

The Word of God in the Believers' Prophesying

The previous installment of "Glossa" presented God as the Word, the means by which God communicates with humanity, from three perspectives as indicated by different Greek words for *word*: its conceptualization and formulation (*logos*), its articulation (*rhema*), and its being written down in scrolls or books (*graphē*, *gramma*, and *biblos*). God is hypostatically and intrinsically related to these three kinds of words. God was incarnated as the Logos, the living Word (John 1:1); the Spirit as the rhema is the applied word (Eph. 6:17); and the written word, all Scripture, is God-breathed (2 Tim. 3:16). God's goal is to constitute His people with His life through His word so that they may become the testimony of Jesus, the testifying church, the Body of Christ as the organism of the Triune God, which is also the bride of Christ and His bridal army to deal with His enemy.¹ One of the most important functions of the members of the Body is prophesying—that is, speaking for and speaking forth God, which results in the building up of the Body of Christ (1 Cor. 14:3-5). These three kinds of words are imparted into the believers and then respoken as the word of God through their prophesying for the building up of the Body of Christ.

The Word in the Old Testament for Prophesying

The use of God's word for speaking for God, or prophesying, can be seen in the Old Testament. Rarely do God's people hear His words directly (Deut. 4:10, 12). God's words are usually conveyed through the speaking of a prophet, one who speaks for Him (5:5).² For example, the word of Jehovah becomes Moses' speaking (Exo. 19:7; Deut. 1:1). God promises to be with the speakers' mouth and to put words in their mouth, supplying the words for them to speak (Exo. 4:15, 28; Num. 22:38; 23:5; Deut. 18:18; Isa. 51:16; 59:21; Jer. 1:9). The words that are supplied become the speaking of the Spirit. For example, the Spirit of Jehovah speaks through David, and His word is on his tongue (2 Sam. 23:2). He even charges that the speaking of one of His people be the speaking of another; Jehovah speaks to Moses, who in turn speaks to Aaron and his sons, who in turn speak to the children of Israel (Exo. 4:30; Num. 6:23). Jehovah promises to be with both Moses' and Aaron's mouth (Exo. 4:15). This speaking can be transmitted also to the second and third generations. This is implied by Isaiah

59:21, which connects the clothing of the Spirit with the putting of Jehovah's words in the mouth of His people:

As for Me, this is My covenant with them, says Jehovah: My Spirit which is upon you and My words which I have put in your mouth shall not depart from your mouth, nor from the mouth of your seed, nor from the mouth of your seed's seed, says Jehovah, from now and forever.

The Spirit's coming upon the Old Testament prophets is also part of their being equipped to prophesy and even their being turned into another man (1 Sam. 10:6).

God desired that the words He commanded would be upon His people's heart as well as written down (Deut. 6:6-9), and that the words spoken by Moses would be written on their heart and on their soul and bound on their hand as a sign, as frontlets between their eyes (11:18-20). Further, the king of Israel also was required to write out for himself a copy of the law so that he may read it all the days of his life (17:18-19). Samuel not only spoke to the Israelites but also wrote down the practice of the kingdom (1 Sam. 10:25). The word of God was near them, in their mouth and in their heart (Deut. 30:14; Rom. 10:8). In a number of places in the Old Testament, the receiving of the word is likened to eating. Jeremiah found Jehovah's words and ate them, and His word became the gladness and joy of his heart (Jer. 15:16). Job treasured the words of His mouth more than his apportioned food (Job 23:12). A psalmist testifies that God's words were sweet to his taste, sweeter than honey to his mouth (Psa. 119:103, cf. Heb. 6:5). The Hebrew word *dabar* is translated both "logos" and "rhema" in the Septuagint. The studies of Repo and Burchard indicate that *rhema* declines in relative frequency to *logos*, and in later Greek, *rhema* no longer means "word" but "verb." *Logos* becomes the main term for *word* in the books that were translated later.³ This trend continues in the New Testament, where the occurrences of *rhema* are rarer, yet when *rhema* does occur, it is significant, especially in relation to the constitution of the word into the believers.

The Word in the New Testament Prophesying

We need to see these three different kinds of words in the New Testament, how they relate to one another, and

how this impacts our experience of Christ to make us the testimony of Jesus and to equip us to prophesy.

