faith of these people and turn them toward hell, when they should be on the road to Heaven.

## **What Can We Do About It?**

### **We Are To Judge the Prophecy, Not The Person Who Gives It**

It is one thing knowing all about false prophets and their deceptions, as well as the negative effects that these have on the churches, but it is quite another to having the wisdom to deal with them without harming innocent godly folk.

Man looks on the outward appearance, as we have seen, but God looks into the hearts of people. What might seem like a false prophecy might just be an error made by a believer with a good heart, and one that appears to be sound might be from someone with a heart that is not right with God. How are we to know? Well, we have the Scriptures as our foundation and guide, and they clearly identify, as I have already shown, false prophets and their intentions.

### **Good Prophets Can Make Mistakes**

But we must remember that Nathan the prophet made an error when he advised David to *“go and do what you really want to do, because the Lord is with you”* when David was proposing to build the Temple. God had to stop Nathan and tell him to go back to David and give the correct prophecy (2 Samuel 7:3, 12-13).

There was an old prophet who invited “the young man from Judah” to stay the night with him, after the young prophet had

destroyed Jereboam's pagan altar, God told him to go straight home and not to stop until he got there. He tried to tell the old prophet what God had told him but for some inexplicable reason the old prophet ignored that and pressured the young man to stay the night with him. But God spoke to the old prophet:

*"While they were sitting at the table, the word of the LORD came to the old prophet who had brought him back. <sup>21</sup>He cried out to the man of God who had come from Judah, "This is what the LORD says: 'You have defied the word of the LORD and have not kept the command the LORD your God gave you. <sup>22</sup>You came back and ate bread and drank water in the place where he told you not to eat or drink. Therefore your body will not be buried in the tomb of your ancestors'" (1 Kings 13:20-23).*

We don't know why the old prophet lied to the young prophet. Perhaps in his desire to be hospitable to him, he had a "senior moment" and did not realise the importance of the word that the young prophet had received. Also, the young prophet was probably inexperienced and didn't have a suspicion when the old prophet said that an angel had spoken to him.

But that doesn't necessarily mean that the old prophet was a false prophet in terms of the Scriptures quoted at the start of this book. There is every indication that his heart was good, but he made a mistake, which had tragic consequences for the young prophet.

## **We Must Give the Benefit Of The Doubt**

Because we cannot see what God can see, we must give every person who exercises a prophetic ministry the benefit of the doubt. If we rush into accusing someone just because he or she “looks” doubtful, we could fall into the error of being accusative. We must remember that the devil is *“the accuser of the brethren”* (Revelation 12:10). It is God’s role to sort out the false from the true prophets, and that will happen at the “great harvest of souls” when Jesus comes again. It will be Jesus who will divide the *“sheep from the goats”* (Matthew 25:31-46), not us.

## **Binding and Loosing**

If there are people who are spreading ungodliness around the church and causing harm to believers, then any accusation needs the support of three witnesses (Matthew 18:16). Then we can apply the Scripture: *“Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven”* (Matthew 18:18). This is a popular verse for binding demons and loosing those in bondage, but it can be for limiting the activities of those whose hearts are not right with God, and releasing into ministry those who show a genuine calling of God. Therefore, if three witnesses support the observation that a certain prophet is regularly giving false prophecies, upsetting the faith of good believers, and turning unbelievers away from the church, then we can “bind” that prophet and prohibit him from exercising his “prophetic” role in the church.

But, if in the mouths of three witnesses that a believer is regularly giving supportive, loving, encouraging prophecies, even though he might make one or two mistakes along the way, we can “loose” him into a prophetic role in the church. I felt “loosed” when my old pastor, after we both attended a Christian conference where I gave a number of tongues interpretations, confirmed that I had the genuine gift of prophecy and should never give it up. This was confirmed over 30 years later when I gave a prophecy to a mature brother in Christ, and it was reported back to me that it was totally accurate, and it was confirmed that there was no way I could have known that brother’s circumstances!

