

Why Every Prophet Must Distinguish Between Soul and Spirit

A “prophet” gave me a prophetic word concerning my “little brother” about whom, he said, I had been very concerned. He assured me there was no need for my concern. God, he said, had revealed to him that my little brother would be saved.

Now, there was only one problem with this prophecy: I do not have a little brother! When I shared this fact with this individual, he seemed embarrassed and replied, “I will have to be more careful.”

Sadly, the very next day I heard him giving detailed personal prophecies to people, even about God sending them to specific nations. I shook my head in disbelief, and for the sake of the people, thought to myself, “I hope you test what you are hearing.”

He was not a false prophet, but simply a zealous individual who had never learned to distinguish between his soul and spirit. The prophecy he gave me was neither from God or the devil, but had been formulated in his own soul, that is, his mind and emotions. It was the product of an overactive imagination, perhaps motivated by a desire for importance.

This is why we must learn to distinguish between soul and spirit. Discerning between soul and spirit is the key for understanding the source of most spiritual manifestations in the church today.

Discerning Between Soul and Spirit

There are three possible sources for a prophecy or spiritual manifestation: 1) From the Holy Spirit who dwells in the

reborn spirit of the believer; 2) from a demonic spirit; 3) from the human soul, or the mind, will and emotions. I am convinced that many prophecies we are hearing from Christians today are from the human soul.

It is, therefore, of utmost importance that we learn to distinguish between soul and spirit. The spirit is the innermost part of our being and is that part that is regenerated when we are born again. It is through our human spirit that we have an awareness of God and the spirit realm. In born-again believers, the spirit is the place where the Holy Spirit dwells and, therefore, the place from which gifts of the Holy Spirit originate and flow.

The soul, on the other hand, consists of our mind, will and emotions. It is the seat of the personality—the ego—and is that part of our being that gives us self-awareness. The soul, or mind, will and emotions, can be moved by a variety of outward stimuli.

Good music, for example, has the power to stir positive emotions of love, nostalgia and compassion apart from the Holy Spirit. Likewise, a gifted orator can stir emotions and move people to behave in ways they otherwise would not. These, however, are mere feelings of the soul and have nothing to do with the Holy Spirit.

Although some think of the soul and spirit as being the same, the New Testament makes a clear distinction between the two. In I Thessalonians 5:23, for example, Paul says, “And I pray to God that your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Hebrews 4:12 clearly says that the soul and spirit are two distinct entities and that only the Word of God can divide the two. Making a distinction between soul and spirit can be very helpful in discerning the source of a prophecy or spiritual manifestation.

Our spirit is sometimes referred to in Scripture as “the heart.” For example, Jesus was speaking of the human spirit when He said, “He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water” (John 7:38). Jesus was speaking of the Holy Spirit who would dwell in those who believe in Him and from whom would flow gifts of the Holy Spirit.

How We Mistake Soul for Spirit

Those who are zealous to be used of God and see His power will often mistake the stirring of their emotions for the Holy Spirit. This is what John Wesley was referring to when on Oct. 29, 1762, he cautioned a colleague who was mistaking his own thoughts and imaginations for the Holy Spirit. Wesley said;

“I dislike something that has the appearance of enthusiasm, overvaluing feelings and inward impressions; mistaking the mere work of imagination for the voice of the Spirit, and undervaluing reason, knowledge and wisdom in general” (Hyatt, *Angels of Light*, 49).

Many today mistake emotional highs for the presence of God. A “revival” service could be the product of skilled musicians and a savvy preacher stirring people’s emotions. R. A. Torrey (1856-1928), a successful revivalist himself, was referring to such “soulish” revivals when he wrote:

“The most fundamental trouble with most of our present-day, so called revivals is, that they are man-made and not God sent. They are worked up (I almost said faked up) by man’s cunningly devised machinery—not prayed down” (Hyatt, *Angels of Light*, 49).

Soulish Prophecies

A young man shared with me about a puzzling and discouraging experience he had with prophecy. He had gone with a small group to pray for a woman in the last stages of terminal

cancer. As they stood around the bed and prayed, he sensed what he believed was God's presence, and he prophesied to the sick woman that God had heard her prayer and was healing her.

He really felt the prophecy was from God, but just a few days later, she died. He was embarrassed and confused. How could this happen? How could he have been so wrong?

I could share numerous stories like this where well-meaning people have given what they sincerely believed was a word from God, but that word turned out to be false. These are usually well-meaning people who desire to be used of God but have never learned to distinguish between their soul and their spirit.

The young man mentioned above did not distinguish between soul and spirit in the prophecy he gave. No doubt, his natural feelings and emotions were moved by seeing the woman lying in bed and dying of cancer. He believed in divine healing and desired so much to see a miracle of healing.

These, however, were natural feelings of the soul and not from the Spirit of God. He was moved out of his own natural feelings to give the prophecy. He gave what I call a "soulish" prophecy—a prophecy borne out of one's own feelings and emotions. He was not a false prophet, just a mistaken one.

Prophecy Must Be Initiated by the Spirit

First Corinthians 12:11 clearly states that gifts of the Spirit, including prophecy, are given *as He [the Spirit] wills*. Contrary to the biblical model, however, some teach that believers can prophesy at their own volition or will. I heard one well-known "prophet" insist that, just as it took Pentecostals several decades to discover they could speak or pray in tongues at will, many in the body of Christ are now discovering they can prophesy at will.

Proponents of this teaching point to the fact, that in 1

Corinthians 14:15, Paul says, "I will pray with the spirit," an obvious reference to praying in tongues. They give emphasis to the "I will" in this passage and reason that if one can will to pray or speak in tongues, then one can also will to prophesy.

This is poor hermeneutics and ignores the context of Paul's discussion. When Paul says, "I will pray with the spirit," he is referring to the private, devotional tongues in which he wills, or chooses, to pray. He distinguishes between private, devotional tongues in which he prays at will and the public manifestation of tongues that requires interpretation and comes forth as the Spirit wills, a very important distinction.

The idea that one can prophesy at will has resulted in many "prophets" operating out of their soul realm (mind, will and emotions) rather than from the Spirit. This leads to failed prophecies, with the prophet often seeking to justify the failure. It can be devastating for young Christians, who had received the prophecy as the word of the Lord.

Prophetic Advice

1. Stay humble. Recognize you are not perfect. If you miss it, be willing to admit it. Do not try to justify yourself when you are wrong.
2. Have integrity in the operation of prophecy and spiritual gifts. I have observed individuals who had become very adept at "reading" people and then giving a word that the recipient could easily apply to his or her own situation. Avoid that temptation.
3. If you are not sure of the source of what you are sensing, just say, "I feel to share this with you." Don't take on the identity of a "prophet" to the point where you think you must begin each statement with a "thus saith the Lord."
4. Don't try to use the Holy Spirit; let the Holy Spirit use you.

5. Develop an awareness of the difference between your soul and spirit and contend for a pure prophetic flow of the Holy Spirit in your life. {eo}

This article is derived from Dr. Eddie Hyatt's latest book, Angels of Light, available from his Amazon and his website at .

Dr. Eddie L. Hyatt is an author, historian and Bible teacher with a vision to see America reconnect with its Christian heritage as a nation birthed in prayer and spiritual awakening. He is also a director of God's Word to Women and the Int'l Christian Women's Hall of Fame, ministries that are lifting the status of women around the world and helping them fulfill their call and purpose in life. If you would like to give a gift to help Drs. Eddie and Susan Hyatt spread the Good News around the world, click the following link: