

THE PROPHETIC WORD IN CRISIS DAYS

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by

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CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

THE PROPHETIC WORD AND REVIVAL

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Does the prophetic Word of God have any relationship to practical Christian living? Many would seem to answer, "No." They view prophecy as an intellectual puzzle to be unscrambled by students of theology. But they see little connection between prophecy and the Christian walk — and their lives bear testimony to this.

Many sincere people have become very pessimistic. They feel that prophecy is a sort of escape mechanism, and they take the attitude, "Well, the Lord is coming soon, so there's nothing for us to do." Several years ago, I received a letter from a lady who had been saved in our mid-week Bible study. May I share an excerpt with you?

"I've returned to California after a year of full time Christian service in Ohio, and an extended trip east. But I've come back almost spiritually shipwrecked. I Have been a Christian for three and one-half years, and until recently was able to give a glowing testimony about being saved out of 'Unity.'

"But lately, I've been so dead that Christ seems 'way up there,' and I'm 'way down here.' I have all the negative virtues of a Christian ("don't smoke, drink, play cards, attend movies, use make-up" . . .) but those things do not make a happy Christian! My friends tell me I'm becoming bitter, — and oh, I don't want that to happen!

"Before becoming a Christian, I was very ambitious, worked hard for whatever I believed in (and incidentally was listed in 'Who's Who'), — but now I wonder what's the use? The world is going from bad to worse. Everything is heading for disaster, and the only hope is to wait for the return of the Lord Jesus Christ."

Now, that is a very pessimistic and certainly a wrong attitude toward the return of Christ and prophecy. Yet this expresses the attitude of many. We ought rather to have the attitude expressed by Dwight L. Moody: "I look upon this world as a wrecked vessel. Its ruin is getting nearer and nearer. God said to me: 'Moody, here is a lifeboat, go out and rescue as many as you can before the crash comes.'"

And George Whitfield, who was mightily used of God for revival in America, said “I am daily waiting for the coming of the Son of God.” But he did not mean he was going to sit down and do nothing while he waited for the coming of the Lord Jesus.

I do not think that we can expect world-wide revival; yet revival has come in most unexpected times in certain areas. The three great miracle periods of the Bible center around Moses, Elijah and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let us look, for example, at Elijah. Here was a man mightily used of God. Yet, Elijah prophesied and did his work during the reign of Ahab and Jezebel, the worst period, the darkest period in the history of Israel. The great revival under Josiah came only thirty years before God's judgment on Israel, — the Babylonian captivity, — and yet, at that time, God sent a time of refreshing.

There never has been a great world-wide revival. It is true that when Christianity first began, it swept over the Roman Empire, but that was the last world-wide movement.

Although I do not think we can expect a world-wide revival today, any church, any group or any individual can have revival. I wrote a little book several years ago, entitled *You Can Have Revival Now*. I believe that any Christian who will meet God's conditions can be revived, even in days like these. Because I'm confident that a great many believers do want to be revived, I would like for you to look with me at the conditions God puts down for individuals. Any movement, after all, is a movement that reaches many individuals, — it must be personal and it must be individual.

God puts down His condition which is expressed in Galatians 5:16: “**This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.**” The Greek rendition is — walk by means of the Spirit, or continue to walk by means of the Spirit. This means a constant, continual, habitual and unbroken walk by means of the Holy Spirit. It means a moment-by-moment walk with God. And to walk by the Spirit means to assign to Him a work that we cannot do ourselves.

It is just as impossible for you and me to walk the Christian walk and to live the Christian life in this world as it would be for the engineer on the Super Chief to get out and start pushing the train out of the station, instead of getting up where he belongs and applying the power that has been provided in the Diesel. And if you should be on the Super Chief when it would stop, and you, wondering what in the world had happened, should get out, and find the engineer at the back of the train pushing, you'd say to him, “Well, whatever are you doing back here?”

He might reply, “We must get this train going; it should run on schedule, and I want to move it out.”

You would have to tell him that he should be up yonder in the cab of the train, using the power that was already available.

Today a great many believers are doing exactly what a good engineer does not do. They are trying to do the impossible. They are trying to live the Christian life.

Now let us notice what the Word of God says: **“For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love”** (Galatians 5:6).

That is a new way of living. It is a new formula that God has presented, and it is different from anything that ever was in the past. I am of the opinion that it is still brand new.

Back in the Old Testament, God said that He would walk with the people. **“ . . . I will set my tabernacle among you: and my soul shall not abhor you. And I will walk among you, and will be your God, and ye shall be my people”** (Leviticus 26:11, 12). Now that was God's method in the Old Testament. He said, “I'll walk among you.”

