

# Lay Ministry Defined and Refined

## Part III

The Gift of Healing: Jesus, the Great Physician, said that the works he did his followers would do also, and this statement certainly includes the manifestation of healing gifts. Just as Jesus used various means for exhibiting healing Power (touching, praying, speaking, casting out demons, utilizing the faith of others), Christians become channels of the gifts of healing through various ways - prayers of intercession, the laying on of hands, anointing with oil, confession, receiving communion, appropriating the promises of scriptures, claiming recovery by affirmations of faith, and various other acts under the direction and anointing of the Holy Spirit. Because wholeness of mind, body, and spirit is God's highest will for his children, his healing power is ever at work to cleanse, renew, revive, and cure all that prevents wholeness, and he works in cooperation with the faithful who are praying and ministering to that end. Although Jesus alone has the power to heal, he ministers the gifts of healing through those he calls to such a ministry. Every Christian can and should evidence gifts of healing in one way or another - either by speaking words of healing and consolation to those who may be suffering, or by interceding in prayer for the sick, or by holding a gift of faith for the recovery of those who are as yet unhealed. Certainly, those with a definite call to the healing ministry (hospital callers, doctors, inner healing counselors, etc.) should manifest these healing gifts, but even those without such a ministry can be prayer channels and a source of encouragement to those who are needy and suffering.

The Gift of Miracles: A close companion to the gift of faith, the gift of miracles is the supernatural intervention of the Lord in the affairs of human beings in unexplainable ways that may deviate from known laws of nature or human abilities. Miracles should not be thought of as some form of magic or superhuman power that can be produced by humanistic efforts such as through transcendental meditation or mind control over matter. A believer cannot, "conjure up" a miracle at will. Like all other gifts, miracles come from the Holy Spirit and are, therefore, under his control. The believer is only the instrument through which miraculous works are manifested as the Spirit operates and directs. The parting of the Red Sea and the raising of Lazarus from the dead were the miraculous responses of the Holy Spirit to the prayers of Moses and Jesus for divine intervention. Some mistakenly believe that the "age of miracles" is past, but signs, wonders, and miraculous happenings occur every day, often going unnoticed by those who do not believe they can happen or who explain away God's marvelous works. Although quite common occurrences, the miracles of natural and supernatural birth (being born and "born again" into God's family) are events that humans cannot duplicate or accomplish apart from the Creator of all life. More dramatic evidences of the gift of miracles at work may be observed in healing services or whenever one has a vision, has a visitation from an angel or other heavenly presence, or has received an interpretation of a dream with spiritual significance as a message from God. There have also been numerous reports of divine intervention in rescues from death or danger and even cases of the dead being raised again to life' Because even Jesus himself did not do many mighty acts in places of unbelief, an atmosphere of faith is best for God's power to become most fully operational. Many people never experience a miracle because they expect none. However, this should never be true of those who minister for the Lord in any form of service, because to do God's work, miracles are often necessary to overcome Satan's opposition, humanity's limitations, and the world's skepticism.

The Gift of Prophecy: Prophecy is God communicating with human beings through the words of another person. Just as the Holy Spirit spoke through the prophets of the old Testament and through the apostles of the New Testament (see Acts 21:10-11 and Acts 23:3 for examples of New Testament prophecy) he continues to speak through his servants today. Although everyone may not be involved full-time in a prophet's ministry, any Spirit-led Christian may evidence the gift of prophecy from time to time. Prophecy may take the form of guidance, exhortation, revelation, or loving reproof and may be

spoken through whomever the Spirit chooses. Included in the prophecy may be a word of wisdom or a word of knowledge. A person does not prophesy at will, but with a special anointing given at a selected moment by the sovereign Spirit for a definite purpose. Prophecy may be given for one person or for a group gathering. Holy Spirit prophecy is not fortunetelling (although a word of knowledge about future events may be brought forth at times), but it is more usually for the edification and encouragement of others (more "forth-telling" than "fore-telling"). Although Paul encouraged prophecy, he also warned that prophecy should be tested ("the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets"). One of the tests for determining true prophecy is the test of fulfillment (God does not lie, so his prophecies always are true or come true). A second test is the agreement of prophecy with Scriptures (Spirit-anointed prophecy is never in opposition to the teachings of the Bible). A third test is the inner witness to the truth, for genuine prophecy will meet with agreement in the spirits of those who test and judge it. Prophecy today may take many forms: reading or sharing a portion of Scripture with another, preparing and delivering a sermon or teaching a lesson, giving a word of loving encouragement to another - all these may be considered aspects of prophecy. Other divinely inspired or prophetic messages may be brought forth during a counseling session, during a time of praise and worship such as in a prayer group, or during a gathering of the body of Christ whenever it is appropriate for the gifts of the Spirit to be in operation. Lay readers, teachers, writers (prophecy may be in written as well as in spoken form), and all those who lead groups should desire the gift of prophecy in order to bring God's messages of truth to others. Always suspect, however, are prophecies that seem harsh or unloving or those that "tell others what to do." Ever a gentleman, the Holy Spirit will always be loving, gentle, and never in violation of a person's free will. True prophets behave in this same manner.

