

The Spirit of Prophecy: An Examination of the Prophetic Call

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Preface

For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy (Rev. 19:10b).

There is a powerful and irrevocable identification between the Lord Jesus, His own distinctive Person, and the spirit or essence of that which is prophetic. The bond between the two is inextricable and intimate. To miss the meaning of the prophetic is to miss the Lord. To reject the prophetic is to reject Him. Jesus Himself functioned as a prophet, and what He is in Himself *is* what the prophetic thing is in itself. It is *that* intricate and *that* joined.

Classically, a prophet communicates the sense of God *as He in fact is*. This is the foundation upon which the church is built ("*...built upon the foundation of the apostles and the prophets, Christ Jesus **Himself** being the cornerstone (Eph. 2:20)*"). It is not the teaching or the ministry alone that apostles and prophets bring, but equally the sense of God *as He in fact is in Himself*. It is Christ Jesus *Himself*. In the bringing of the word, the prophet communicates something formed in his own person of that sense. This very thing is foundational to the church, or the church would inevitably be given over to a view of God that is shallow and that is likely not God at all. Prophets, therefore, among their other functions, correct the church from a faulty or inadequate perception of God.

It may well be that the greatest enmity of the world against God is visited on prophets for exactly this reason, namely, that to 'assault' a prophet is to assault God. The world is at enmity with God, but the prophet is the visible, corporeal manifestation of elements central to God's own being, and therefore the world has the opportunity both to identify, to hate, and to despise that which stands for God. The testimony of the prophet is the statement of God, not only when he is speaking, but often when he is silent. His very presence is an abomination and an offense to a world that despises God. We need to watch with a jealous urgency anything that purports to be prophetic and is not, because it subverts the validity of that calling for the church in putting before it a false model of God.

There is a great accountability for that gift of God to men, and if it is mistreated, ignored or rejected, then the end result will inevitably be judgment. We pay a great price when we lightly regard or disregard, let alone violently reject him whom God sends in that prophetic mantle, because it is so much the essence of God Himself in His own being. Israel repeatedly stoned the prophets that were sent to her, and in so doing, invited and made necessary the devastating judgments that followed. In fact, the coming of the prophet is the 'day of decision.' The receiving or the rejecting of the prophet is the making of a final statement to God. It is a fateful decision, one way or another, that can determine the future of that individual, that church or that fellowship. May this modest attempt at identifying the essential characteristics of the prophetic leave the reader with a greater regard and understanding of the Lord Himself.

Introduction

There are two great words that the church needs to guard with a fierce jealousy, namely, *prophetic* and *apostolic*. If those two words are cheapened or made to stand for something that God did not intend, then we have lost our foundation. If our apostles and prophets are dubious, what then will the superstructure be if it is based on *that* foundation? The superstructure cannot exceed the foundation, and therefore the foundation

deserves the most exceeding attention. This has been our long-standing passion and jealousy, and we have been watchful over the use of these words lest they should be used indiscriminately or lightly, which is unfortunately what is happening today.

There is a present phenomenon taking place worldwide of a sudden interest in the prophetic calling. One of the interesting things to note is the popularity now of that calling, with people gleefully tripping off to conferences in order to hear men who are being called 'prophets' and 'oracles.' We are told that in the Last Days there *will* be false prophets, false apostles and false anointings. In the book of Revelation, the church in Ephesus is congratulated by the Lord for discerning the false apostles, "*those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false (Rev 2:2b).*" We need, therefore, to have some framework of understanding or at least be able to intuit what the apostolic and prophetic functions represent and the *importance* of what they represent.

There is certainly a naiveté and ignorance about the prophetic among God's people. There are untold numbers of ministers taking for themselves these titles, or allowing themselves to be so described, who are not in fact in these offices or are false expressions of it. It has become so that many cannot even distinguish between the *gift* of prophecy and the *office* of prophet. We cannot think of a more fundamental confusion that would destroy the foundation of the church than this one thing alone. The *office* of prophet is so holy. They are as the "*holy prophets of old.*" The gift of prophecy is something else and can be exercised through any believer as the Spirit wills. *That*, however, does not make them a prophet and that distinction needs urgently to be made.

The most formidable nature of deception in the Last Days is not going to be something so bizarre that it can be instantly identified as being out of the bowels of hell; rather it is going to be couched in the most conventional, orthodox and biblical language. It will, for that reason, be more difficult to discern the good than it will be the evil. Evil is apparent, but good is subtle. Good has much going for it and much to commend it, but if the good is not from God and just emanates from a kind of altruistic, humanistic personality, then good will be just as destructive to the interests of God as evil. That which appears as good will keep us from the particular and perfect will of God, and it is, therefore, more deadly than blatant evil since it is not recognized as evil.

How, therefore, will we discern? We have got to hate that which is good, the false good; that which purports to be good; that which appears to be good; that which will appeal to us as being nice, pleasant or right. We need to hate good in *that* sense, to hate sentimentality and to hate that which gives a *nice* feeling. The false prophet is the one who says, "Peace, peace, where there is no peace." He 'makes nice,' and which of us does not like to be made nice? There is something that yearns for it, and therefore the false prophets have a ready market, large audiences, great responses and mass mailing lists, because what is wanted is that which is nice, good and pleasant to the ear.

The false prophets of Baal with whom Elijah was in conflict actually thought there would be a god to answer. They believed wholeheartedly that there was going to be for them a fire from heaven. They were not cynical men religiously posturing. They were deluded and deceived *themselves*. The false prophets of the Last Days may be well-meaning men with sincere intentions, fully persuaded that they are right and that the other man is the person who is in error. What distinguishes, therefore, the one from the other? We can hardly think of a more valid question for the church at this time.

And so there are two parallel tracks, the fictitious, assumed and presumptuous nonsense of men as opposed to the authentic thing, now in process of restoration from God. One will flatter you with entreaties to your flesh and the other will inevitably call you to the Cross, and by that you can know who are the true prophets and the false. This issue of true or false is a critical issue, and it is the issue of the *Cross* in an authentic appropriation, not just in credal acknowledgment! Merely to be satisfied with credally acknowledging something as being true is itself the heart of deception and apostasy. To passively acknowledge something as being doctrinally true is not the statement of its 'truth.' It falls short of the existential reality that God is after. If we have not pressed in and *wrestled* to obtain the actual reality of truth, then we will not be able to communicate it to anyone. What we are seeing in the new crop of 'prophets' is a testimony of a dubious Christianity that has not pressed in and wrestled, but has been satisfied with glib credal affirmation and a craving for confirming experiences. It has been sufficient for *us* to 'get by,' but insufficient for God's glory! *Everything rests in the existential appropriation of the faith.*

There is something also about the seductive power of the approval and acceptance of man that works in us

as a leaven for disaster. Man covets the approval by his fellows, to receive their appreciation and to be honored by them. To be indifferent to that honor and approval, and to speak the necessary word, though it bring painful rejection, can only be borne by someone who has no life to consider unto himself. It is all the same to that one as to whether he is accepted or rejected, misunderstood or approved. This is again where the Cross separates the true prophet from the false. Flattery is an antichrist mode of winning and influencing men. It is so beguiling, for who does not love to be flattered or to be acknowledged and recognized?

We need, therefore, to grow up in the ability to discern and sense truth in general, and truth about this calling in particular. It may well be that certain practitioners are so artful and so appearing outwardly to be prophetic that crowds will run after them, and the true man, who does not cut any such impression, is altogether ignored-and yet be the true bearer of God's requiring word!

The Prophet Historically and Presently

What rises in your own thought and in your own heart when the word 'prophet' is evoked? What image, what sense of things comes to your own understanding? We need to remember that the false prophets were those who wore rough garments to deceive, and that the only reason they could succeed was because the people whom they deceived had an anticipation or a stereotyped view of prophet that their false depiction represented. Does a prophet have to be some longhaired wilderness man in a rough garment, who acts strange and peculiar, and who peers with great intensity in his eyes? How would you define what a prophet is? How is he different from an apostle, or a teacher, or an evangelist? Do prophets still exist, or are they strictly an Old Testament phenomenon? Is there such a thing as a New Testament prophet, as being something very different from the Old?

