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THE SPIRITUAL GIFTS

The Holy Spirit cannot be separated from the gifts of the Spirit, for these gifts are the manifestations of it. They are the real benefits. They are given to every man, “to profit withal” (1 Corinthians 12:7). It would be foolish to seek for the Holy Spirit and yet ignore its extraordinary manifestations of power. If the Holy Spirit is to be continuous, so also are its gifts. The two can no more be separated than fire and heat or wind and force.

The apostle Paul, concerned about the new Gentile converts, said, “Now concerning spiritual gifts brethren, I would not have you ignorant” (1 Corinthians 12:1). He spoke to those who had ignorantly followed the dumb (speechless) idols. He knew how important it was that they become informed; thus he spoke boldly. In spite of this, we find today there are many professing Christians who are ignorant of the spiritual gifts; many even deny they exist.

WHY THE SPIRITUAL GIFTS?

The Holy Spirit and the gifts it manifests come to testify of Christ, teach us all things, and give us strength—this that we might witness for Christ unto all men. Evidences of the power to witness are found in the examples of Peter at Pentecost (see Acts, chapter 2), Peter and the apostles before the council and the high priest (see Acts 5:27-32), and Philip at Samaria (see Acts 8:5-8).

The apostle Paul wrote, “Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all” (1 Corinthians 12:4-6).

He then enumerates some of the gifts: the word of wisdom, the word of knowledge, faith, gifts of healing, miracles, prophecy, discerning of spirits, divers kinds of tongues, and interpretation of tongues. The remaining portion of this discourse explains that while it is the same Spirit that gives all of these gifts, not every man receives every gift, for God divides “to every man severally as he will” (see 1 Corinthians 12:7-11).

In the above quotation, Paul mentions nine spiritual gifts. We do not believe this limits the manner in which God can manifest Himself through the Holy Spirit, but it indicates that there are many spiritual gifts. Paul’s admonition is to “covet earnestly the best gifts” (1 Corinthians 12:31). Although he may not have intended to enumerate the gifts in the order of their significance, it does seem clear that the first three are of major importance.

The first noted is “wisdom.” Of all gifts, this is most precious. A wise man judges according to moral and spiritual truth. The gift of wisdom is more than a knowledge of truth; it carries also the ability to apply this knowledge. James says, “The wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy” (James 3:17; see 1 Corinthians 2:1-7). Wisdom permits man to interpret revelation in such a way as to come to an understanding of God.

The second of these three major gifts is “knowledge.” Spiritual knowledge comes as the result of inspiration and instruction given by the Spirit to the mind of man. It is given by the literal appearance of Jesus Christ, by the audible voice, visions, the ministry of angels, and the voice of inspiration. Jesus promised the Jews who believed on Him that knowledge of truth would make them free (see John 8:31-32). The truth of God is obtained through His Spirit.

Such was the knowledge that permitted Peter to proclaim, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:17). It was upon such a revelation of truth—knowledge that is sure and unmovable—that Christ built His Church (Matthew 16:19). The importance of knowledge that comes to man only through the Spirit of God was emphasized by Christ as He said, “And this is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent” (John 17:3).

The third of these gifts is “faith.” Paul wrote, “Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1). He further emphasizes the importance of faith: “Without

faith it is impossible to please him; for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him” (Hebrews 11:6). A modern writer proclaims that faith is the “dynamic of action.” Thus, we see that it is this great gift of God’s Spirit that moves men forward in the adventure for the divine possibilities that we believe exist. Without this gift, man would simply believe but never achieve.

While the remaining gifts of the Spirit may not be as significant as those just discussed, they are important and do show the outreach of God to man. Christ demonstrated on many occasions the gift of healing. Through His divinely called ministry this was continued. James instructed the Saints, “Is any sick among you? Let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him” (James 5:14-15; see D&C 34:3c, 42:12c-13).