Kaspar Schwenckfeld, as quoted by Rufus M. Jones, recognizes two kinds of words, the inward word and the outward word, saying,

The Word, when spiritual messengers preach or teach, is of two kinds with a decided difference in their manner of working. One is of God, even is God, and lives and works in the heart of the messenger. This is the inner Word, and is in reality nothing else than the continued manifestation of Christ. He is inwardly revealed, and heard with the inward ears of the heart...This inner Scripture has an active creative power of holiness, and makes holy, living, righteous and saved all those in whose hearts it is written.

The other word which serves the inner Word with voice, sound, and expression is the external word, and is heard by the external man with his ears of sense, and is written and read in letters. He who has read and heard only that, and not the inner Word, has not heard the Gospel of Christ, the Gospel of Grace, nor has he received or understood it. (n.p.)⁴

Vine also recognizes this distinction in his comments on Ephesians 6:17, seeing that the storing of the written word within the believers is a prerequisite for their experience of the rhema word:

Here the reference is not to the whole Bible as such, but to the individual scripture which the Spirit brings to our remembrance for use in a time of need, a prerequisite being the regular storing of the mind with Scripture. (230)

Watchman Nee and Witness Lee in his early ministry also recognize this twofold distinction and spoke concerning it in numerous places. However, at the end of Witness Lee's ministry, his more sophisticated understanding was that there are three different kinds of word. This notion is reinforced by the different Greek words for *word*, which are crucial to distinguish (*Romans* 83-84).

Over two thousand years ago, there was only the written word, not the living word, because Christ was not here yet. Today we have the living word. Without Christ as the living word, it was very hard for God's word to become the applied word as the Spirit. This is because before Christ came, the Spirit was mostly objective; He was not

yet within God's people. Before Christ, the Spirit of God was upon God's people. But today we have the Triune God embodied in Christ and realized as the all-inclusive, compound, life-giving Spirit indwelling us all the time. Thus, when we touch the Bible, right away the Bible can become living and applied. (*Romans* 87)

The source of our speaking usually begins with God's word written in scrolls or books (*biblos*) compiled into sections, such as the book of Moses, the book of Psalms, the book of Isaiah, and the book of the prophets (Mark 12:26; Luke 3:4; 20:42; Acts 7:42). The written word or Scripture (*graphē*) is for us to read (Matt. 21:42), know (22:29), and believe (John 2:22). The Scriptures contain many promises, which have been or will be fulfilled (Rom. 1:2; Matt. 26:56). "All Scripture is God-breathed and profitable for teaching, for conviction, for correction, for instruction

in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, fully equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Yet the Scriptures need to be explained and opened through the proper interpretation (Luke 24:27, 32; Acts 8:30-31). The Scriptures can be searched or examined, but we should not neglect coming to Christ

as the living Word, concerning whom they testify (John 5:39-40; Acts 17:2-3). Knowing the sacred writings (*gramma*) makes us wise unto salvation through the faith which is in Christ Jesus (2 Tim. 3:15). God mostly speaks to us what He has already spoken in the written word (Heb. 1:1-2).

However, if we treat the Scriptures in a legalistic way according to the letter (*gramma*), we may be spiritually deadened and may deaden others, as Paul warns us, for "the letter kills" (2 Cor. 3:6). Here *the letter* refers to teachings, doctrines, forms, regulations, and methods, all of which, apart from the Spirit of life, may deaden us. "Know[ing] the principles of the Christian life and understand[ing] the truth" may become a "basis for criticizing others" and may bring death to us and to others (Lee, *Exercise* 134-135). As New Testament believers, we need to conduct ourselves not according to the principle of law but according to the mingled spirit, the Spirit mingled with our spirit (Rom. 8:16). We need to serve in newness of spirit, not in oldness of letter (7:6).

If we learn to open our spirit and pray after reading the Bible or hearing a message, digesting the Word of the Lord in a spirit of prayer, His words will become spirit and life to us. They will swallow up our death, supply our needs, and cause us to live in a fresh and living way before the Lord. (Lee, *Exercise* 135)

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In order to avoid having the Bible merely in its physical sense as the letter, we need to come to Christ, realizing that He is the living Word (*logos*), the embodiment of the divine thought (John 1:1; 5:39-40).