There is a tremendous amount of difference and controversy that broods over this subject. The church has really suffered from a kind of dichotomy between the Old and the New, as if the New has displaced or rendered the Old null and void. That is *not* the way God sees it. That is the terminology that *men* have employed, but it is not the terminology God Himself has given, and we have suffered loss for just that. Jews have also suffered for that because it leaves them secure within the framework of their own human understanding: "You have your Book; we have our Book." It is implying that: "You have your God, and we have our God". It is an impression that God never intended. We have allowed our Jewish kinsmen to luxuriate in this false understanding and to find safety in it. We need, therefore, to contend for the *one* faith, the *one* unbroken, continuous faith, given from the beginning, and that is climaxed, concluded and consummated at the end by the same God who gave it in the beginning.

We seem to be fascinated by the contemporary 'prophets' despite their shallowness, who themselves have completely bypassed interest in the great Hebrew prophets of old through whom God spoke, not only in addressing the Israel of their own generation, but the Israel that is yet future. It borders on a kind of biblical schizophrenia. We need to be constantly reminded that the prophets are the prophets of *Israel*. They are the spokesmen of God to that nation. Nothing more reveals *God as God* as is seen in His dealings and judgments with Israel. To separate ourselves, therefore, from Israel and the prophets of Israel, is to totally put us away from the *hearing* of God's prophets. This will, therefore, affect our whole consideration of what we mean by prophetic. It will condemn us to a kind of shallowness about the very things of which we are already victim.

In a word, we need to probe what the classic, timeless elements are that have constituted prophets in every generation, whether it is Elijah, Isaiah, or Jeremiah. Are there any essential differences in their message? If we can come to some understanding there, then we are cutting right into the truth of what the prophetic call is. Is it the soothing and benign comforting of a false kind, which is generally what people want? Our souls cry out for it, particularly in time of distress and consternation. The true prophet, however, frequently rubs salt into the wounds of his hearers. He deepens the dilemma and brings it into yet a sharper focus by saying, "You are not going to find peace until there is a judgment for this." He brings an unwelcome message that contraverts all that is religiously understood and from which the flesh shrinks; and the most common way to nullify such a message is to 'kill' the man who brings it by rendering *him* null and void.

However diverse prophets are, is there anything central that runs through them all, that is intrinsic to being prophetic? What is the *heart*, the quintessence of that which is prophetic? The differentiating quality of the man comes through in his speaking or writing, yet they all share the same title 'prophet.' We are trying to get at the heart of what that prophetic definition is, because if we have not as yet seen it in New Testament times, then how will we know and anticipate it when it comes? Certainly, we are heading for great tumult and controversy in Last Days' collisions between kingdoms of darkness and Light in that final warfare that eventuates in the victory of the one and defeat of the other. We cannot imagine, therefore, that the age is going to close without employing again men of the biblically prophetic kind.

If we were to examine the callings of all of the prophets and their responses, we would see how often these men cry out, "But I am a child and cannot speak." After all of our examining we would have a portrait, and it would be a composite portrait of the prophetic character. This is what we want to identify, because certainly the cry for that particular thing is with us in these Last Days. All of a sudden this subject has broken upon the consciousness of the church, and now there is a sudden flush of excitement. We seem to be running everywhere to hear 'prophets.' They have come to an instantaneous popularity and are being heralded in very lavish ways, not just as prophets, but even as 'the oracles of the hour.' This is, therefore, a phenomenon that we need to examine to see how legitimate it is, and whether indeed it is of the Lord or some kind of counterfeit. We should be well along enough in the Lord to know that whenever the authentic thing is about to come, it is often preceded by something fictitious or counterfeit. We are watching this present prophetic (and apostolic) phenomenon very carefully and have an extreme sense of caution in our own spirits-if for nothing more than the suddenness and the popularity-both of which have not been our own experience. The true prophet experiences quite the opposite, namely, a slow growth and much reproach.

The Office of Prophet and the Gift of Prophecy

An important distinction, as we have said, is to differentiate between the *gift* of prophecy as opposed to the *office* of prophet. In fact, our failure to distinguish between the two may be the gravest mistake now being made. We tend toward calling a man or woman a 'prophet' who are only moving in the gift of prophecy, but are not called to the *office*. The fault lies with us in thinking that this is a New Testament dispensation that therefore requires another definition. If there is only one definition, however, and has been in existence for *all* time, though we have not seen it much in recent times, then there is no reason to look for a new kind. The Spirit of God divides severally His gifts, which He can give in a moment as *He* wills. That should not, however, be a permanent and abiding distinction or designation. The Spirit of God can fall on any one of us and we can prophesy. We are operating by the Spirit in the gift of prophecy. The gift is something that the Spirit exercises at His will, and it can come through either a man or a woman. It has nothing to do with their calling, their training, their preparation or their qualification. It may be informational, directive or a word of encouragement, but the office of the prophet is altogether something else and other.

The *office* of prophet differs from the *gift* of prophecy in that it is permanent. It is given with the man. It is a calling, and it may well be that men, who have the office of prophet, can go an entire lifetime in their service and never once speak out of the gift of prophecy. The church today is suffering from the ignorance of blurring these two categories. We are calling men prophets who have not the office, but who are operating in the gift of prophecy, and in many instances, not even the gift of prophecy, but rather even a deceitful clairvoyance.

The office of prophet is an ultimate thing and carries an enormous responsibility. Such a one brings the oracles of God. He is standing for *very* God and speaking *from* God with the authority *of* God. His statements are the intent of God's heart to His people and have to do with His purposes in an understanding of the present time in view of the things that are future and eternal. It is the prophet who is alerted and alerts.

The man who calls himself prophet and talks statistically (for example, seventy or eighty percent predictive accuracy) is not in keeping with the timbre, the character and the knit of a truly prophetic man. To determine whether a prophet is true or false should not immediately depend on whether their predictions are accurate. The real issue is *not* the accuracy of prediction in assessing the validity of prophets. Even to think statistically is to put us on a false basis in determining true and false among prophets. False prophets can bring a biblically correct message, but it is the kind of message that is a routine commonplace, that is to say, which virtually anyone can bring. There is nothing in it that can be faulted in terms of doctrine, but it is

not *oracular*. It is not a message that bears prophetic weight, intensity, seriousness or requirement. Oracular speaking can be distinguished by the way it brings with it a perception of reality and of the purposes of God that were not there before that word came. It opens up things as God Himself sees them, which is altogether *not* as we see them!

If we allow the word 'prophet' to be given to anyone who is giving predictive prophecy or even the gift of knowledge or what may be more likely, clairvoyance, and call *that* oracular prophecy, then we are well on the way to deception! These men speak messages of a predictable kind, but they are usually only a preliminary that one has to wait through in order to get to the 'action' for which we have *really* come, namely, for their predictive and personal prophecies that so excite and titillate us as an audience. The greater issue is not whether these prophets are accurate *most* of the time so much as whether they are prophets *at all!* To confirm the church in its present lightness by their own example is analogous to the false prophets of Old Testament time who confirmed Israel in its sin. All in all, one must ask, "What is their revelation? How oracular is it? What is it more or other than the general preaching of others who make no profession of being prophetic? Is their distinctive not much more than the sensationalism or excitement of their gifts or the anticipation derived from the elevated status generated largely by their mutual affirmation of each other?"

The Prophetic Function

The quintessential function of the prophetic call is given to Jeremiah at the inception of his ministry:

Then the LORD stretched out His hand and touched my mouth, and the LORD said to me, "Behold, I have put My words in your mouth. See, I have appointed you this day over the nations and over the kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant" (Jer. 1:9-10).

