

The Authority of the Spoken Word of God

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Part I

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Introduction

Recently I was privileged to hear a series of anointed messages by Rev. Ellsworth Q. Williams of Georgetown, Guyana. He spoke on the authority of the spoken word of God. I was so impressed with what he said that I asked his permission to use the messages for this teaching. I have taken considerable editorial liberties, but the substance of this powerful truth is the fruit of Brother Williams' labor.

The Power of the Spoken Word

We see the principle of the authority of the spoken word begin to unfold in the very first chapter of Genesis. **And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light.** (Gen 1:3 NIV, emphasis added.) The phrase, "and God said" is found six times in the first chapter of Genesis. God literally spoke the world into existence.¹

We know that Abraham understood that God could speak things into existence. Paul writes that Abraham was commended for his faith in that he believed in the God "... who gives life to the dead and **calls things that are not as though they were.**" (Rom 4:17 NIV, emphasis added.)

God has continued to exercise His authority over this world. Two thousand years ago, He sent His only son, Jesus Christ, part of the triune Godhead, to redeem the world from the curse of Adam's sin. And who is Jesus? Jesus is the embodiment of the Word of God. John described Jesus this way:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning . . . The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. (Jn 1:1,2,14 NIV)

God Has Delegated This Authority

We also see in Genesis, chapter one, that after God, by the authority of His word, spoke the world into being, He then delegated that authority to Adam. In Genesis 1:26 God said, "... let them [man] rule . . . over all the earth" By this transference of power, God gave Adam the right to literally rule over all the earth. When God formed the beasts of the field and birds of the air, He brought them to Adam to see what he (Adam) would name them. When Adam named one of the four-legged creatures with a long tail "monkey," God let the name stand. Why? Because He had relinquished authority over the earth to man. (Gen 2:19-20).

But Adam lost that authority to Satan through sin. Satan was able to hold on to that authority because of man's sinful state. He had full power over earth until Jesus came and took it back. Paul gives us a glimpse of the "redemption ceremony" in Colossians:

He (God) forgave us all our sins . . . he took it away, nailing it to the cross. And (Jesus) having disarmed the powers and authorities (satanic kingdom) he made a public spectacle of

them, triumphing over them by the cross. (Col. 2:13-15 NIV)

So Jesus has regained that authority for those of us who are born-again. Thus, God, through the sacrifice of His son, Jesus, has restored that line of authority between Adam and every believer. Authority to do what? To use the spoken word to rule over the world just as Adam did before his fall.

But what is the purpose of that authority? To rule over all the earth just for our selfish, personal benefit? No, of course not. God delegated His authority on earth to us so that we can use that authority to spread the Gospel and to accomplish His purposes in every generation. And what is one of our most powerful tools in that realm of authority? It is the same tool God used to create the world, **the spoken word!** We are to rule by our words. Look at Jesus' words to His disciples:

"I tell you the truth, if anyone says to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart but believes that **what he says will happen,** it will be done for him." (Mk 11:23 NIV, emphasis added.)

"If you believe **you will receive whatever you ask for** in prayer." (Matt 21:22 NIV, emphasis added.)

"Ask and it will be given to you . . ." (Matt 7:7 NIV)

Peter added a new dimension to this when he said,

If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God . . . (I Pet 4:11 NIV)

We need to recognize our authority in the spirit realm! We need to meditate on it. Then we need to act on it. Scripture is full of statements that tell us of the power of our words.

Solomon, the wisest of all men, tells us, "Where the word of a king is, there is power . . ." (Ecc 8:4 KJV)

"The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit." (Pro 18:21 NIV)

With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all. (Acts 4:33 NIV)

Yes, words do indeed have great power.

The Problem With the Church

There is a great paralysis over much of today's church. Instead of running with the Gospel, much of the church has lost its zeal. Sadly, in many places in the world, the church poses very little threat to the kingdom of darkness. What has caused this paralysis? The church today has the same choices Adam had. God placed two trees in the Garden of Eden, the Tree of Life and the Tree of Death [Knowledge of Good and Evil]. Adam was free to

eat all he wanted from the Tree of Life. But he was solemnly warned not to eat of the Tree of Death. The Tree of Death symbolizes, among other things, the devil's supply to the world. It's fruit is sweet to the carnal taste and easily accessible. But to the believer it brings death. The Tree of Life symbolizes God's provision to the church through Jesus Christ. From this source there is a vast supply. In fact, there is more available to the church than we can ask or imagine! Paul understood that when he said,

And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus. (Phi 4:19 NIV)

As I see it, there are four categories of churches today. There are some Bible believing, Christ centered churches that, to their credit, have not gone to the Tree of Death. These churches are moving in the power of God and spreading the gospel in a mighty way. This is the first category.

But, unfortunately, I think these churches are in the minority. The second category of churches are also Christ centered. They have not gone to the Tree of Death for their power. But neither have they fully accessed the Tree of Life. They are simply going without provision of any sort. (By provision, I don't mean just money. I mean the power that God has for them.) These churches are pure, but malnourished. They are therefore unable to accomplish the mission given them by the Lord.

The third category of churches also has not turned to the devil. This group has simply turned to the world to supply its needs. But it is still taking from the Tree of Death, isn't it? And, like churches, many individual Christians have also turned to the world to supply their needs.

Then there is the fourth category of churches that have gone to the Tree of Death for provision. These are the ones that resort to gimmicks, deceit, and in some cases, outright lies to finance their work. How it must grieve the heart of our Lord to see those for whom He died resorting to such tactics.

It's time for every church and every believer to stop these fruitless efforts! Its time to turn away from the Tree of Death and return to an absolute dependency on the Tree of Life.

But then the question arises, "How does one avail oneself of the Tree of Life?" By the spoken word, that's how! We, as the church of Jesus Christ, must prayerfully think through what God has called us to do. We must seek His mind, in prayer, as to our role in accomplishing His plans and purposes in this generation. Then we must determine the needs of our lives and churches to accomplish these purposes. And then we need to learn to exercise our spiritual authority concerning these legitimate needs for the work of the kingdom.

And we must speak those needs into the spirit realm with force and boldness. Jesus said, "From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing, **and forceful men lay hold of it.**" (Mat 11:12 NIV, emphasis added.) Jesus makes it very clear that it is those who are forceful who will advance the kingdom of heaven.

Now I am not suggesting that we can just pray forcefully and do nothing else. We are not to just wait for Jesus to "make it happen." We must do our part in this process. Lets look at the incident of Davis's defeat of Goliath in I Samuel, chapter 17.

When David, as a young man, saw the army of Israel being intimidated by Goliath, the first thing he did was to analyze the situation. He asked enough questions to get the sense of the circumstances. Then, in one of my favorite verses in the Old Testament, he declared, "*Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?*" (1 Sam 17:26b NIV) Is that speaking into the spirit world with authority, or what?

At that point David volunteered to fight Goliath. But notice that he neither wanted nor needed Saul's armor. Why? Because he was already very accomplished with the sling shot. He told Saul:

"Your servant has been keeping his father's sheep. When a lion or bear came and carried off a sheep from the flock, I went after it, struck it and rescued the sheep from its mouth. When it turned on me, I seized it by its hair, struck it and killed it . . . The LORD who delivered me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine." (I Sam 17:34,35,37 NIV)

David was already an expert with his weapon of choice, the sling shot and smooth stones. He had prepared himself in the setting in which the Lord had placed him, that of a shepherd.

Then David spoke with the authority of God Himself. Listen to what he said to Goliath:

"This day the Lord will hand you over to me, and I will strike you down and cut off your head. Today I will give the carcasses of the Philistine army to the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth, and the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel." (I Sam 17:46 NIV).

And it was so!

Life or Death Is in the Tongue

We have just seen how David spoke victory and God gave him victory. But this principle works equally well against us if we speak the wrong things. God has warned us through Scripture that our negative speaking can bring us trouble we would not otherwise have.