As was pointed out in the last issue, *logos* is more commonly associated with the written word than *rhema*. Due to its association with Christ, the *logos* can be considered the constant written word. We may say that the *logos* is contained and conveyed in the written word.

God is the source of the word. This is indicated by personal genitive modification, such as the word of God (mentioned in the New Testament forty-five times), the word of the Lord (fourteen times), the word of Christ (two times), the word of Jesus (one time), or a personal possessive pronoun referring to God (about one hundred thirty-five times). These expressions may also point to God, the Lord, Christ, or Jesus as the agent, that is, the word that is spoken by God. They may, in addition, imply that God is the content of the word.⁵

When *logos* occurs with other genitive modifiers, it usually indicates the concept or content that the word conveys. The *logos* is the word of the kingdom (Matt. 13:19), the word of the truth (Eph. 1:13; 2 Tim. 2:15; cf. John 17:17), the word of the gospel (Acts 15:7), the word of the truth of the gospel (Col. 1:5), the word of this salvation (Acts 13:26), the word of His grace (20:32; Luke 4:22), the word of the cross (1 Cor. 1:18), the word of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:19), the word of life (Phil. 2:16; 1 John 1:1), the word of righteousness (Heb. 5:13), and the word of the beginning of Christ (6:1). There are also words of wisdom (1 Cor. 2:4), and words of the faith and of the good teaching (1 Tim. 4:6). The *logos* is also the word of the Lord's endurance (Rev. 3:10) and the word of the testimony of the overcoming believers (12:11).⁶ Christ is the reality of these genitive modifications, which indicate that we need God in Christ as the source and content of our concept in our prophesying.

Rhema is the instant spoken word, or a particular utterance that those who hear immediately respond to. For example, in Luke 1:38 Mary said, "Behold, the slave of the Lord. May it happen to me according to your word [*rhema*]." So also, in 5:5 Simon answered and said, "Master, through the whole night we toiled and caught nothing; but based on Your word [*rhema*] I will let down the nets." The *rhema* may also be applied later, as someone remembers a word spoken at some prior time, which is applied to a situation at hand, e.g., Peter's denial of the Lord (Matt. 26:75), the Lord's being delivered up to be crucified (Luke 24:7), and the baptism in the Holy Spirit (Acts 11:16). Similarly, in order to prepare the readers of their Epistles for the days at the end of the age, Peter and Jude tell these readers to remember the *rhema* words

spoken before by the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior preached by the apostles, especially regarding the last days when mockers will come, going on according to their own lusts and questioning the Lord's coming (2 Pet. 3:2-4; Jude 17-18).

R*hema* is linked particularly with the Spirit in terms of its essence—the *rhema* words the Lord speaks are spirit and life as the real food (John 6:63, 68); *rhema* is also identified with the pneumatic Christ—Christ as the Spirit (Rom. 10:6-8; cf. Eph. 6:17). It is Christ as the life-giving Spirit who applies the word to us.

Watchman Nee points out the necessity of the *rhema* word:

All doctrine, teaching, theology, and knowledge are of little use if they just flow from one person to another. True growth depends upon our receiving the word directly from God. God is using His *rhema* to do His work, and He desires to speak to us. Therefore, if our purpose in reading the Scriptures is solely for knowledge, it is indeed pitiful. If this is so, we are finished. The real value of the Scriptures is that God can speak to man through them. If we desire to be useful in the Lord's hands, we must be spoken to by the Lord. Whether or not our building is spiritual depends upon whether the Lord has spoken to us. Knowledge and doctrine are of no spiritual use. Only the Lord's speaking in us is of spiritual value.

Only *rhema* is of any value...Only God's speaking to us, personally and directly, is of any real value. When God speaks to us through His word, we are enlightened; through His word we are sanctified; and through His word we are made to grow. We need to know what is dead and what is living, what is mere knowledge and what is spiritual. Whatever is not living has no spiritual value. If we have *rhema*, the living word of God, we can be cleansed and sanctified. (57-58)