In this statement, the first expression of the prophetic calling is *judgment*. Unless we have a stomach for that, we will not be allowed the privilege of the word that builds and plants. Note the order of the words: the hardest thing *first*. Everything that is painful to the flesh and that will earn for us the displeasure of men must *first* be addressed. The prophet is called to pluck up and break down the things that are dear to men. This includes their religious traditions, the false things that they have celebrated for generations and the things that they want to cling to because it has to do with their identity, their dignity and the way in which they even see themselves. Men will kill for this, and yet the prophet has got to tear down and destroy. And the things that are false will be contended for fiercely! His word then is destructive before it is benevolent. Unless we are willing to speak the destructive word, we will never be used for benevolence. *The prophets who were faithful to speak the word of exile and judgment were also the ones likewise who were given the privilege of speaking the creative word of restoration and return.*

A prophet identifies falsity and ruthlessly destroys it. There is something about his word that is like a fire. It is plucking up, rooting out and destroying before it is planting and rebuilding. Who wants to hear men like *that*? Prophets not only bring things into question; they absolutely reduce it to rubble before your eyes. For you to pick it up after that is to touch the unclean thing. They have identified it, and now you are stuck with that word. It is little wonder that such men are not welcome in places where people want to continue their mode of lifestyle unchallenged.

A prophet critiques and unsparingly lays bare, without fear or regard of man, the lie or even 'conventional' truth, that is to say, the assumed, mindless, uncontested premises that constitute death in the life of the hearer. He reveals the lie and blows the whistle. That lie may well be the lies of the false prophets. The whole world is predicated on lies, but how shall it know unless a word of truth comes. If that word is to come, then it is to come from one who is totally without fear of man. We all know that the fear of man is the most powerful and crippling factor that works in the lives of God's ministers. To be free of that and to speak without regard to the fear of man is an ultimate statement that implies such a history of God's dealing with that servant. We are all born with the fear of man. We live for the regard of man, for their acknowledgment and for their applause. Men *love* the acknowledgments of men, particularly prestigious men, but we have got to be weaned away from that necessity. It is a process; it does not take place in a day. Every time that God brings us to that place of weaning, we have got to submit to it. We need to come to the place where we are not only indifferent

to the applause of men, but also to their biting criticisms and reproaches. A prophet requires, therefore, an extraordinary discernment to critique and an analytical ability that has been honed by the Spirit.

The prophet's own lifestyle must itself, therefore, be a repudiation of the lie. We cannot expose false values if we ourselves are subscribing to them. There is something about apostolic and prophetic poverty that is more than an accident or happenstance. It is appropriate to the authenticity of our union with God. Camel's hair garments and the eating of locusts are symbolically intrinsic to the prophetic life. There is a reason why John the Baptist was in the wilderness and not in Jerusalem, though he was the son of a priest. He could not be where the Establishment was. He could not enjoy its benefits and at the same time expose the falsity of it. We cannot in our own lifestyle indulge in the very thing that we are condemning before others. Lifestyle is, therefore, remarkably important with regard to the word that is to be proclaimed, and probably nothing more betrays whether you are a true or false prophet than this. The false prophets ate from Jezebel's table. Elijah had to be fed by ravens and live by the side of a brook. It is not that one *seeks* to wear a camel's hair garment because it is romantic or that you *have* to dress in such a way that marks you as being distinctive and different. Rather, the values that are false cannot have a place in us. A prophet is called to reveal the lie, the underlying premises that need to be examined in the light of God about values, about life and its purposes. Our own lifestyle must therefore be a repudiation of that lie, even though society and a carnal church sanctions it. A prophet's speaking not only reveals the lie but also condemns and judges it. His word, as his life itself, is a divine destruct.

When Elijah said, "*There shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word* (1 Kings 17:1b)," he was not intimating that there would be a slight difference in Israel's weather pattern. It meant that they were not going to have crops. They were not going to eat. They were going to experience a famine. It was going to be a judgment from God, and it was to come *through* the speaking of Elijah's word. His word was not just a piece of information or an opinion, however much it may be that, but rather it was the *event* of judgment. It would actually affect the whole nation. It is *this* kind of word that needs to be revived and restored.

The prophet's task is to establish an apostolic and heavenly alternative that is powerful and valid enough to utterly displace the lie. He presents a view of reality not yet existent, contrary in every point and particular to that which is thought to be 'real' and for which there is no precedent or model in the experience of the hearer. He brings a reality that obliterates the kind of validation and endorsement that the world's values have had upon his hearers up to that time. If he had not come, they would have *thought* that what they were celebrating was real. When the prophet comes, however, he is not only blowing the whistle on what is false, he brings a compelling sense of what is true and what is *eternally* true. He brings the sense of eternity itself and inducts the hearer into it. By his speaking, he sets in motion and brings his audience to a place where what was superficially dismissed as 'false' becomes true. The word becomes creative and establishes the resonance of something not understood before—something that is ultimate and eternal. To pierce through the false and raise another kind of a standard and make *that* the foundation of life is an extraordinary kind of proclamation.

To add to that, those who embrace the perspective, which the prophet is setting forth as the alternative to the lie, condemn themselves to being pilgrims and sojourners in the earth. If they are going to receive a prophetic word like this that calls them to the same heavenly vision in which Abraham walked, then there will be real, if not radical, consequence for their lives. The word, therefore, that comes to the hearers has got to come with such a power, authority and credibility that those who embrace it know that they are in effect signing their death warrants. No one is going to sign that lightly who has not been persuaded by a word that invites that kind of consecration. Only a prophet, a foundational man, can bring the word of that kind. He calls for something of ultimate consecration on the part of the hearer—*unto death*. That is why false prophets are more invited and listened to than the true. The false prophet affirms the hearers in their present condition and assures them that they are 'well-pleasing' in the sight of God.

The prophet's purpose is singly and jealously the Father's will. He restores lost vision of a kind that energizes the people of God, especially in crisis times, when despair needs to be turned to hope—having initially been stripped of false hopes by the prophet himself. He does not balk at having to be cruel before he can be kind. In a word, the prophet brings the 'moment of truth.' Standing in the council of the Lord, he is able to perceive error and state boldly and unequivocally the requisite truth though it be utterly at variance with the consensus being demonstrated.

The prophetic task is to restore to men who have lost it or have never had it, the biblical mindset and the biblical view of things that are unchanging in God's sight. He conveys the radical view of God, particularly to a people who are unwilling to hear it. If the prophetic word is critical to bringing an alignment of God's people

with God's own view, then the kind of word that is brought by the prophets *is the ultimate issue*. Where there are authentic prophets who are willing to bring the unwelcome word, so will there also be a plenitude of popular false prophets who bring the false word of comfort and who say, "Peace, peace" when there is no peace.

Out of a consummate jealousy for the glory of God, the prophet sets forth the *ultimate* purposes of God in such a way as to obtain the sacrifices of his hearers to fulfill it. It is not enough just to set forth what God's program is, but to set it forth in such a way that he has won the willingness of the hearers to be participant in obtaining the ultimate and eternal purposes of God-*at sacrifice!* The prophetic word communicates the eternal purposes of God in such a way as to win the commitment of his hearers to that sacrifice necessary to *fulfill* them. *That* takes more than mere explanation. The prophet himself epitomizes the suffering that such an adherence evokes. In other words, those who are going to embrace the view that he is presenting are opening themselves to suffering. The prophet, therefore, who is inviting them to *that* suffering has himself in some unaware sense to exhibit it and give the evidence that *this* is God's way, and that this Cross is central to the faith. He makes clear to his hearers that persecution, if not martyrdom, is intrinsic to a faith of *this* kind-and wins their willingness. To win the hearer's consecration to that call is an extraordinary stroke that requires the authority and anointing of those who bear His word. It is a call to ultimate and sacrificial things, and that is why that kind of a word will always be resisted.

The prophet announces and projects the impending end of this world in apocalyptic fury and judgment, sufficient to birth the longing for "a new heaven and a new earth in which there is righteousness." He not only brings to the awareness of the hearer that the world, which they have celebrated and where their own hearts are, is under judgment and is intended for destruction, but he also births a longing for the thing that comes down from above and which will replace this present age.

A prophet is a man of the Word. He abhors lightness while deeply respecting and guarding the sanctity of language and its meaning from abuse and cheapening. He is not, therefore, always your enjoyable household guest and is not good for easy conversation and small talk. He guards his mouth because he knows the sanctity of words and will not, therefore, give himself to frequent speaking as it debases the currency of words. There is with him a history of waiting and silences.