"The tongue has the power of life and death . . ." (Pro 18:21 NIV)

With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be. Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? My brothers, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water. (James 3:9-12 NIV)

God wants us to clearly understand that we can't have it both ways. If we continually use our mouth to tear down, to criticize, and to speak negatively, we are invoking the tongue's power to take us into a kind of living death.

But, while recognizing the destructive power of the tongue, it is important that we don't deny facts. Remember

Abraham and Sarah?

By faith Abraham, even though he was past age - and Sarah herself was barren - was enabled to become a father because he considered him faithful who had made the promise. (Heb 11:11 NIV)

Abraham certainly recognized his own old age and Sarah's barrenness, didn't he? He didn't pretend that there were no natural obstacles in the way of the accomplishing of God's word to him.

Likewise, if you are sick, admit it. Jesus can heal the sick. But if you start declaring that you "aren't sick," then He can't heal you. If you have no money, admit that you have no money. Jesus can and will supply. Don't deny reality. Admit the facts, but then begin to boldly speak God's truths into your circumstances.

The Power of Agreement

Another thing we need to be aware of is that demonic beings have the power to inject thoughts into our minds (Eph 6:16 - fiery darts.) Because a demon can inject thoughts into your mind in the voice of the first person, you may think they are your thoughts. If we accept these negative, death-invoking, sickness inducing, poverty-laden thoughts, and if we speak them out, we are, in effect, agreeing in the spirit realm with the devil!

The Bible says ". . . *the testimony of two men is valid.*" (Jn 8:17 NIV). If I agree with God and His word, that's two of us, God and me. It meets the "two men" standard. But, if I agree with the devil and his lies, that's two of us too! We must be ever so careful what and with whom we agree. Shall we agree with God and His truths, or the devil and his lies.

It is our choice. Are we going to declare, "I am the righteousness of God in Christ. My God is supplying all my need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus. My God is healing my body . . ." and so on? Or are we going to say, "I'm sick and I'm going to die. God has forgotten me. I'm going to lose everything I own"?

From the fruit of his lips a man enjoys good things... He who guards his lips guards his life. (Pro 13:2-3 NIV)

Brother Williams told this story of an apostle whom he knows. This apostle's wife, the mother of small children, became deathly ill. After a period of continually growing worse, she told her husband, "I'm not going to recover from this sickness. I'm going to die." After hearing his wife say these things for some period of time, the husband, in Holy Spirit boldness, said to her, "You are not going to die! God gave you to me. You are the mother of these children. **YOU ARE GOING TO LIVE AND NOT DIE!**" With that he rebuked the spirit of death and **commanded** her to live. She is alive and well today having supernaturally recovered from her sickness by the power of the spoken word.

Stories like these make me wonder how many times we Christians have been robbed of our God-given provision to accomplish God's plan for our lives by repeating and confessing the lies of the devil. We need to examine each crisis in light of

God's call on us. If the crisis is contrary to God's call, then whether it is the devil's lies, or just plain bleak circumstances in the natural world, we are to rebuke it and confess God's call and His provision.

Another powerful verse of agreement is, ". . . *if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven.*" (Mat 18:19 NIV) Here again is the principle of the power of speaking out in agreement. This verse says that whatever two of us agree upon, our heavenly Father will do.

I believe very strongly in this principle of agreement in prayer. There is great power in it. (Of course, we must also be ever so careful about what we ask for or agree to!)

The Power of the Spoken Word Perverted

In the mid-70's a teaching swept over much of the American church regarding the power of positive confession. The teaching is known as the Positive Confession and/or the Prosperity Doctrine. Please let me make clear that I am not calling into question the sincerity of those who teach or believe this doctrine. I am, however, challenging the validity of their doctrine.

I will give a very brief analysis of this doctrine. Mark 11:23 states:

"I tell you the truth, if anyone says to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart but believes that **what he says will happen**, it will be done for him." (NIV, emphasis added.)

Notice that Jesus said that whatsoever you say with your mouth, and believe in your heart, you will have. The prosperity doctrine has taken that verse and made it foundational to their teaching. It is called "confessing with your mouth." If you confess that you are sick, then you are sick. If you confess that you are healed, then you are healed. Thus, people were (and still are) taught to only confess "positive things."