The Word Making Us the Testimony of Jesus

In order for us to be the testimony of Jesus, we need to experience the word in four ways: first, as the word of life, the living and abiding word to regenerate us and supply us; second, as the word abiding in us for spreading and bearing fruit; third, as the word that cleanses and sanctifies us; and fourth, as the word that functions as a sword to slay the enemy. These aspects of the word are crucial to produce the testimony of Jesus in three aspects—the organism of the Triune God, the bride, and the warrior. The fact that these expressions occur both with *logos* and *rhema* causes some to postulate that the two words *logos* and *rhema* have little or no distinction in meaning. We need to see that the distinctions between the *logos* (concept) and the *rhema* (application) are for the carrying out

of various functions in the believer and that these distinctions are necessary to make them a particular aspect of the testimony of Jesus and to equip them for prophesying. The written word needs to become the rhema word in our experience, through our contacting Christ as the Logos Word (John 1:1; 5:39-40), so that He can be applied to us as the life-giving Spirit by the instant utterance of the indwelling Spirit in our spirit (6:63).

The written word testifies concerning Christ and His coming as the word of life through incarnation to bring God's concept by which we may receive God in order to be begotten of Him (1 John 1:1-2; John 10:10; 1:12-13; 3:6). Through Christ as the living and abiding logos word of God, we are regenerated (1 Pet. 1:23), and by the logos word of the truth we are brought forth (James 1:18). The Lord imparts the divine life into us through the logos word, as is illustrated by the parable of the sower. The logos word of the kingdom is sown as a seed into the human heart, which is symbolized by four kinds of soil conditions: wayside, rocky, thorny, and good earth (Matt. 13). The desired soil condition is the good earth, which consists of those who hear, understand, and receive the logos word or concept so that it may grow, bear fruit, and produce, even a hundredfold (v. 23). Although the condition of our heart may be impure, the logos word is living and operative and able to pierce even to the dividing of the soul from the spirit to discern the thoughts and intentions of our heart (Heb. 4:12). The logos word needs to be mixed with faith when we hear it in order to profit us (v. 2). Those who hear the logos word and do it, that is, carry it out by faith, are likened by the Lord to a prudent man who built his house upon the rock (Matt. 7:24) and to His real relatives, His mother and brothers (Luke 8:21).

The word is not only imparted into us through regeneration; it also needs to abide in us. Actually, this abiding is mutual. We need to abide in the Lord's logos word (concept) to be His disciples (John 8:31), and we need to have the logos word (concept) of God abide in us, which makes us strong and overcomers of the evil one (1 John 2:14; cf. John 5:38; 8:37). When the believers read the Scriptures, they need to come to Christ and let the logos word (or concept) of Christ dwell in them richly (Col. 3:16) so that they can have a store of the word to hold forth or present as the word of life to others (Phil. 2:16), especially when they prophesy. As the believers speak, the logos word or concept is propagated; it grows and multiplies (Acts 6:7; 12:24; 19:20).

We do not experience regeneration by merely receiving the concept (logos) concerning being born again; instead, we experience regeneration by the hearing of faith, that is, through hearing the rhema word of Christ spoken to us by others, which causes us to believe in our heart that God has raised Jesus from the dead and to confess with our mouth Jesus as Lord, calling upon His name to receive Him as our salvation (Rom. 10:8-17). The spoken rhema words are words of life containing the elements of spirit and life that impart God's life into us (Acts 5:20; John 6:63, 68). We live not by bread alone but by every rhema word (instant spoken word) that proceeds out through the mouth of God (Matt. 4:4).⁷ Whereas the logos word emphasizes the concept and content of life, the rhema word emphasizes the application and realization of life, just as the Spirit is the reality of Christ, making Christ and the divine and mystical things real to us.

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If we abide in the Lord and His rhema words abide in us, we can ask whatever we will, and it shall be done for us (John 15:7). The rhema words refer to what we sense in our spirit when we pray. Concerning this, Witness Lee states,

When we abide in the Lord and let His words abide in us, we actually are one with Him, and He works within us. Then, when we ask in prayer for whatever we will, it is not only we who are praying; He too is praying, in our praying. This kind of prayer is related to fruit-bearing (v. 8) and will surely be answered. (Recovery Version, v. 7, note 2)

The context of this abiding is Christ as the true vine, and the asking is related to fruit-bearing (vv. 1, 5, 8, 16). Whereas receiving the concept of the logos word cleanses us (vv. 2-3), cutting us off from our former source, the rhema word applies and supplies the life of the vine into us to make us fruitful branches.