A prophet shuns the distinctions and honors that men confer. These things bring a certain aura of prestige and eminence and weight, but the prophetic man, in order to be true to God, is often the 'wilderness' prophet. Wilderness does not mean a necessarily physical isolation, but a conscious and willful separation from the kinds of things that are calculated to compromise. He does not effect any kind of prophetic outward 'appearance' to indicate his office. He is unprepossessing in appearance and demeanor and despises what is showy, sensational or bizarre. A prophet is intent on turning men to God and not to himself.

This calling is *given* and is not something that we ourselves summon or take for ourselves. But if we have it, then we need to know that God is going to work us over, again and again, in order to ensure that it is *His* word that comes forth and not our own.

Prophetic Proclamation

The prophets of God in the redemption history of the faith have always been the *oracular* kind. Their *word* distinguishes their calling. The prophetic word is weighty and we know it when we hear it. It makes a particular demand upon our attention and likewise a requirement in our obedience. That kind of word can only come out of the council of God. Our concern is the debasing of the church, a decline in the value and the valuing of the spoken word, when that which is *not* out of His council is being announced as the prophetic word.

What an importance, therefore, this puts on true prophetic proclamation. The prophet speaks with an urgency. If you can hear God in that speaking and take it to heart and repent, then you will be saved from the very thing of which he is forewarning. To compound the issue, it may well be that the man is offensive in your sight, and you want to discredit him and find every reason for doing so. That gives, therefore, an urgency to the message of the prophet that makes prophetic proclamation distinctively different from teaching, evangelism or pastoral preaching. Jesus said about Himself:

If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin (John 15:22).

In other words, "My appearing and My speaking have removed from you all pretense. The truth has come in Myself, and now you are responsible. Before I came you had an excuse for your superficiality and for your religious 'carryings on' that you thought was the real thing, but now that I have come, now that I have *spoken*, you have no excuse. The divine standard has fallen. The reality of God, the revelation of His purposes has been presented, and now you are responsible for that. You cannot go on as you were before. If you choose to reject what has come, then be assured that you cannot go on as before. You will either fall back to something much less even than what you had before, or go on to a qualitatively new thing."

The truly prophetic man not only embraces both the past and the future; he himself *is* both. He is living *in* the eternal future while at the same time being in a clear continuum with the biblical past. There is something about his whole manner and being that shows in the unselfconscious and unpretentious way he bears himself. He is not *in* this world. We do not mean by that that he is a vain kind of flighty creature. He already hears a resonance of the things that are coming to pass. His anticipation, awareness and appropriation of that reality are so real for him, that even when he does not explicitly speak it as a subject matter, he already unwittingly expresses the aura of it. He brings a sense of the unbroken continuum of the faith. He is *in* the Son, the eternal and changeless One. He comes to a people who are locked in time and culture and who are slavish products, if not victims, of their age. He shows forth the one, timeless, irrevocable statement of God on truth and reality throughout all ages and the ages to come. The prophet stands more than any other beyond the conventional categories of time. He sees the eternal thing toward which everything is tending, and in a compelling manner, he brings the significance of that into the present moment for those who are hearing him.

To obtain 'the mind of God' and to be able to articulate that is inherent in the prophetic calling. There is always going to be a tension of opposition between the mind of the world and the mind of God, between our own thoughts and His thoughts. Prophets are always, therefore, going to run into a place of opposition and resistance, because God's thoughts are not only pure, they are also contrary to our own and invariably make a painful requirement. You cannot hear God without being required of. We came to that conclusion in our weekly Bible studies: "If we are not hearing some requirement from God every time we assemble in the examination of His Word, then we are not hearing God. We are only using His Word as a text to have a study."

When God speaks, something has got to give. If we do not want to give that something, then there is going to be a tension of resistance and rejection of the word. If people cannot find their opportunity to oppose the word by virtue of rejecting the *word*, they will find their point of opposition in rejecting the *man*. And God will always give them something to find to fasten on to. There will always be something provided if men want to find a way to absolve themselves from the implications and the requirements of God's word. Yet at the same time, for the man who is bringing it, he is not to justify it as an excuse where if he has defect he says, "Well, that is what God uses." He needs to be grieved over the fact that there is *any* defect and seek in every way to rectify and make right, and to be impeccable and without offense before God and man. However earnest he will be in that, men will *still* find offense. They found it in Jesus, and they will find it in us, but "...*blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in Me* (Luke 7:23b - King James Version)".

The Voice of the Prophet

God puts a great premium on the voice of the prophets. It is not just their words, but their voice that carries the urgency and divine seriousness of God. If you change that and yet retain the technical word, you have lost the message. There is the resonance of God in his speaking that conveys not only the content and the meaning, but also the disposition of God's own heart and how *He* feels about what is being said. The mood of the speaking has nothing to do with the prophet's choosing. There are times when he is like a piece of putty and he cannot alter it. He is uncomfortable speaking like that and wishes that he had the liberty to give the word the flourish that it needs. He is, however, as much bound in God in the manner of the speaking as the content of the speaking. Other times the same man is beside himself. He cannot be contained. He is falling off the edge of the platform (so to speak) in the intensity of the moment. In both cases, it is not the man who

makes that determination, but *God*.

When the prophet, whom God has raised up early and sent often (Jer. 7:25), is not heard and the word is rejected, then the next and last thing is judgment. It is, therefore no wonder that there is an urgency in the speaking and that his words are designed to shock more than edify. The prophet is, therefore, often seen as being horrid, slashing and offensive. The most common accusation is 'unloving,' which he has to bear. That is the way it often sounds and appears, but how many of us can see that the harsh word is uttermost love? For a prophet, not to have spoken it would have been unloving-if that is what the urgency of the moment required. That is not a justification to be in that mode continually, but in the moment that God calls for it, it must not be withheld.

[The prophet's mood is often in violent opposition to the mood that has already been established in the congregation, especially by the 'worship team.' We ourselves are frequently in conflict with worship teams and worship leaders. They seem often to have an independent purpose for their own activity, no matter what, and establish some kind of mood, however contrary to God it is. Instead of working in conjunction *with* the word that is to come, or sensing the mood and heart of God, they have already got their choruses numbered and what they are going to sing and do. They have their musical virtuoso, talent and amplifiers and they are going to 'do their thing,' and leave you to make the best of it afterwards as well as you can. Many messages have been dulled and the power of them lost because of that unspoken opposition and tension where worship ministry is celebrated as the ultimate thing in itself. We need perhaps to pull the plug out of every overhead projector and every amplifier! Let us rather just splutter and choke along and miss a word here and there and come into the spirit of God's worship, than that we should be led with choruses and more choruses and more choruses. What it seems they are often really trying to do is to effect an atmosphere for a service, rather than touch the heart of God, let alone prepare for the receiving of a holy word for those assembled.]

A prophet will often send people home jarred and unhappy with many unanswered questions. He has not that mentality that wants everything to be wrapped up in one package with a ribbon on it, in one service, and send people home happy. He will let the people go home pained and even agonizing. He will raise perplexing questions that he himself has not adequately answered, and they themselves have got to wrestle and fight their way through to a truer place in God. There are very few pastors, maybe one in a hundred, who would be willing to allow his congregation to suffer that kind of stress and tension. "Send them home happy" is the unspoken premise of contemporary religion to which prophets do not subscribe. They are not in the mood for sending people home happy. They are of a kind to send them home agitated with questions that the hearers are compelled to consider and that cannot be asked and answered in one service.

The prophet's suspicions are alerted if there is any bombast, theatrics or sensationalism that conjures up a manner or a mode of excitement or anything else that the ear loves to hear that would draw out those who are bored and want some kind of alternative to their boredom. The one who speaks of coming judgment should not invest it with anything more than the word itself. He does not have to bring to it an additional quality so as to make it compelling to the hearer. The word itself speaks for itself. Anyone who would seek to bring an extraneous element through his own personality or manner of speaking is likely false. The prophet, therefore, does not have great latitude in how he deports himself. If we are highly individualistic and want to cut a swath for ourselves or do our own thing in our own way, then we are disqualified.