The Gift of Tongues: Jesus said of those who believe that they "shall speak with new tongues" (Mark 16:17). Perhaps the most controversial and least understood of all spiritual gifts, speaking or praying in tongues is the utterance of a language (a prayer language) spoken without having to learn or understand it. The Spirit "gives the utterance." Although the believer is in control of its use (he or she may stop and start at will), the words are from the Holy Spirit. Although the emotions may be stirred and the spirits lifted, as in all times and forms of prayer, praying in tongues is not a frenzied or undignified phenomenon. It is merely a prayer language that bypasses the intellect. Although all other gifts are for the benefit of others, the gift of tongues is personal, a prayer aid for the believer. First, it is a language of praise, assisting Christians in higher, worthier praises than they are capable of offering with their limited vocabulary and human intellect. Second, it is an aid in intercession when one does not know, how to pray or when specific needs of a situation are not fully known. Third, the gift of tongues "edifies the believer" (I Cor. 14:4) or "builds up" spiritually those who allow the Spirit to pray through them. Fourth, it allows a believer to yield one of the most unruly, members of the body to the Lord. The tongue is an instrument of rebellion many times, but in times of praying in the spirit, there is perfect unity with the Holy Spirit and no human will or selfishness in operation. There is at such times an inherent yielding or "letting go" of control to allow the Holy Spirit to take over. Fifth, praying in tongues allows the Holy Spirit to pray through the believers about things deep in their subconscious, things about which they may be completely unaware. It allows the Holy Spirit to purify and cleanse the hidden or unknown areas of the being. Tongues are a love gift from God to assist a Christian's inadequacies in times of prayer and praise. Those involved in ministries of intercessory prayer may find the added dimension of praying in tongues beneficial. Although generally not used in corporate worship because it would be confusing to visitors and not edifying to those not in acceptance of this practice (see I Cor. 14), praying in tongues is sometimes a part of body ministry in prayer groups or small gatherings of believers who are in agreement and open to this manifestation of the Spirit.

The Gift of Interpretation of Tongues: While private devotional pray in tongues may or may not have an accompanying interpretation, when this gift is manifested in a body of Christ (someone praying aloud or giving a message in tongues at a group gathering), it should be followed by an accompanying interpretation "that the church may receive edifying." Paul warns about the confusion that will exist in a group if no one understands what is going on (I cor. 14:23). On the day of Pentecost, when believers first began to manifest the gift of tongues, or praying in other languages under the anointing of the Holy Spirit, there" followed a message which all could understand (Peter's sermon in acts 2). Tongues plus interpretation equals prophecy, or a message from God. Anyone who prays in the Spirit at group gatherings is encouraged by Scripture to pray for an interpretation or else to pray quietly within oneself and to God. At times, a prayer in tongues by one person becomes the key which opens the heart of another to speak forth a word of prophecy or to give a message from the Scriptures, or to give a testimony, or to bring forth some other form of revelation of God's truth. Because the Lord desires to communicate with his people and uses many different methods of doing so, an interpretation of a message in tongues can become an aid to this end, both to individuals and to groups. Like all other forms of prophecy and revelation, any interpretation should be judged or "tested" in order to confirm that the message is from the Lord and not the flesh. Submitting such supernatural revelations to the clergy or to approved spiritual directors is a necessary safeguard to prevent human error and Satan's counterfeits from stumbling believers. Zeal must always be balanced with wisdom.

From Gift to Ministry: No gift of the Holy Spirit is some kind of merit badge or indication of special spirituality. The Lord does not give gifts to people who do not want or cannot use them. Gifts differ "according to the grace given" (cf. Rom. 12:6-8). The Holy Spirit will always give the necessary gifts to those whom he has appointed to a particular task. Just as people who have no carpentry work to do have no need of hammers and saws, so people who have callings not requiring the use of the "tools" or gifts of the Spirit may not manifest such gifts. Not everyone has the same gifts; not everyone has all gifts: "But all these [gifts] work by the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will" (I Cor. 12:11). It must be remembered that all spiritual gifts are to be used in love. The entire thirteenth chapter of Corinthians is devoted to teaching that "though we speak with tongues of angels, have the gift of prophecy, understand all knowledge, and have enough faith to remove mountains, if we have not LOVE, we are nothing." Spiritual gifts are love gifts from the Father to his needy children manifested through one to another. Attention should never be placed upon the gifts, but upon the Giver of the gifts. No human being "possesses" a gift anyway. Onl, the Lord can bestow gifts, but how marvelous that he allows open, willing Christians to be the "delivery boys" to bring his supernatural gifts to one another!