The three kinds of words work together to help us function properly in the vine, a symbol of the mysterious organism of the Triune God. As Witness Lee notes,

We must read the sixty-six books of the Bible...word by word because all of the words express, explain, and define our mysterious Lord. If we want to know Him, we must know the Word and how to deal with the Word. But, on the other hand, the Spirit is within us, giving us some living words at the right time to meet our needs. At the very hour of our need, the Spirit within us gives us a timely word for our particular case. The inner

rhema always corresponds with the outer logos. The Spirit speaking the rhema within never speaks differently from the written logos. The outer logos and the inner rhema always correspond with each other, and many times the inner rhema interprets the outer logos. Perhaps you read the written logos in the morning but fail to understand it or to apply it to yourself in a living way. While you are working, the Spirit anoints you from within with the word, giving you the right meaning and even the right emphasis. You sense the living rhema with its living emphasis by the Spirit. As a result, you not only understand it in your mind but also apprehend it in your spirit. Now the outward, written word becomes the living word within your spirit. You can experience it and apply it in your life. In this way the logos becomes the rhema; the outer word becomes the inner word. We need to attend to the living rhema within, allowing it to have its full way within us. In order to allow the living word to have its free way within us, we must go along with it. In other words, we must be very submissive and obedient to the living rhema that is speaking now within us. Concentrating on the inner rhema will make the living Lord so real to us in our spirit. It will make Christ so available and practical. We shall sense the moving and the working of the Lord who energizes us inwardly. (*John* 412-413)

The three kinds of words operate to regenerate us and make us a living, growing, spreading organism, which is symbolized by the vine, the tree of life, and the golden lampstands, which also bear tree-like features, such as calyxes and blossom buds (*Exo.* 25:31-34; *John* 15:1; *Rev.* 2:7).

The written word also contains the concept that we are sinful, old, and impure and are thus in need of cleansing both from our sins by the Lord's blood and from our oldness and impurities by the Lord's flowing life contained in the word (cf. *Heb.* 10:22; *1 Cor.* 6:11). Both the logos and rhema word cleanse and sanctify us, although it is mostly the application of the rhema word that carries out this process to make us Christ's spotless bride. We are clean (Gk. *katharos*)—pruned to bear much fruit (*John* 15:2), because of the logos word or concept spoken to us (v. 3). The logos word referred to here is "Jesus' 'teaching'...in its entirety, including what he is and what he does (since he himself is the *logos* incarnate, 1:1, 14), has already taken hold in the life of these followers (cf....13:10)" (*Carson* 515-516).

The logos word, the truth, also sanctifies us (17:17).⁸ In *John* 17 the Lord told the Father that the disciples have kept the Father's logos word, His concept (v. 6). The rhema words or utterances that the Father gave to Him the Lord gave to the disciples (v. 8), and the Lord has also

given them His logos word or concept (v. 14), the New Testament revelation that has its source in the Father. "The Father's words are of two kinds: the constant word (v. 6) and the instant words (v. 8). Both are used by the Lord to impart eternal life to the believers who receive both kinds of words" (*Lee, Recovery Version, John* 17:6, note 1).

To be sanctified (*Eph.* 5:26; *1 Thes.* 5:23) is to be separated from the world and its usurpation unto God and His purpose, not only positionally (*Matt.* 23:17, 19) but also dispositionally (*Rom.* 6:19, 22). God's living word works in the believers to separate them from anything worldly. This is to be sanctified in God's word, which is the truth, the reality. (*Lee, Recovery Version, John* 17:17, note 1)

The church is sanctified and cleansed by means of the washing of the water in the rhema word (*Eph.* 5:26). The word translated "washing" is *loutron* "bath, laver," closely related to the word translated "laver" in the Old Testament—a laver that the priests washed in (*Exo.* 30:18-21). The rhema word is like a laver for us to wash away the impure things (spots) and the old things (wrinkles) that contaminate us. This makes the church Christ's spotless bride. The water refers to the flowing life of God, typified by flowing water (*Exo.* 17:6; *1 Cor.* 10:4; *John* 7:38-39; *Rev.* 21:6; 22:1, 17), which

washes away the blemishes of the natural life of our old man, such as the "spot or wrinkle or any such things" mentioned in v. 27. In separating and sanctifying the church, the Lord first washes away our sins with His blood (*Heb.* 13:12) and then washes away our natural blemishes with His life. We are now in such a washing process, that the church may be holy and without blemish (v. 27). (*Lee, Recovery Version, Eph.* 5:26, note 3)

The indwelling Christ as the life-giving Spirit is always speaking an instant, present, living word to metabolically cleanse away the old and replace it with the new, causing an inward transformation. The cleansing by the washing of the water of life is in the word of Christ. This indicates that in the word of Christ there is the water of life. This is typified by the laver situated between the altar and the tabernacle (*Exo.* 38:8; 40:7). (*Eph.* 5:26, note 4).