## **Prophecies Judged By God’s Word**

Regardless of whether we believe that a Christian brother is a “prophet or a loss”, we need to give him the benefit of the doubt, and ensure that the prophecy is written down or recorded, so it can be examined and evaluated to see if it is consistent with the clear teaching and spirit of God’s Word.

But those who have the role of judging prophecies need to be men and women of prayer and the Word. Therefore it is not recommended that novices in the faith be put into the role unless they are surrounded by good, mature men and women, experienced in the prophetic, who can mentor them,

But judging prophecies is entirely Scriptural:

*“Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said”* (1 Corinthians 14:29).

When weighing up a prophecy, the first question to ask is: “Does it *‘speak to people for their strengthening, encouraging and comfort?’*” (v.3). If it does, then it has passed the first

stage. Now, the prophecy itself has to be examined to ensure that it is in harmony with the clear teaching of Scripture or in the spirit of it.

Requiring a prophecy to have specific verses of Scripture to support it, this can be an excessively stringent test to apply. If it does, then the prophecy has passed the second stage; if not, we need to examine the general threads and principles of Scripture to see if it is in line with the attitudes expressed by true prophets of God, especially in the Old Testament prophetic books.

### **Genuine Prophecies Turn People Toward Christ**

Reading through the prophetic books of the Old Testament we see the heart of God pleading with the disobedient people of Israel and Judah to abandon their idols and to return to Him. The whole point of these prophetic books is not to belt the people over the head with the big stick of condemnation, but to draw them with cords of love back to Himself.

Here is an example:

- “Stand up, plead my case before the mountains;  
let the hills hear what you have to say.*
- <sup>2</sup> *“Hear, you mountains, the LORD’s accusation;  
listen, you everlasting foundations of the earth.  
For the LORD has a case against his people;  
he is lodging a charge against Israel.*
- <sup>3</sup> *“My people, what have I done to you?  
How have I burdened you? Answer me.*
- <sup>4</sup> *I brought you up out of Egypt  
and redeemed you from the land of slavery.  
I sent Moses to lead you,  
also Aaron and Miriam.*
- <sup>5</sup> *My people, remember  
what Balak king of Moab plotted*

*and what Balaam son of Beor answered.  
Remember your journey from Shittim to Gilgal,  
that you may know the righteous acts of the LORD” (Micah  
6:1-5).*

So, a prophetic word that expresses what God has done for us and gives reasons why we should be totally faithful to Him, is weighed and found to be genuine, because it shows the nature and character of God in it.

But if a prophecy causes depression, fear, and a weakening of faith and trust in Christ, then it has failed the first test. If it cannot be validated by either a specific passage of Scripture, or by the experience of a Bible personality, then it has failed the second test.

A friend was in a Christian conference at one time and a man with “a built-in amplifier” got up and gave a long, loud, prophecy in King James English. The leader got up and said, “We can safely ignore that one!” Later in the conference another man gave a prophecy that was clearly contrary to Scripture, and the leader got up again and cried out, “That’s not of God!!”

## **We Must Be People Of Prayer And The Word**

To be able to discern between truth and falsehood we must have a good foundation of personal fellowship with God where He hears our voice a lot, and we hear His voice in return. We can know the difference between the voice of God and that of the world, flesh and the devil, if we are spending much time with the Lord, being honest and open in our prayers to Him. Being people of the Word and knowing it intimately, gives us the foundation of

the knowledge of God's nature, character and ways as they are revealed to us in the Bible.

*"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand"* (John 10:27-28).

With a good foundation of honest, sincere prayer, and of the principles of the Word, we are able to have the spiritual discernment to recognise the voice of the Lord when He speaks to us. This is the foundation of genuine prophecy and the accurate evaluation of it.

## **Recognising The Right Use Of Spiritual Gifts**

The foundation here is shown by:

*"But solid food belongs to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil"* (Hebrews 5:14)..