Though the prophet's life is wholly given over to God, there is no surrender of identity. In fact, his authentic identity is established. He loses his life but he has found it. Prophets are distinct, flesh and blood men with personalities. They are not robots who bear the word of God as a mechanical contrivance. They are formed in the womb, and that forming is *God's*.

Proclaiming the Word that is "Given"

The spirit of the prophet is subject to the prophet. If it is not God's moment, then we need to hold it. Something happens internally to the prophet when he contains and holds his own spirit and does not just spit it out. An ejaculation is always a great relief, but to hold it until the appointed time is *beyond* the issue of what relieves *us*. It is the issue of what glorifies *God*. There is still a 'you' involved when we blurt out something. We need to come to a place where there is no interest or satisfaction in ourselves. It is all the same to us to speak or not to speak, to be seen or not to be seen, to be used or not to be used, to be set

aside or to be employed. Only then *can* we be used.

God's purpose is not the alleviation of our tension, but the revelation of His glory. We are alleviation-minded and not glory-minded, and so long as we remain in that condition we will never be used to minister the Life of God. We have a question and so we *expect* an answer. The question may even be good and interesting, so why not ask it and get an answer! We have a need and we want it met. That is not being ruled by the Spirit of God but by self-interest. The fact that it is a 'spiritual' interest does not void it from being self-interest. The prophet does not operate by his own curiosity. Though something is good or valid, that does not justify expressing it. The only issue is what God intends in that given moment.

The prophet is not at liberty to address everything he sees. He can only address what God would have him to see. He does not proceed by his own seeing, or by his own hearing, his own subjectivity or his own impressions. He is the Lord's, and maybe that is why God is more jealous over the prophetic man than any other. The prophet is one who is the communicator of God's *own* word. It is not the prophet's word. The prophet is dead. He has no life until God gives it, and God gives it for *His* purpose and glory *only*. Even when you see those who are being addressed falling like flies and going down on their faces under the power and the impact of that word, he himself subjectively experiences often absolutely nothing in that moment. He is absolutely impervious and totally unaffected by what has brought others down on their faces. He is simply out of it because it is not *his* word. He cannot exalt in it. It is not his work. It is the strangest of feelings to be somehow beside yourself and detached from the power and the effect of your own word, nor are you allowed in any way even to touch it or to draw forth any satisfaction for yourself.

There are times when a prophet will enter a fellowship that seems to 'have it all together' and they are worshipping enthusiastically-and everything *seems* to be right-yet he is grieving! He is almost doubled over and knotted in the inner man. He is anguishing in his soul, while everybody else is having a good time. How many people have been in such functions where they are the only 'freak'? Everyone else seems to be 'moved by God,' and there is all kinds of talk about 'the presence of God,' yet you feel no presence at all. You are not conscious of any anointing. You do not see any blessing. All you see is a sea of soulish carnality and self-deluded people priming and pumping themselves up, and your one presence in that room is a contradiction to all that is going on. To top it all, you are not there as an observer; you are going to speak! What will you speak? Will you speak so as to confirm what people think is the spiritual reality they are celebrating, or do you take your whistle out of your pocket and blow it, and cry out, "Phony! Pretense! False! Self-effected! Hyped up production! Emotional! Sensual!"?

There are situations where you are not sure what to say or what to do. It is a remarkable kind of suffering to be in that kind of predicament, and then even after the moment passes, we are still assaulted by the thought of perhaps having missed the moment when we should have done something and we did not. It is a suffering, but *that* suffering is at the heart of the church. There is a suffering that remains to be filled up in the Body. This kind of suffering is inevitable, frequent and we have long borne it. Many of us have agonized over the condition of the church, and the Lord knows it, and there is a certain inevitability about it, a certain tension of not knowing. We will always wonder if we did rightly. We need to bear that suffering, and the Lord honors that. When the redemptive answer comes, it will come out of that willingness to bear that suffering as being intrinsic to the prophetic.

The Seriousness of the Word Spoken

There is a weight of responsibility on God's people to correctly identify whom God has set before them, and there *is* a choosing. In making that decision and choice, something is struck that will profoundly affect that believing life for the rest of its days. Just the presence of the man, let alone the radical content of his word, puts a premium of requirement upon the hearer. What do you do with *this* man and *this* word? Something has come in a moment of time that requires something from you, and if you will not recognize it and give it, then you are not just going to go on, you are going to fall back. Something unexpected and incisive has come and your response to that will affect your whole continuance and future in God.

In the light of that, the prophet has a great responsibility to be the authentic thing that compels God's people to choose with an earnestness that was never theirs before. How much more seriously do we need to consider our own walk, and for that reason, how dare we give ourselves over to casual, carnal lifestyles

ourselves? There is a seriousness of God now coming to their fellowship that is making a requirement like nothing that it has ever known. All of a sudden they are having a guest speaker, and the moment he opens his mouth something is struck and something is required that was never required or even hinted at before and will be full of portent for all of their future.

The prophet's function is so absolutely the matter of life and death, more so than can be said of other callings. If it is a false word, then it could be death. If it does not bring a warning, then it could also be death-literal, physical death. If it does not indicate the issues that are eternal, then it could be robbing the hearer. It is not an exaggeration to say that the rejection of the prophets was the death of Israel. How can one say more for something that is life or death for a people, and yet God invests that in flesh and blood, in mere man, who is subject to every frailty and weakness of his humanity! It is an enormous weight of responsibility that he can say, "Thus says the Lord", or even if he does not intone that inscription, it is implied, and the weight of that has to borne on the faintness and weakness of his mere humanity.

When God calls Ezekiel, "Son of man," He is not just mouthing a few words. It is as if the prophet *needs* to be reminded of his humanity. God chooses a frail piece of humanity for so ponderous a task because it is a statement *against* the mystery of the principalities and the powers of the air. The prophet himself in his own person, in the election of God, is itself a statement *against* the wisdom of the powers of darkness. One would think that God would reserve such elect speaking for *Himself*. *He* alone is qualified and has the authority, and yet to invest it in flesh, the very mystery of incarnation, runs smack dab into the heart of the wisdom of the powers of the air. *They* would never have done a thing like that, but would have chosen something appropriate to the task, for example, something weighty, monumental, dignified and that carries all the credentials. God's prophets, therefore, are extremely conscious of their frail humanity, not only at the inception of their call, but also in all the whole longevity of their use.

The Anatomy of False Prophets

We need to be jealous for the truth of the prophetic calling. If the church is built upon the foundation of the apostles and the prophets, then we cannot be careful enough in the consideration of this subject. Do our present-day prophets speak out of their own hearts and spirits? Do they draw from each other, or do they come to us out of the secret place of God? *Out of what formative relationships in the Body have these prophets come?* Has there been an appropriate nurturing, not only of the gift, but also of the character of prophetic men before they minister to the church? How long and how rightly have they been part of a local fellowship? Have they been sent out by the same in a sending that is more than a ceremonial, officious thing? Do we even know what a true sending is?

False prophets validate each other, where the one applauds, affirms and establishes the other, but it is not a fellowship that has validated them. They have not risen up out of the organic work of God itself, like the church in Antioch. Instead they pay tribute to each other and compliment each other, especially as those who are flowing in much the same thing. What is the source of their prophetic speaking? Where does the prophet get his word? If it is not out of the council of God, the secret place, how is it then God's word? If men do claim to be commissioned, we have a right to look for evidence that they have indeed stood in that place.

In Jeremiah chapter 23, God gives us a powerful statement about true and false prophets. It is one thing to have an indictment against Israel, but when you begin to indict the *prophets* of Israel, the loftiest, the best and the noblest thing, then that must be a symbol or a statement of the low condition of a nation prior to its judgment.

"For both prophet and priest are polluted; even in My house I have found wickedness," declares the LORD (v.11).