But when you come to the New Testament, in this day in which we live, there is something altogether new. God says, **“And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people”** (II Corinthians 6:16). Before, He said, **“I'll walk among you”**; now, He says, **“I'll walk in you.”**

Every believer today is indwelt by the Holy Spirit of God, and is walking by the power of Another. We have been saved by faith, and a great many people think that ends it, — that we just believe in Christ, and then from here on we're on our own. That is not true. We live by faith, just as we are saved by faith. The Christian is to walk by faith today, leaning upon Another, not leaning upon his own strength.

If you and I can learn that technique, there is a revival for us. We can be revived even in these dark days. It will mean a new day for us, full of new joy. God is holding before His own a vista of satisfaction. He wants us to live in a way that is well pleasing to Him. He wants us to live in such a way that we can have the greatest fulfillment of life and can be the greatest blessing. And what we are talking about does not rest upon just a few unrelated verses of Scripture. It is a great principle which is set down in the New Testament.

There are three steps which we must take if we are to walk by means of the Holy Spirit. I want to suggest that if you and I, as Christians, are willing to take these steps, we will be walking in the Spirit and experiencing revival in these days.

This is the desire of my own heart, as I am sure it is the desire of every sincere Christian today, — that we might walk in the Spirit, and that we might be revived in our own hearts.

The first step is this: the realization of our human weakness and sin.

Notice with me in I John 1:8, — **“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.”**

I believe that this is the most difficult step for any believer to take. It is like the first step that a baby takes, — the baby is always afraid to take that first step. And believers today are afraid to take this first step in the Spirit.

We are unwilling to take the place of utter helplessness and total corruption before God. We are unwilling to admit that we are absolutely depraved and to say with Paul, **“I know that in me . . . dwelleth no good thing”** (Romans 7:18). Now, notice very carefully. John suggests this to us:

“If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth [just keeps on cleansing] us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin [that is, if we say we have no sin nature], we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (I John 1:6-8).

Now a great many folk like to think that they get rid of their sin nature when they are saved. I live in a community with folk like that, and many of them are lovely people. But I have never met one of them who has convinced me that he had gotten rid of his sin nature. I have never met a believer yet whom I thought had gotten rid of his sin nature. You and I always have that sin nature. We need to recognize it, and we need to take the position that God takes concerning that old nature.

The Scripture uses the most frightful terms to describe it. It is spoken of as a leprosy, as a running cancer, filled with corruption. Paul speaks of it as the body of death. It is like a putrefying corpse that is chained to us, for Paul says, **“O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?”** (Romans 7:24).

The picture is that of a murderer in the Roman Empire. The body of the one he had murdered was chained to him and he carried that corpse with him the rest of his life. The flesh wasted away and then he carried the skeleton. Paul says, “That is exactly what I'm carrying around in this life.” I wonder if you have discovered your sin nature to be this.

A great many believers today try to cover up and say, “Well, I just don't have that; I'm free from that sort of thing.”

Yet the greatest saints of God have been more conscious of this than anything else.

It was Tholuck, the great theologian of Germany who, when honored at a banquet on his eightieth anniversary, was asked what he was most thankful for. He rose and said, “The thing I'm most thankful to God for is the consciousness of sin.”

It was Count de Maistre in France who said, “I do not know what the heart of a villain might be; I only know what the heart of a righteous man is, and it is frightful.”

It was Samuel Johnson, the great English writer, who made this statement: “I have never yet read of a crime but what I, too, might have committed that crime.”

Goethe, the great German, said, “Every man knows that of himself which he dares not tell his dearest friend.”

And it was John Bunyan who said, “When I saw John Bunyan as God saw John Bunyan, I did not say that I was a sinner; I said that I was sin, from the crown of my head to the sole of my foot.”

Isaiah the prophet was in a position of complaining and even criticizing God, but when he came into God's presence and saw the Lord high and lifted up, he saw himself. And when he saw himself he said, **“I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips”** (Isaiah 6:5). Someone has put it this way:

Man calls sin an accident; God calls it an abomination.

Man calls sin a blunder; God calls it blindness.

Man calls sin a chance; God calls it a choice.

Man calls sin a defect; God calls it a disease.

Man calls sin an error; God calls it enmity.

Man calls sin an infirmity; God calls it iniquity.

Man calls sin fascination; God calls it fatality.

Man calls sin a luxury; God calls it leprosy.

Man calls sin a liberty; God calls it lawlessness.

Man calls sin a trifle; God calls it a tragedy.

Man calls sin a mistake; God calls it madness.

Man calls sin a weakness; God calls it willfulness.

When the Scripture speaks of confessing sin, it means to say the same thing God says about sin. The word in the Greek is *homologeia*, and it means to say the same thing that God says. No man has ever truly confessed his sin until he has taken the position that God has taken about that sin. Sin is an awful, frightful thing before Almighty God.