### **Cessationists Cannot Judge Spiritual Gifts**

There is no way that a person who has no experience in the spiritual gifts can know the difference between the genuine and misuse of spiritual gifts. Because of this, we can totally ignore any comments from Cessationists. Their theological prejudice prevents them from having any say in this matter. They believe that all modern use of the spiritual gifts has to be false because they believe that the gifts ceased after the Apostolic Age of the

church. So, we can safely ignore anything they have to say concerning spiritual gifts.

Although many who hold Cessationist doctrine are sincere Christian believers and are filled with the Spirit, although they choose not to enter into spiritual gifts, there are those who are prejudiced through Cessationist doctrine and who have a “criticizing spirit” toward those who believe in and practice spiritual gifts in today’s churches. These are to be “safely ignored” when they give their views and make comments about spiritual gifts. They are approaching spiritual gifts as natural men and *“the natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned”* (1 Corinthians 2:14.)

## **The Effect Of Spiritual Gifts Is The Same As For Prophecy**

Prophecy is a spiritual gift, along with the others, so the primary test for the genuineness of a spiritual gift is that it is given “so *that everyone may be instructed and encouraged*” (v.31).

If a word of knowledge is given it must be instructive and encouraging. It must not quench a person’s spirit. It does not have a “binding” effect, but a “loosing” effect on a believer’s spirit. A word of wisdom is not natural wisdom, but a special supernatural wisdom that guides a believer in a specific way to action that enhances their experience with Christ. A gift of healing improves a believer’s welfare, and influences the unconverted to turn to Christ. A miracle is a sign to show that the gospel is true and that Jesus is really alive today. The Discerning of Spirits is there to show a believer that he or she has a good spirit, or to reveal a spiritual bondage that can be

broken giving a new sense of release and freedom in that person's spirit. The gift of faith is to show that there is nothing impossible with God, and that believers can do things that would be impossible to natural men and women.

All these are to instruct the believer in the nature, ways and love of God, and to encourage him or her to give their full trust and commitment to Christ. If we are sure about the correct use of the spiritual gifts, then we will manifest them in the right way. Also, we will recognise when they are manifested incorrectly and be able to correct a brother or sister in love.

## **The Fruit Of The Spirit Is Essential**

The presence of the fruit of the Spirit in believers' lives is the evidence that they are "good trees that cannot bear evil fruit" (Matthew 7:17-18). A person who shows evidence of the fruit of the Spirit cannot be a false prophet by any stretch of the imagination.

**"Love"** is the basis of the correct use of a spiritual gift: "Pursue love, and desire spiritual *gifts*" (1 Corinthians 14:1). Love comes first before the desire for spiritual gifts. Love is the reason why a genuine believer would want to manifest a spiritual gift. This is because he wants to provide comfort, encouragement, and sound, edifying instruction for the others in the church.

**"Joy"** is one of the results of giving and receiving a spiritual gift. Many who have suffered from depression have been set free from that "black dog" through the manifestation of a spiritual gift. James was being prophetic when he said: "*My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces <sup>l</sup>patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing*" (James 1:2-4).

**“Peace”** is another result of a genuine spiritual gift being manifested. Believers in bondage can be anxious, stirred up, have high blood pressure, and agitated. Then someone with the Discernment of Spirits is able to identify the nature of the bondage, bind the spirit, and immediately the freedom brings a settled peace:

*“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus”* (Philippians 4:6-7).

**“Patience”** is another attribute of a believer manifesting a spiritual gift. If a prophecy is given and it doesn’t have an immediate effect, it can be recorded, left for several months, and often it becomes relevant. This takes patience to accept that not all prophetic words have an immediate fulfilment. Remember that Joel’s prophecy about the arrival of the Holy Spirit to the church took 800 years to be fulfilled.