It is remarkable how self-serving this reciprocal thing is between heads of apostolic and prophetic movements or fellowships and their prophets, and how comfortable they are with one another and how they affirm one another. The people are in an unspoken agreement with their ministers: "You present a biblical message. We

will pay the bill and have a Sunday service that will leave our lives free from any kind of demand that would *really* touch our true vested interest and values. We don't want a message that is going to challenge where our heart *really* is." As the priest, so also the people. As the pastor/preacher, so also the congregation. Into that situation we have to come prophetically-and likely be stoned!

Therefore their way will be like slippery paths to them, they will be driven away into the gloom and fall in it; for I shall bring calamity upon them, the year of their punishment," declares the LORD (v. 12).

It implies that there is not an immediate judgment, but rather an appointed future time in which God judges those who profane His house-even those who originally had authentic and holy callings. That may well be why the Lord is allowing to continue that which is presently being called prophetic or apostolic and is so popular, but for them, as with the priests and prophets of old, there will be a year of visitation or a time when God calls a halt.

Moreover, among the prophets of Samaria I saw an offensive thing: they prophesied by Baal and led My people Israel astray (v.13).

There is a consequence for false prophecy. It will affect the entire nation and therefore the entire church by the same principle.

Also among the prophets of Jerusalem I have seen a horrible thing: the committing of adultery and walking in falsehood; and they strengthen the hands of evildoers, so that no one has turned back from his wickedness. All of them have become to Me like Sodom, and her inhabitants like Gomorrah. (v. 14).

Their view of truth and God is corrupted by their sensual and ungodly living. Walking in lies and committing adultery (or the frequency of divorce and remarriage) go hand-in-hand. If you are going to commit adultery spiritually or physically, then there is a way in which you have to inwardly justify yourself, and you can only do that at the expense of the truth of God. There is also a consequence in that it strengthens the hands of evildoers. There is nothing about their proclamation that causes repentance and return, but rather a condoning of those who are in a place opposed to God, who Himself hates divorce. It is something like judges today who cannot bring sentence upon transgressors. They cannot bring the severity of the law against the lawbreaker, because their own life personally is itself a transgression.

Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts concerning the prophets, 'Behold, I am going to feed them wormwood and make them drink poisonous water, for from the prophets of Jerusalem pollution has gone forth into all the land.' Thus says the LORD of hosts, 'Do not listen to the words of the prophets who are prophesying to you...' (vs. 15-16a).

Notice that God still calls them prophets! It is maybe because the gifts and callings of God are irrevocable. They still retain their official title, but what they are performing under that title is in God's sight an abomination. There is nothing more profane than when the sacred is not authentically sacred. When we take the sacred phrase, 'Thus says the Lord' and merely employ it as a device to obtain the attention of our hearers, then we are desecrating the sacred. We are making the sacred profane and once we have done that, what can be hoped for? If we are not as a priestly people setting forth the distinction between the profane and the sacred, what can be hoped for in the world?

They are leading you into futility; they speak a vision of their own imagination, not from the mouth of the LORD. They keep saying to those who despise Me, 'The LORD has said, 'You will have peace'; and as for everyone who walks in the stubbornness of his own heart, they say, 'Calamity will not come upon you.' (v.16b-17).

This must be the very quintessence of what a false prophet is, namely, the giving of a false comfort and a false assurance of peace that does not regard the truth of the conditions that need to be faced. It is an unwillingness to bring a hard word. The things that are prophesied are normally flattering and encouraging to the flesh, rather than challenging or threatening. False prophets have historically prophesied peace when there is no peace. '*Calamity will not come upon you*' is unhappily the kind of prophetic statement that is coming forth even today, especially in Israel. They are giving a false comfort to those who are not even properly aligned to God. Humanly speaking, we would not see these people as those who despise God. God sees them, however, as despising Him, and we need to see it as God sees it. The false prophets are actually bringing a kind of encouragement to those people who are already *out* of right relationship with God and give them an assurance that their relationship with God is in order.

But who has stood in the council of the LORD, that he should see and hear His word? Who has given heed to His word and listened? (v.18).

Here is the key verse. Everything in God, in the last analysis, comes down to the issue of relationship. He will never give anything independent of relationship. When He called Moses up to the Mount to receive the tablets of the law in order that he might teach them, Moses was first to come up and *be* there. How dare we say, "Thus says the Lord," who have not stood in the council of the Lord and heard His word? I think it is impossible for a flamboyant, gainsaying, gain-seeking minister to even *be* in that place. To be in the council of the Lord requires a certain humility, a certain brokenness, a certain utter dependency upon God, a certain capacity to wait and a certain separation from self-interest, fame, fortune and recognition. Men given to those things *cannot* be in the council of the Lord, and yet they are the first ones to so readily say, "Thus says the Lord!"

The characteristic of ministries today is toward the separation of ministry from relationship. We have made ministry a thing in itself. We talk about worship and the Lord, but somehow we are able to perform it out of an independent, virtuoso ability. Relationship is not only the key to the bestowing of the gift or the tablets of the Law, but the ongoing ability to rightly teach them. Once you sever relationship from ministry, you are on exceedingly dangerous ground. The ministry flows out of the life and the life out of the relationships, and if we break that connection and have a ministry independent of that, then it is *not* going to be a ministry that God recognizes, employs or honors.

But who has stood in the council of the LORD...?

This phrase implies a closeness to God. How is it, then, that these prophets who were speaking prolifically and influencing the nation toward evil were not in *this place*? Why did they not get the word of the Lord out of His council and out of His presence? That there should even be a moment's hesitation about answering this question is a real statement about *us!* They were adulterers and walking in lies, and therefore, how can such men be *in* the council of God? *This* God is holy and you cannot come into *that* presence in *that* condition. You do not even *desire* to come into that place in that condition. That is why you get your words from others, or out of your own skull. Standing before God requires sanctification. It requires something about our own condition that permits that kind of relationship, particularly as it is in abiding.

It is *being* in the council of God and *being* in the presence of God that the word may come, but if you make the word and the attainment of it the condition for entering the presence, then you have already stepped off holy ground. You are coming in the spirit of utility and not in the spirit of devotion to God *for His own sake*. Moses was told to come up the Mount and *be* there, not for the benefit that was going to accrue to him for coming, even the ministerial benefit, but simply because God is God! He is the Creator and we are the creation. We are simply to *be* there, and if no word comes, then no word comes. If we come looking for a word in that expedient, utilitarian sense that we have, then it is no longer the holy ground. It is the spirit of the world that has the underlying premise that one must do *this* in order to obtain *that*. We simply do not know what it means 'to do' or 'to be' for its own sake. If we have never come to that place first with God, then how shall we come to it with men? There is, therefore, a warp in all that we do and say that does not have its true place out of the presence of God, which place *cannot* be entered in the spirit of utility.

Seeking the Lord is an extraordinarily difficult thing and few there be that have the incentive. It itself is a suffering, and in fact, just to be more ruthlessly honest, it is a dying. Living on the earth, in the flesh, in the world and in time, and to confide and to commune with God, is an extraordinary and ultimate attainment. If you attain it, then maintain it, because you do not want to have to do it all over again. We are talking about something very critical. What then shall we say for the whole rash of popular and sought-out prophets that have arisen in recent years? Are they speaking from the council of God? God's judgment about the failure to obtain His word in that place is severe:

Behold, the storm of the LORD has gone forth in wrath, even a whirling tempest; it will swirl down on the head of the wicked (v. 19).

The word 'wicked' is almost exclusively used for those who should know better. It is those who profess or should have every reason to know God and are yet, by intent, acting wrongly. *That* is wickedness.

The anger of the LORD will not turn back until He has performed and carried out the purposes of His heart; in the last days you will clearly understand it (v. 20).

Notice that the judgment is deferred. It is not immediate, but it will come later for something now that is an offense to God, namely, the whole compromise of His prophets and the way it has affected the nation.

I did not send these prophets, but they ran; I did not speak to them, but they prophesied. But if they had stood in My council, then they would have announced My words to My people, and would have turned them back from their evil way and from the evil of their deeds (vs. 21-22).