How many today are willing to take the first step of confession, saying, “I know that within my flesh dwelleth no good thing. I cannot walk! I'm like Isaiah; I am a man who is undone.” When you and I get to that position and see our own weakness, our own sin, then we are ready to take the second step.

Now the second step is a recognition that God's standard for Christian living is not attainable by human means.

Let me put it very bluntly: you cannot live the Christian life, and furthermore, God has never asked you to live the Christian life. But He has asked that He might live it through you. That is the reason He says, **“Walk in the Spirit.”** You cannot do this yourself. Listen to Paul again, as he speaks to the Galatians. **“Christ is become of no effect unto you whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace”** (Galatians 5:4).

Paul is talking here not about losing one's salvation, but about being saved by faith, and then coming down to a low legal plane, and living by law instead of going on living by faith.

To **“fall from grace”** means to try to live by law instead of **“walking in the Spirit.”** Let me illustrate this.

A few years ago all the passenger planes flew around six thousand feet above sea level, and they were constantly bumping into mountains. But today they do not fly that low; they are now up above twenty thousand feet. And when you say today that planes are not flying at six thousand feet, you do not mean that they are not that high; you really mean they are higher.

Similarly, a great many people say, 'Well, if you're not under law, that means you can break the law.'

No, you do not come lower; you go higher. We are not today to live by law. We are fallen from grace if we live by law; we have come down to the six thousand foot level. God wants us to continue on the twenty thousand foot level. He has called us to a higher level of living. Listen to Him: **"But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law"** (Galatians 5:18). You are not down at the six thousand foot level, if you today are **"walking in the Spirit."** You are walking on a higher plane.

I wonder if you have ever noticed the heights to which God wants to take us in that which is called Christian living. Let me give you just a few verses.

"But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light" (I Peter 2:9).

Now a child of God is to **"shew forth the praises"** of God. That is not under the law. The Ten Commandments never asked any man to shew forth the praises of God. But we are asked to do it.

"That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God" (Colossians 1:10).

The law never asked any man to do that; but today a child of God is told to produce the fruit of the Spirit, which is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and temperance (Galatians 5:22, 23). These are the things which are to be manifest in the life of the believer.

"That ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory" (I Thessalonians 2:12).

When anyone says that we are not under the Ten Commandments and can therefore do as we please, he is wrong. There are commandments given to believers. Listen to the Lord Jesus: **"A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another"** (John 13:34, 35).

There is no use beating around the bush. Unless that love, one for another, is manifest today in the lives of believers, the world outside is not going to be interested. One of the reasons that the world is passing by the church is that they do not see love being manifest.

You and I cannot work up love. It can only be produced by the Holy Spirit of God working in our hearts and lives. It is a supernatural love that can come only in a supernatural way.

Paul also gives some commandments: **“Ye know what commandments we gave you by the Lord Jesus”** (I Thessalonians 4:2).

Here are some of them.

- **“Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more”** (I Thessalonians 4:1).
- **“Rejoice evermore”** (I Thessalonians 5:16). A child of God today is commanded to rejoice evermore.
- **“Pray without ceasing. In everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you”** (I Thessalonians 5:17, 18).

You and I have not been called to the legal plane of the Mosaic system. We have been called to a much higher plane today, and we cannot attain to it in our own strength at all. And when we recognize that, we can say as David says, **“Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it”** (Psalm 139:6).

The first step toward revival is a realization of our sin nature. The second is a recognition that God's standard is above anything that you and I can accomplish.

The third step is resting upon the Holy Spirit, — which brings us back again to Galatians 5:16, “This I say then, Walk by means of the Spirit.”

Be in the habit of walking by the power of the Holy Spirit.

You know, a walk is a very interesting sort of thing. A walk means putting one foot in front of the other. It is something that goes on continually, and the minute you stop putting one foot in front of the other, you are no longer walking; you are standing.

The Christian life is not a ride in a missile. A great many people would like it to be that sort of excitement. Many people envision the Christian life as a series of great emotional experiences. But the Christian life is not that; the Christian life is a walk, right down here on this earth.

The most important thing in the world is to be able to walk on the school campus, in the place of business, in the office or the workshop, or on the street, by means of the Holy Spirit. That is far more important than to go up in a missile on Sunday and then to come down on Monday and be the same person you were before.

God doesn't intend for us to live a defeated life although that is generally accepted today as the norm for Christian living. God wants us to walk by means of the Spirit.

Now, again, let us read: “**For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith**” (Galatians 5:5).

We walk, you see, by faith, and not by sight. Let me illustrate. Here is a man whose legs have been paralyzed. He is dependent upon his crutches. He does not attempt a step without them, for he knows that without them he could not walk. He would fall.