The three kinds of words are also crucial in dealing with the enemy. On the one hand, the written word tells us that Satan has been defeated on the cross (*Heb.* 2:14-15; *Col.* 2:15). On the other hand, God is waiting for the church to execute His judgment on His enemy. We need to overcome Satan by the blood of the Lamb, the logos word of our testimony, and loving not our soul-life even unto death (*Rev.* 12:11). Our only offensive weapon to deal with the enemy is the sword of the Spirit, which Spirit is the rhema word of God, and we receive

the word by means of all prayer and petition (Eph. 6:17-18). The rhema word as a sword deals with the enemy without and the adversary within, especially through our prayerfully reading the Word, or pray-reading.

The Word is the Bible. But if this Word is only printed letters, it is neither the Spirit nor the sword...This *rhema*, which becomes the Spirit, is the sword that cuts the enemy to pieces. For example, we may read a particular verse again and again, only to have it remain the *logos*, a word in letters. Such a word cannot kill anything. But one day this verse becomes the *rhema* to us, the present, instant, living speaking. At that time this *rhema* becomes the Spirit...The instant, present word is the Spirit. This kind of word is the sword. Therefore, the sword, the Spirit, and the word are three that are one. Furthermore, we, not the Spirit, are the ones to use this sword to kill the enemy...When we pray-read the Word, every word becomes the *rhema*, the sword that cuts the enemy. (*Ephesians* 5:48-54:9)

The word that we receive in a living way as the Spirit is a spiritual antibiotic that kills the “germs” within us so that the evil forces in the air have no way to take advantage of us.

Christ as the living word infuses us with God’s substance, and Christ as the slaying word kills the adversary within us to make us His overcoming testimony (Living Stream Ministry, *Revelation* 7-8)

Eventually, at the end of the age Christ as the Logos Word of God comes to judge His enemies, and out of His mouth proceeds a sharp sword (Rev. 19:13, 15). He slays His enemies by the breath of His mouth (2 Thes. 2:8).

These three kinds of words—written, *logos*, and *rhema*—regenerate and abide in us to make us branches in the vine as the organism of the Triune God, cleanse and sanctify us to be His spotless bride, and equip us as His bridal army to slay the enemy.

The Word Equipping Us to Prophecy for the Building Up of the Church as the Testimony of Jesus

The three kinds of words are also necessary to equip the believers to prophesy, or speak for God and speak forth God. The Greek word translated “to prophesy” is προφητεύω, which may be rendered “speak for,” “speak forth” (from πρόφημι, “to say beforehand, to speak on behalf of”). Although the common notion of prophesying is

foretelling, which is one aspect of prophesying, in a broader, more encompassing, sense it is more accurate to consider prophesying as speaking for God or speaking God forth. God speaks through the (re)speaking of His word in the saints’ prophesying. Concerning this, Fretheim states,

The God who gives the word does not, as it were, leave the word to do its own work, however forceful that may be. Word of God and presence of God must always remain together...

The word of God so given is an embodied word. God assumes a human form in order to speak a word in personal encounter...God *appears* in order to speak. (965-966)

All the believers can prophesy (1 Cor. 14:31; Num. 11:29). Prophesying issues in the building up of the church, which is the increase and growth of God (1 Cor. 14:5).