We can *know* when the word is out of the council of God because it has this salutary effect. It will affect the nation or fellowship in turning it toward God, rather than away from Him and from their evil ways and their practices. Generally speaking, when men will invoke the phrase, "Thus says the Lord," it is almost a testimony to the fact that the Lord is *not* saying. If He is saying, then we do not have to embellish the statement by legitimating it. The statement itself will ring with the truth of God and the sense of God. Is it a quickened statement of God of an original kind that we need to hear in the crisis place that we are, or is it just some kind of an embellishment to give a charismatic endorsement to our meeting? If it is the latter it will have the effect of cheapening the whole integrity of that which is prophetic and make it a shamelessly light kind of thing that anyone almost at will can offer^{3/4} and does!

When Israel's prophets said, "Thus says the Lord," then you know that what is following is going to be a judgment that is so horrific that God validates even the words that bear His resonance, because they are words of ultimate judgment. It must, therefore, be clear from the inception that this is not the prophet speaking out of himself. We have it passed down to us as written prophecy of a kind that has affected the history of Israel. But in contemporary spoken prophecy we need to discern whether it is the Lord speaking authenticated by what is being said in terms of the anointing and the authority it bears, rather than in having it labeled for us.

The call to the prophet is the call to the Cross. It is a frequent, if not continual form of suffering of an exquisite and ultimate kind. Can we say, "Thus says the Lord" without actually articulating those words or implying those words in our statement, except that our word has indeed come through the Cross? It is out of a death. It is not our own word, but His, which can only come from that Cross-centered place. That was true for the prophets before the advent of the Cross. Elijah preceded the Cross historically, but he knew the death of it when he said, "...*there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word.*" Jesus knew the Cross before He became crucified on it. The Cross only exemplified and made visible the thing to which His life was all along submitted.

'Can a man hide himself in hiding places, so I do not see him?' declares the LORD. 'Do I not fill the heavens and the earth?' declares the Lord. I have heard what the prophets have said who prophesy falsely in My name, saying, 'I had a dream, I had a dream!' (vs.24-25).

The heart of the offense in being false before God is that all of this takes place as if He is not seeing and does not understand and is not aware of what is being done. It is an enormous presumption, one that God notes. It is, in effect, a complete absence of the fear of God or the reverence for God as *God*. Those that do so really believe they are hearing from God and that what they are communicating *is* the council of God! They have reached such a place of deceit, that they have persuaded themselves of it, and that when they say, "Thus says the Lord," it is in fact the Lord saying. We can come to that condition by a gradual erosion, a little day-by-day, slight kind of a thing, that when the process is finished, one is not only false, but one *thinks* that one is still true. Thus there is a daily vigilance required over the issues of the heart in order that deception does not have its ultimate work, where the man deceived thinks that he is in the right while leading many to their doom. That is why God urges us to exhort one another daily while it is yet today, because tomorrow is already too late.

...who intend to make My people forget My name by their dreams which they relate to one another... (v.27a).

That is to say, to communicate a sense of God that is not God and allow those listening to think that it is God because they have attached the name of Jesus to it. False prophetic things and things that are deceitful will affect how people perceive and understand God, especially if it affirms them in their shallowness or a certain lightness and frivolity is communicated. God cannot help but suffer loss. They are prophesying "in the name of the Lord," but because it is false, the effect of it is to get people to "forget His name," which is to say, to lose the sense of God as God, of what He is fearfully and majestically in Himself.

We can know that it is God's word because it is likely to be the word that is expressed in verse 29:
'Is not My word like fire?' declares the LORD; 'and like a hammer which shatters a rock?'

In other words, "My word breaks up the deeps; it demolishes and it burns." If you want to distinguish between a prophetic word that is God's word and a prophetic word that is assumed by man, conjured out of his own mind and imagination and that is false, then here is the distinction: God's word is like a fire. His word burns and is like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces. It is devastating and brings an effect and contains a power that breaks in or burns through. It will never be some innocuous, syrupy thing that confirms us in what we already are, especially when our lives are slovenly and slack. His word should burn in our heart and reveal its *true* condition and not as we presumptuously thought it to be.

Every true word requires, and if we do not respond, then it means that we have not really heard. *"Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts* (Heb. 4:7b)." If we have heard, then it should evoke a response in us. Not to respond is to harden. There is no such thing as neutrality. The word of God when it *is* the word of God has to have consequence for ill or good. We can never ignore it or allow it to pass and nod our heads by saying, "Yes, that was a good and interesting word. I enjoyed that." It requires or we harden, and that is why we find so many people in a hardened condition, and then God's last appeals would be a prophetic cry, but it has got to be like a hammer upon a rock that breaks through until the necessary repentance and release.

"Therefore behold, I am against the prophets," declares the LORD, "who steal My words from each other. Behold, I am against the prophets," declares the LORD, "who use their tongues and declare, 'The LORD declares.' Behold, I am against those who have prophesied false dreams," declares the LORD, "and related them, and led My people astray by their falsehoods and their reckless boasting ('and by their lightness'- King James Version); yet I did not send them or command them, nor do they furnish this people the slightest benefit," declares the LORD (vs. 30-32).

There is a certain levity, a certain kind of air of casualness that seems to prevail in conferences and sessions where men who have not been sent of God have had opportunity to speak as if they had been sent of God. The unhappy thing is that great numbers of Christians in the world have never heard a true prophetic word spoken in the authority of God, and all they hear they assume to be normative. They have no basis for comparison. But to hear such a true word *once* is to be ruined forever for anything less. There is, therefore, a great cry and need for *that* word and *that* authority to come into the earth, that the church might be rightly 'ruined' and made candidates for the truth. It is the word that has become 'event.'

False prophets steal God's words from each other and often speak the identical kind of word. If we were to survey the last thirty-five years, has there not been a succession of fads, panaceas, gimmicks and things that we latch onto? There is a way in which one can test by a raised finger: "Which way is the wind blowing? What is current? What is now popular? I know that if I speak on 'prosperity and faith,' the people will love it; or prayer, or worship, or church growth, or power evangelism." We seem to go through periods where certain themes have found a place of popularity and then you just move in that; and you pick up what others are saying, and then *you* begin to say it. It is easier to hear the word from other men and to imitate and repeat that, knowing that it has already found approval and acceptance. We desperately need to hear all the more, therefore, what is on God's heart; and the only one who can communicate that is that one who is close to *His* heart through a *consistent* communing. There is a door of dying to reputation, name and acceptance to find your way into the place of the secret council of God; but it is in *that* place alone that the word of the Lord will be given.

Prophetic Formation and Integrity

It is an ultimate calling that points us again to the premium, not of the office as some abstraction, but that it rests and inheres with the man himself. *The man is the thing in himself.* He *is* the prophetic *man*. His message is not some kind of an addendum. He is not a disembodied spirit who simply brings a word. He is bound up with the word. If you reject him, then you are rejecting the word with him, which is to say, rejecting the Word made flesh. We need to see the inseparability of the office and the man, and that is why prophets are not born in a day. That is why they are not going to be produced in a three-month school, or any comparable kind of thing. It is a work; a process whereby God invests *Himself* into the man in His own

essential Person.

The prophet does not come to an identification with the seeing of God in a day. There is a history of dealings, of heart-rending and heart-aching disappointments, setbacks, castings away and conflicts that he just lives with as being inherent with the call; and he bears it. He grew up in the world, and the values of the world as a *man*. He is recruited and called in, and brought out of the world, its values and seeing, and brought increasingly into the place of God's seeing. If the prophet's word is going to devastate others, then he himself must *first* experience devastation. He has *first* to come out of his own false alignments and come increasingly into the place of God's seeing, and then in coming to that place, a courage to bear the reaction against him. You wonder why anybody would want to be one! The first evidence of a false prophet is somebody who likely *wants* to be a prophet! It has nothing to do with what *you* want to be; it has to do with the God who calls. It is nevertheless remarkable how many people are attracted to becoming a prophet because their definition and view of prophet is other than what we are describing. Their view is of something much more exciting, romantic and self-glorifying.