Then the doctrine was extended to the idea that God wants to bless you. III John 2 states in the King James Version, "*Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth.*" The doctrine focuses on the King James word, "prosper." So they began to teach the positive confession of things connected with prosperity such as wealth, good health, or anything else which was perceived as a blessing to the one who was doing the confessing. Finally, to help people's faith, because Jesus said the believer could move mountains if he believes he can, they taught that your confession should be spoken aloud over and over again. Upon repeatedly saying it, and hearing it over and over, the one confessing would come to believe it fully.

Many Christians fully embraced this teaching and began diligently to confess many and great things . . . "I am healed!", "God is giving me a new car!", "I will make a fortune in this new business!" and so on.

I once heard a young man who had embraced the teaching tell this story. In 1973 Guatemala had a devastating earthquake. The young man went there as an emergency relief volunteer. He

left for Guatemala full of this positive confession teaching. While in Guatemala he saw ruin, destruction, death, and poverty such as he had never imagined.

Upon his return to the US, he told me that, as the days passed, working with the poor, injured, and homeless people, he began to wonder how effective his positive confession teaching would be on the people with whom he was working. He asked, "How could I say to a beggar with no legs, 'God wants to give you a Mercedes' when his greatest hope was food for the next meal?" He came to realize that his teaching was powerless in that poverty ridden culture.

For some time I pondered this story. Finally I saw the principle it contained. That principle is:

If a biblical doctrine will not work equally well in every cultural or economic setting in the world, or if the doctrine will not work over every century from the time of Christ to the present, then God is not its author!

What Are the Flaws in This Prosperity Doctrine?

For years I reflected on this prosperity teaching and its supporting Scripture. It looked good. I couldn't fault the biblical principal which says there is power in what one says. God **does** do the impossible through words spoken in faith. Indeed, that is what this article is all about, the power of the spoken word.

I believe that there are two fundamental errors in this doctrine. First, there has been an overemphasis on the word "prosperity" from the King James Bible. The New International Version's translation of III John 2 is, *Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well.* Notice that the word, "prosperity" is nowhere to be found.

Second, and more importantly, this prosperity doctrine has taken the general principle of God's provision for His children's needs and distorted it. The motive of this positive confession is so that its benefits can be spent on **self**. Thus, the whole underlying motive is wrong!

The evolving, more sophisticated offshoot teaching of this doctrine is the "seed faith" doctrine. This doctrine says that, if you will give me \$100, then you are planting a seed by faith. God will honor that faith by giving you \$1000 in return. Notice

that here again the motive is still wrong and the object is still benefit to self.

God never told us that we will be rich or comfortable if we become one of His children. In fact, we know from Scripture that every believer is called to take up his cross and follow Christ. Indeed, we are to share in His suffering, as well as sharing in His glory.

For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him . . . (Phil 1:29 NIV)

Let's look at Paul. God supplied everything the Apostle Paul needed for spreading the Gospel. I cannot imagine Paul taking those provisions and lavishing them on himself, wearing the finest clothes, living an extravagant lifestyle, or purchasing the best things life has to offer. Then preaching this lifestyle to others motivating them to do likewise. I can almost hear him say, "God forbid such a thing!"

Satan is clever. He has taken one of the most powerful tools given us by the Lord to do His work and has distorted it. Most unfortunately, because most believers have quite properly rejected this distorted prosperity doctrine, we have also lost the true, biblically sound principle of moving in the authority of God's word. In turning away from error, we have also turned away from the truth. We have thus deprived ourselves of a very powerful tool in God's kingdom. I believe God's church needs to rediscover this truth and begin moving again in the power of the spoken word of God!

In Part II of this article we will analyze how belief forms a partnership with the mouth in exercising this authority. We will also explore how to overcome the devil and his lies, and how to speak to legitimate needs in our God given authority.

1. We know from the book of Colossians that Jesus was the one who actually created all things. Paul wrote: *He is the image of the invisible God, the first born over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible... all things were created by him and for him.* (Col 1:15,16 NIV)

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