How many of us Christians rush into a new week in our own strength and, like Don Quixote, attack new windmills; and come away defeated. As we come to the end of a week, we have to look back and say, “Lord, I have been defeated again.”

May I say to you, He wants us to walk by means of the Holy Spirit, — not in our own strength. We do not have the strength or the ability to walk alone. His standard is too high for us; but God has given to us the Holy Spirit, and we are to walk by means of Him. That means that we are utterly dependent upon Him, as this man is dependent upon his crutch. If he were to put down that crutch, he would fall. Today, believers are attempting to walk without the power of the Holy Spirit, and when they try it, they fall.

I want you to notice how God has taken ordinary men and how He has enabled them to walk by means of the Holy Spirit.

First there is the man, Elijah. Elijah seems to be a man who is way up yonder, whom we can barely touch. Actually though, in the Scriptures, we read that he was a man of like passions as we are, which certainly is shown in the record that is given of him.

This man went yonder to the top of the mount, and he put on an amazing demonstration against the prophets of Baal, — one man against four hundred. God gave him a great victory. You would think that Elijah was superhuman, but he wasn't. Jezebel said, “I'm going to get rid of that prophet. He got rid of my prophets of Baal, and I'm going to get rid of him.” This man, who was not afraid of four hundred prophets of Baal or the entire nation of Israel, ran from the woman, Jezebel. He ran south as far as he could go. When he got as far as Beersheba, he said to his servant, “You'd better stay here; you're out of wind. I've got my second wind, and I'm going to keep running.”

He kept going into the desert, and finally crawled up under a juniper tree, and he said to the Lord, “I can't go any farther; I'm through. I'm absolutely through.”

Then God said, “***Well, Elijah, I'll be able to use you now, because you know you're through.***”

If many of us only knew that we are through, that we can't do it, then God could do it. When Elijah said, “I can't do it, Lord,” then the Lord moved in and began to deal with this man.

First of all, he was physically exhausted. He was, I think, a nervous wreck. That was one of the reasons he ran away. And so, one of the things God did was to doctor him. He gave him some very fine vitamins, by the way.

“And the angel of the Lord came again the second time, and touched him, and said, Arise and eat; because the journey is too great for thee” (I Kings 19:7).

You mean the man who put four hundred prophets of Baal to death? Yes, the journey is too great for him. And this life is too much for us today. That is one of the reasons that many Christians are seeking out a psychiatrist today. They cannot face life alone. God never intended us to. **“The journey is too great for thee.”**

And notice that after God got through with this man **“he arose, and did eat and drink, and went in the strength of that meat forty days and forty nights unto Horeb the mount of God”** (I Kings 19:8).

He journeyed all the way to Mount Sinai in forty days and forty nights. He covered in forty days what it took the children of Israel forty years to cover, because God had strengthened this man. God wants to do that for you and for me, and He can do it only as you and I walk by means of the Holy Spirit, and not in our own strength.

Let me give just one other example, and I go to the New Testament for it. Simon Peter is another man I always like to look at because, frankly, I seem to stumble just about as much as he did. And he apparently stumbled all of his life. But the interesting thing is that he was able to walk for God under unusual circumstances.

There was a time out on the Sea of Galilee, when there was a storm. Every commentary that I have ever examined has criticized Simon Peter for his audacity and his presumption in wanting to walk on the water. I don't criticize him at all, for the Lord Jesus never said to him, “You're wrong in doing this.” The Lord Jesus said to him, “Come; you want to walk, so come.” And we are told that he did!

And then the commentaries always say that he made such a failure. He didn't fail. He did walk on the water. Will you notice —Jesus said, **“Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus”** (Matthew 14:29).

He was walking in the Spirit. But then he did what you and I do in this life. He got his eyes off the Lord Jesus and began to look to his own strength. And **“when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me”** (Matthew 14:30).

And the Lord Jesus reached down and picked this man up, and brought him into the ship.

You and I are living in crisis days. There's a bit of a storm blowing out yonder, and if we are going to walk for God in this storm, we'll have to do it by relying completely upon the Holy Spirit.

You and I will never become wonderful saints of God. We are always going to be His little children, filled with foolishness, and stumbling and blundering. He is the one who is wonderful, and He is the one who wants us to have the very best. And the only way for us to receive what He has for us is to meet His conditions.

This involves, as we have seen:

- Realizing that we are, in ourselves, weak and sinful,
- Recognizing that we are absolutely incapable of living the Christian life in our own strength;
and
- Resting wholly upon the Holy Spirit, who alone is able to keep us from falling.

And when we meet these conditions, He is there to bless us in a very wonderful way.

~ end of chapter 17 ~

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