We also note that in the life and ministry of Jesus, many miracles were performed (see Acts 2:22; Hebrews 2:4; Mormon 4:76-81). These were not done by breaking God’s laws but by putting into effect laws which man does not know. Anything is miraculous if it is beyond man’s understanding or his ability to perform without divine aid. That miracles should continue to be performed among God’s people is evidenced by the very unchangeable nature of God. Moroni said, “And behold I say unto you, He changeth not; if so, he would cease to be God; and he ceaseth not to be God and is a God of miracles” (Mormon 4:82).

The gift of prophecy has also been found among God’s people whenever they have served Him in righteousness. He placed prophets within the Church of Jesus Christ (see 1 Corinthians 12:28; Ephesians 4:11). He promised that He would do nothing until he revealed His secrets unto His servants, the prophets (see Amos 3:7). The gift of prophecy makes it possible for God to speak to His people—admonishing, counseling, and encouraging them. Through this gift, man is given opportunity to understand that which has happened in the past and to look into the future—inasmuch as God sees it is wisdom for him.

However, we must also beware of false prophecy and false prophets. John admonishes us to “try the spirits whether they are of God” (1 John 4:1). The Scriptures give us numerous tests to apply in judging both the prophet and the prophecy (see Deuteronomy 18:21-22; Psalm 89:34; Matthew 7:24-29; Galatians 1:8-9; 2 John 1:7-11).

God does not leave man entirely to himself in this matter of judging prophecy and trying the spirits. Through the Holy Spirit the gift of discernment is given. While not everyone has this gift, it is within the Church. Satan has power to deceive and will try to deceive even the very elect (Matthew 24:23). We ought to seek for this gift of discernment and follow its leadings. If it is not ours to have, we should look to those who do have it and heed their advice and counsel.

One of the most dramatic examples of the gift of divers kinds of tongues was bestowed on the day of Pentecost (see Acts 2:4-6). Nephi bore witness that this indeed is a gift of the Holy Ghost (see 2 Nephi 14:2-3). Moroni spoke boldly concerning those who denied this and other spiritual gifts (see Moroni 10:14-18). Paul warns about unwise uses of the spiritual gifts and insists that there should be no exercise of the gift of tongues without an interpretation (1 Corinthians 14:26-33).

ARE THE GIFTS TO BE FORGOTTEN?

In the Christian world there are many who would say that there is no longer any need for these spiritual gifts. Some say that Paul in his discourse on charity (see 1 Corinthians 13) substituted charity for these gifts. He wrote, “Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing” (1 Corinthians 13:1-2). However, he did not say the gifts are nothing. He did emphasize the fact that these gifts must be used with charity, the pure love of Christ in our hearts (see Moroni 7:52). Certainly, without this love of God, we are as nothing—regardless of what else we have or do. In a further effort to clarify, he said, “Follow after charity, and desire spiritual gifts” (1 Corinthians 14:1).

Moroni writes of a serious condition in which angels cease to appear or the power of the Holy

Ghost is withheld. "It is by faith that miracles are wrought; and it is by faith that angels appear and minister unto men; wherefore, if these things have ceased, wo be unto the children of men, for it is because of unbelief" (Moroni 7:41-42). May our faith fail not!

SUMMARY

In conclusion, we note that according to the gospel of Jesus Christ, as taught by Him and His disciples and as restored again in this latter day, the gifts of the Spirit are the manifestations of that Spirit within us as individuals and as a Church. Through obedience to the gospel, our lives become fit dwelling places for this good Spirit; and we are entitled to receive the Holy Spirit and the gifts it manifests. As we move forward with Christ in His great cause, we ought to covet earnestly the best gifts, using them with charity, the pure love of God. These gifts become meaningful to us only as we seek them, that we might manifest the fruits of God's Spirit in our lives and bear faithful witness of Christ to all men.

Questions for Discussion

1. What are spiritual gifts?
2. What are the three gifts of major importance?
3. Of what value is the gift of prophecy?
4. Give scriptural examples where spiritual gifts changed the life of a man.
5. What gift makes it possible for us to say with Peter, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God"?
6. When may something be called miraculous?
7. What was the admonition of Paul in seeking spiritual gifts?
8. Are there gifts of the spirit other than those named by Paul? What might they be?
9. If spiritual gifts are not manifested to us, what is the cause?