Concerning the components of a prophecy, Witness Lee says,

The knowledge and the experience of God, Christ, and the spiritual things, the utterance to speak forth what we know and have experienced, and a clear view concerning our situation and environment are the basic preparation for our speaking. In addition, we need the instant inspiration of the indwelling Spirit that stirs up our spirit to speak. We are different from the Old Testament prophets. In the Old Testament, the saints did not have the abiding Spirit indwelling them. They had to wait until the Spirit came upon them before they could speak for the Lord (2 Chron. 15:1; Ezek. 11:5). However, the New Testament says, “The Lord be with your spirit” (2 Tim. 4:22). We do not need the Spirit to come upon us, because we always have Him in our human spirit. Therefore, we should not wait for the Spirit to come upon us; rather, we should exercise our spirit. When we exercise our spirit, the Holy Spirit who is indwelling our spirit will be moved by us, and we will have the inspiration. It is not He who moves us, but it is we who move the indwelling Spirit. If we remain clear with the Lord by confessing our failures, we will have a direct, open fellowship with Him. He is in our spirit, and we are in Him. When we come to the meeting, we need only to exercise our spirit and say, “Lord Jesus, I want to speak.” Then He will rise up, and we can speak according to our experience with the utterance we have gained and with the enlightenment that we have. If we do this, everyone will have

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something to speak in the Lord's Day morning meeting.
(*Practice* 15)

From the point of view of the three kinds of words, we need to come to the written word of Scripture and contact Christ as God's Logos to obtain the proper knowledge and the experience of God, Christ, and the spiritual things. Yet we also need the utterance (rhema) to speak forth what we know and have experienced, according to a clear view concerning our situation and environment, as the applied words (rhema) from the instant inspiration of the indwelling Spirit.

Prophesying brings in a number of positive actions. It speaks building up, encouragement, and consolation (1 Cor. 14:3), and it builds up the church (vv. 4-5, 12, 26). Prophesying convicts and examines the unbelievers and unlearned, manifests the secrets of their hearts, and testifies that God is truly among the members of the church (vv. 24-25). Prophesying is done by twos and threes, and others discern (v. 29). It can reveal something to one sitting by, stirring them to prophesy in response—all have the capacity to prophesy by virtue of the indwelling Spirit and the equipping of the three kinds of words so that all may learn and all may be encouraged (vv. 30-31). Prophesying causes the building up of the church by speaking God into people. As the word is spoken in prophesying, God is ministered into the hearers. The growth or increase of God in the believers is the building up of the church (Eph. 4:16; Col. 2:19).

Conclusion

The proper realization and handling of the three kinds of words—written, logos, and rhema—is especially crucial in the prophesying of the members of the Body of Christ. The believers receive the word of God to speak for Him and to speak Him forth into others. In their speaking, God speaks mostly what He has already spoken, which has been recorded in the written word. The written word testifies concerning Christ the living Logos Word. Through the believers' coming to Christ as the living Word, the proper logos concept is imparted into them and thus constituted into them. Then Christ as the Spirit is realized and substantiated as the rhema or instant spoken word applied in a particular situation. Christ as the life-giving Spirit operates to bring to the one prophesying the proper utterance (rhema) as well as the instant inspiration to stir up his spirit to speak for God and to speak forth God, who is embodied in the word as the logos concept (Christ) and the rhema utterance (the Spirit) ministered to the hearers. Prophesying issues in the building up of the church, and the word (logos or rhema) spoken in prophesying may regenerate an unbeliever, minister a life supply to believers to cause them to grow, cleanse away some improper elements or concepts, and

terminate some negative or hostile elements or concepts. Consequently, the church may be the testimony of Jesus, the Body of Christ as the organism of the Triune God, the bride of Christ, and the bridal army to defeat God's enemy.

by Roger Good

Notes

¹This is indicated by John, who testified "the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ" (Rev. 1:2, 9; 19:10; 20:4). *The testimony of Jesus* refers to a number of items in the book of Revelation, including the golden lampstands (ch. 1), the bride of Christ and the bridal army (ch. 19), and the New Jerusalem as its ultimate consummation (chs. 21—22). "The testimony of Jesus is the spirit—the substance, the disposition, and the characteristic—of the prophecy (19:10)" (Lee, Recovery Version, 1:2, note 1).

²The Hebrew words for *prophet* and *prophesy* come from the root *nb'*. Its meaning is disputed. Some consider that it is related to the root *nb'* "to boil, or bubble," with which it shares two consonants and means "to boil or bubble over as in ecstasy, to pour forth words." Others connect it to an Arabic root, meaning "to announce as a spokesperson," or to an Akkadian root meaning "to call or name, i.e., someone called by God." The verb *nb'* "to prophesy" is considered a denominative verb, coming from the noun *nabi'* "prophet," meaning "behave as a prophet." It occurs in two verb stems, as a hitpael with a reflexive or reciprocal sense, and as a niphal with a reflexive sense (cf. Joüon 443). The reflexive sense of this verb in these stems could perhaps be to pour forth or utter what is bubbling within, in the sense conveyed in Job 32:18-20:

I am full of words; / The spirit in my inward parts constrains me. / Indeed, my inward parts are like wine that is not vented; / Like new wineskins, they are about to burst. / Let me speak, that there may be relief for me; / Let me open my lips and answer.