**“Kindness”** is crucial when manifesting a spiritual gift. “Jesus is the kindest Person we will ever meet”.<sup>[xi]</sup>

*“Do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, forbearance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?”* (Romans 2:4).

This is really important when we are giving a personal prophecy, word of knowledge or a discernment of the person’s spirit. Even a word concerning the worst of sins, when shared with humility and kindness, it can have dynamic life-changing results and set up a wonderful future in the Spirit for the person receiving it.

**“Goodness”** is a feature of a spiritual gift that builds up the church when it reflects the goodness of the giver’s heart.<sup>[xii]</sup> Everything that God does is “*very good*” (Genesis 1:31). Genuine spiritual gifts do not harm believers. They do not

crush a person's spirit: *"A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench: he shall bring forth judgment to truth"* (Isaiah 42:3).

Another attribute of Jesus that we should reflect if we are to genuinely represent Him in the exercise of spiritual gifts:

*"How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good"* (Acts 10:38).

**"Faithfulness"** reflects the solidarity of the promises of God. No spiritual gift will countermand any promise of God found in Scripture. If a genuine prophecy indicates that something good is going to happen to a believer, then it will come to pass, because the faithfulness of God will ensure that it will happen. If a gift of healing is manifested, then healing will happen. It may not happen right away, but it will happen. If a person receives the gift of faith and steps out in faith to do the impossible, then he will come through in victory. He will not fall on his face, because of the faithfulness of the gift.

**"Gentleness"** is perhaps the most important feature of the manifestation of a spiritual gift. A harsh, King James English, judgmental prophecy has to be false because it is not gentle. Ministering healing by the laying on of hands has to be gentle. The Scripture says: *"Lay hands suddenly on no man"* (1 Timothy 5:22). A very sensitive word of knowledge needs to be given in a very gentle manner, and often needs a word of wisdom to be able to give it in a way that does not "blow the person apart".

**"Self-Control"** A believer has absolute control over the manifestation of any spiritual gift: *"the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets"* (1 Corinthians 14:32). The manifestation of a spiritual gift is never compulsive. It is well thought out, time taken to ensure it comes from God, and waits for the right opportunity manifest it. A self-controlled person receiving a prophecy before a meeting, will either record it or write it out and submit it to the pastor, and be teachable enough

to accept the pastor's verdict. He will know when to pray quietly in tongues during a service and when to speak out loud. If he gets a word of knowledge, he will take the time to ensure that it is correct, and will seek a word of wisdom instead of rushing over and blurting it out. Self-control among those who exercise spiritual gifts will ensure that everything in Christian gatherings are "*done decently and in order*" (1 Corinthians 14:39).

## **Conclusion**

It is important that in our efforts to ensure that prophecy and other spiritual gifts are manifested correctly, we don't enforce a set of hard and fast rules. These can have an intimidating effect on novices in the prophetic. It can be a scary experience for a believer giving a prophecy for the first time in a Christian meeting. There is the fear that if a mistake is made, someone will approach and say, "That was not of God!" and put a potential prophet off for years.

There are some, usually inexperienced in the prophetic and coming short in the fruit of the Spirit who maintain that when God gives someone a prophecy it has to be totally correct in every detail otherwise it is false. These people can be very quick to go up to a believer and given them their "expert correction", when in fact, they are being rigid, intolerant and unkind in the way they go about it.

### **Genuine Prophetic Believers Will Make Mistakes**

Mistakes are part of the prophetic territory. We make them and learn from them. We try not to make the same mistake twice, and with experienced mentors giving kind and gentle correction, eventually get things right.

It all has to do with recognising the right "voice" that comes to us. That can come only through experience and practice. Yes, we have to practice the gift. If John Wimber took eleven years of "practicing" his gift of healing before there was a flow of

successful healing, and he was a mature man of God, surrounded by good, solid men of God to mentor him, are we any better?