The Body of Christ - The Place of Formation

It is not to be imagined that God is going to send men like that out into the world and into the nations who have not first been sharpened and made acute within their own fellowship. They need to bring the word into the band of souls to whom they are daily joined. If the fellowship will not bear and be supportive of their prophets, then there will not be men to be sent. He must be sent from a body who understands these things and recognizes the significance and the fatefulness of his speaking and acting. He needs to be sent with the laying on of hands, which means, "We not only identify with you, but we sustain you by our own intercessions, because we are going to suffer the consequence of what you are doing. We are in this with you." That is the 'Antioch' that we are waiting for, that men could be sent out of such a context with such an identification.

Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was there, prophets and teachers: ...And while they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said,...(Acts 13:1a and 2a).

In other words, when men of those two callings were found 'together,' that is to say, something more than sitting in the same room, "*the Holy Spirit said...*" Anybody who knows anything about this knows the painful tension between a teacher and a prophet. It is not because they are *wanting* to act contrary, but both of them, acting out of the integrity of their call, of necessity rub the other raw. The teacher wants it to be according to the Word-line upon line, precept upon precept. If there was not, however, the press that comes of visionary things to get the teacher beyond the safe, prescribed place according to the Word, the teacher himself would be limited. There is, therefore, interplay, with both men acting out of the integrity of their call, and yet necessarily chafing one another. That is where love comes in, namely, to bear the strain and the tension of that, and to receive therefore the benefit of it, and not to flee from it because there is a painful or irritating tension of interrelationship.

The Spirit of God called out of the congregation at Antioch, "*Set apart for Me Barnabas and Paul for the work to which I have called them* (Acts 13:2b)." It was *in* the fellowship that they became separated from their own ambitions and defects. The Body of Christ, the prophetic body, the supportive body, is an enormously crucial thing in the shaping, the perfecting and the sending of the prophetic voice into the earth. That is what we are talking about as a prophetic community. They do not all have that call, but they all have that awareness. They all understand the primacy and importance of the prophetic word. Institutional situations will never produce a prophet. But there will never be any 'Antiochal' sending bodies unless we desire them and are willing for the cost of them.

Do we have the ability to recognize those who give evidence of the call? We are not to dampen them but encourage them. At the same time we are to show to them the admixture of flesh and Spirit still operative. By such a process of gentle and loving admonition and exhortation the Body can be a help to them. The prophet needs to be separated even from the self-consciousness of his own calling, let alone any subtlety of ambition that needs for him to be seen, applauded and recognized. He needs to be able to bear the reproach and rejection of what will invariably be the consequence of his faithfulness. Indeed, the prophet's whole life and history in God is calculated toward that end. It is aggravation, consternation and every divinely calculated thing, because that is how the prophetic person is formed. There is no cheap way to incubate it. He has got to pass through the essence of the issues of life in order one day to address them with penetration and

authority in others, compelling them to decisions for or against God.

While his most radical obediences will most likely be performed alone, the prophet is a man both communal and corporate, not in an idealized sense, but as one himself frequently critiqued of others *and desiring it*. The moment of obedience may come as one standing alone before Ahab, but the thing that makes that moment powerful and confrontational is that which preceded it, that is to say, in the man coming out of a true corporate life. That corporate life is not some idealized or romantic community out in the remote boondocks. It is rather a situation where that man is more subject to review and examination than any other that make up that community. If the community is not rendering *that* service, then I cannot think of anyone in greater danger than the prophet. The prophet *must* make himself accessible. A prophet who prefers privacy and who is unattended by others or is surrounded by a self-affirming, paid and mutually congratulatory staff is likely false or will become so. There is a difference between living in an interactive community and being surrounded and affirmed by a staff of paid employees.

It is another situation when you are living in proximity and relationship and where others have every freedom to critique you and speak into your life. The true prophet knows that unless he is receiving that kind of input and examination, then he will move into deception and *that* without even knowing it. Just because one has an anointing from God, it does not mean that one is invincible. The presence of an anointing does not necessarily mean that God's statement of approval is on the individual's life in its entirety. You can be anointed in the place of ministry, but the defects and contradictions in your life, personally and privately, need to be both attended and seen to.

Prophets are not to go out before they are threshed. They should be welcoming the threshing and expect it, because there are subtleties of soul in all of us—little insinuations of ambition, little presumptions of pride, little romantic notions of what we think prophetic service is—that God has got ruthlessly to deal with. This is necessary so that when the prophet speaks, it is *God's* word, not only in its content, but also in the mood and spirit of its delivery.

Meekness - The Key to Revelation

The key then to apostolic or prophetic seeing and the receiving of the revelation of the mysteries of God is found in Ephesians 3:8,

To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ.

In other words, all true seeing is given to men like Paul, who indeed see themselves as the '*very least of all saints*.' Paul is not being deferential and polite, and making the kind of statement that a chamber of commerce speaker would make. He actually saw himself as this. He was the apostle to whom was afforded such visions that God had to give him a thorn in his side, lest he be exalted beyond measure for the magnitude of the revelations that were given him. We must not, however, pass by apostolic character, which is to say, the deep humility, the authentic meekness and the Christ-likeness of the apostolic or the prophetic man. If the man is the thing in himself, then it is more than his knowledge. It is his very life; it is his character; it is his knowledge of God; it is what he communicates as one who comes to us out of God's own presence. This statement, '*the very least of all saints*' was Paul's actual, stricken, heartfelt consciousness of how he unaffectedly and continually saw himself before God.

It is a remarkable irony that the deeper we come into the knowledge of God, the more we see ourselves as *less*. Instead of becoming more exalted by the increase of our knowledge of God, the further down we go in seeing how abase and pitiful we really are. It is a contradiction and a paradox, and it is a paradox to be found only in the faith. Authentic meekness or humility is not something that one can learn, emulate, or pick up at school. It is the dividend of God out of the measure of actual, real relationship with Him. It is the revelation of God as He is and the unutterable depths of it, that bring a man to this kind of awareness of himself. The revelation of what we are is altogether related to the revelation of who He is. The two things then necessarily always go together.

Then I (Isaiah) said, 'Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts' (Isaiah 6:5).

This is the prince of prophets, Isaiah, speaking here. The foundation of the church, as we have said, is the revelation of God as He in fact is. *That* is the foundation. It is not as we think Him to be, which is more often than not a projection of the way we would *like* Him to be, especially when we have chosen to celebrate one attribute of God and ignore another. The *key* knowledge is the knowledge of God as He is, both in judgment and in mercy, and the foundational men to the church are those who can communicate God in *that* knowledge. Paul had this knowledge because he saw himself as the '*least of all saints*,' and saw himself as the least because he had this knowledge.

The Lord Jesus Himself was absolute. He used language in such a fierce and uncompromising way; He overthrew moneychangers' tables. Was He meek even while He was violent and offensive? This act set in motion the things that eventuated in His death. How do we reconcile the act of violence that Jesus performed and the meekness of God? When we think of meek, we think of lamb-like, quiet and deferring. This is an aggressive act, and yet we are saying at the same time that it is meek. Meekness is total abandonment to God; all the more in an act or a word that would give an impression to the contrary, and lay the obedient servant open to the charge of a reproach for being violent, or being angry, or being too zealous. If God wanted to be violent and we withheld Him because it contradicts our personality, disposition, or preference, then we are putting something above and before God, namely, our own self-consideration.

A true prophet will not relent nor refrain. He cannot be bought or enticed into being 'one of the boys.' He shuns the distinctions and honors that men accord men. He necessarily has to or there would be a compromising of what he is in God. He is scrupulous in character and will never use his position to obtain personal advantage. He is naturally unaffected, normal and unprepossessing in appearance and demeanor, despising what is showy, sensational or bizarre. He is not necessarily the man that is going to be wearing the hairy garment. He may be wearing rather a three-piece suit! He will not call any attention to himself by externalities. He is the thing in himself, in the depth and the pith and marrow of his being because of his communion with God and his history in God. The false will always lack meekness, but it is the indistinguishable sign of the authentic prophet, and also the quintessential character of God.