Jeremiah uses a different image of fire with a similar effect: "If I say, I will not mention Him / Or speak anymore in His name, / Then it is in my heart like a burning fire, / Shut up in my bones, / And I am weary of holding it in, / Nor can I" (20:9; cf. Psa. 39:3; Jer. 5:14). The reciprocal sense emphasizes that the action of prophesying is related to others. The action of prophesying can stimulate or stir up something within others to speak (cf. 1 Cor. 14:29-31). The niphal form is more frequent in later writings and perhaps superceded the hitpael form.

³Burchard summarizes E. Repo's study, *Der Begriff "Rhêma" im Biblisch-Griechischen*, presenting the following statistics:

As to the Septuagint, the ratio is 3 to 1 in the Pentateuch which was translated first, with a lavish 16 to 1 in Genesis. In the rest of the OT ῥῆμα rates much lower except in Job which is again 3 to 1...Philo, Josephus, and most other Greek Jewish writers have little use for ῥῆμα.

The NT averages 1 to 4.7...but...the different authors have different likings for ῥῆμα...Between them Luke's gospel and Acts marshal 33 of the 67 (68?) occurrences of ῥῆμα in the NT. In John's gospel (no ῥῆμα in the letters) and Hebrews the proportion is 1 to 3. ῥῆμα is rare in the Pauline Corpus. (281-282)

⁴Jones quotes a translation of Kaspar Schwenckfeld's *Schriften von Kaspar Schwenckfeld* (in 4 volumes, published between 1564-1570), Vol. 1. 767.

⁵The word in this kind of structure is mostly the logos word. The rhema word is referred to as the word of God only four times, the word of the Lord four times, the word of Christ one time, and with a personal possessive pronoun twenty-five times.

There are also a number of uses of the words *logos* and *rhema* in the New Testament that do not refer to God's word but rather to human concepts and utterances; however, the underlying thought of logos as concept and rhema as utterance is still preserved, and they are even related to each other—for example, "I say to you that every idle word [rhema] which men shall speak, they will render an account [logos] concerning it in the day of judgment. For by your words [logos] you shall be justified, and by your words [logos] you shall be condemned" (Matt. 12:36-37). The idle (lit. "not-working," or "non-productive") rhema word is a word uttered by someone "when the conventional restraints are removed, which really [shows] what he is like...and the real feelings of his heart come bubbling to the surface" (Barclay 46-47). The rhema utterances express the logos concept in our heart, and it is this concept that will justify us or condemn us.

⁶Cf. the very few structures with the genitive modification of *rhema*, perhaps confirming that the logos word emphasizes the content. The genitive modifiers following the rhema word are the word of the faith (Rom. 10:8) and the word of His power (Heb. 1:3), which emphasize the application (of the faith and power) more than the content. In the plural there are rhema words of truth and soberness (Acts 26:25), words that convey and apply truth or reality and soberness to the hearers—in this case Paul speaking to Festus and those with him.

⁷This verse in Matthew is a quote from Deuteronomy 8:3: "He...fed you the manna...so that He might make you know that man lives not by bread alone, but that man lives by everything that proceeds out from the mouth of Jehovah." The Septuagint, quoted in Matthew, translates *everything* as "every rhema." We may need to exercise caution in reading too much into the significance of *rhema* in the New Testament when it occurs in a verse quoted from the Old Testament. However, in this case at least, John definitely associates the coming of manna as food in the Old Testament with the rhema word in chapter 6 of his Gospel.

⁸In John 13:10 Jesus said, "He who is bathed has no need except to wash his feet, but is wholly clean; and you are clean..." The believers were bathed by receiving His word concerning His redemptive death on the cross. "Bathing here

signifies the washing of regeneration (Titus 3:5; John 3:5)" (Lee, Recovery Version, John 13:10, note 1).

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