We can laugh at an aspiring (or inspiring?) prophet who got up in one meeting and said, “Yea! Yea!” and sat down. He got up in faith and we should honour him for that. How do we know if there were no people in that meeting who were asking God, “Do I go ahead with my project, use my gift, preach the message on Sunday, go and pray for that sick person”? And the prophecy came forth as “Yes! Yes!” what do you think? Could it have been a genuine prophecy? I tend to think it may have been!

## **What If You Use A Spiritual Gift And Nothing Happens?**

You may give a prophecy to the church, and there is no response; or it may be a personal one, and the person says, “I can’t relate to it.” What do you do? Do you walk away defeated (as many do), or do you encourage the person to sit on it for a while and see if circumstances does make it relevant? This is the value of having prophecies, words of knowledge and discernment of spirits recorded. Then the subject person can have the recording to take away and to keep it for future examination.

It can be very disappointing for a believer to use the gift of healing and the person remains sick and even dies! One mature pastor I knew in the 1970s said one, “Every person I have prayed for this year has died!” This does not seem to be a “good look” for someone who believes he has the gift of healing, but we cannot sit in judgment, because healing is a sovereign act of God

and all we can do is to minister healing in obedience and leave the results to Him.<sup>[xiii]</sup>

The answer to this is that we use the spiritual gifts in obedience to God's word to us. Faith and trust work together. We use our faith to manifest the gift, and we trust in the Holy Spirit to make it good. We can do no more.

## **Ending Thoughts**

I hope that I have been able to give a good account to help believers identify false prophets, prophecies, and the misuse of spiritual gifts.

I also hope that I have provided some guidelines for being able to ensure that we prepare ourselves before God through prayer and His Word so that we can learn to be truly prophetic believers, building up the church.

That is my aim for writing this book: to build you up in your knowledge of God so that you can spiritually discern His ways, and be an asset to the church where you currently fellowship.

## End Notes

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[i] John F MacArthur Jr; *Charismatic Chaos*; 1992: Zondervan. Is an informative treatment of tongues from an anti-Charismatic perspective.

[ii] If the reader wants to know more about the gift of tongues from a reliable source, see

<http://www.daveroberson.org/Media/7/WOSWOP%20Portrait.pdf>; and my book, Paul Christensen, *A New Look at the Baptism With the Spirit, Prophecy and Tongues*, Personal-Communication Ministries, Auckland NZ. Marketed through Amazon Kindle.

[iii] See 1 Corinthians 14 for Paul's teaching on the correct use of tongues.

[iv] <http://www.miraclesofthesaints.com/2010/10/speaking-in-tongues-supernatural-gift.html>

[v] See <https://charlesasullivan.com/8601/missionary-crisis-speaking-tongues/> for a insightful account of the problem.

[vi] Once during the 1970s I was praying in tongues in church during an altar call, and a New Zealand Maori lady told me afterward that I was praying in the Maori language, which I had no knowledge of at that time.

[vii] Although they may be the result of a demon spirit in him.

[viii] For those who are unaware of what an "altar call" is: it is the invitation, after the preached message, for those who wish to go forward to the front of the church for prayer, ministry, or to receive Christ.

[ix] See Dr. Ed. Murphy, *The Handbook For Spiritual Warfare*; 1996, Nelson, Tennessee, USA. Neil Anderson, *The Bondage Breaker*, 2000 Harvest House, Oregon, USA.

[x] A helpful resource for understanding depression is: Neil Anderson; *Finding Hope Again*; 1999, Regal Books.

[xi] See [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=99ahX9L9G\\_U](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=99ahX9L9G_U)

[xii] Listen to Oral Roberts talking about the goodness of God: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hc89G\\_kf9e8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hc89G_kf9e8)

[xiii] When I use the word "sovereign" in relation to God I mean that God does things His way and does not have to give account to anyone. It does not mean that He never responds to our prayers of faith. This is just one way He works to heal the sick.