

ORIGINAL ARTICLES

Signed articles and letters do not necessarily receive the indorsement of the editors. Writers are responsible for their own views.

When Will the Spiritual Gifts Cease?

By Elbert A. Smith

Paul in his Corinthian letter enumerates certain spiritual gifts, nine in number: wisdom, knowledge, faith, the gift of healing, working of miracles, prophecy, discerning of spirits, speaking in tongues, and interpretation of tongues. (1 Corinthians 12: 7-10.) These he declares are given or "divided" among believers by the Spirit according to God's will. It has been the position of this church from the beginning that these gifts, severally and collectively, may be and are enjoyed in this age.

Opposition on that point has been a fruitful source of controversy with our brethren of other denominations. Although perhaps willing to admit the necessity for wisdom, knowledge, and faith, they have denied the continuation of others of the gifts apparently more extraordinary, such as divine healing, prophecy, etc. Many are the verbal encounters our elders have had with representatives of other churches on this subject. But during the past two decades has come a decided change of sentiment, at least regarding divine healing. In years gone by we have many times been challenged to work cures under abnormal conditions never contemplated in the Scriptures; while cures actually wrought under normal conditions in harmony with the scriptures were quite ignored. However, during the past twenty or more years a goodly number of the churches have come forward in defense of divine healing. Such movements as Christian Science, the Immanuel movement, and other forms of healing have obtained a great vogue from time to time. This change of front raises a question, namely, If wrong on that point, may not the denominations have been wrong on other points in the controversy?

Are Subject to Control

It may even be that among our own people the thought has occurred to some that these gifts will pass and perhaps should pass as we develop. Some have thought them to proceed from an entirely emotional basis. Even though that be true they should certainly have an intellectual *control*, since the statement is made clearly that "the spirit of the prophet is subject to the prophet." There arises this further consideration: man himself is emotional; he has the three attributes, will, intellect, and emotion. In the normal man these are well balanced and equally developed. The religion then that would

help the normal man should be both intellectual and emotional and should stimulate and develop the will. God is not perceived by the intellect alone. Nor does he appeal to the intellect alone. His appeal is always emotional. The soul that is not stirred never senses God.

It may be that the sentiment that some have developed against spiritual gifts is the result of having observed very evident abuse and misuse of such gifts in certain branches, with inevitable bad results. The remedy, however, is not the cessation or loss of these blessings, but rather an intelligent and proper use. There is no field of endeavor wherein humanity may not err, and in this realm, where we are handling heavenly things, we need not be surprised to find mistakes and abuses. But to revert to the argument so often used by the early elders, we do not discontinue the use of currency because of an occasional counterfeit bill or coin. We denounce the counterfeit and throw it out of circulation, but continue the use of the genuine.

When Do They Cease, and How?

It may have been argued also, even within the church, that as we progress in spirituality and draw near to God the need for these particular manifestations diminishes. This argument does not seem to be borne out by the actual tests of experience. Without offense to other gatherings of Saints we may, we believe, truly say that the gathering of Saints in the Lamoni Stake for some years past has maintained a plane of spiritual and intellectual development not excelled by any other gathering in the history of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. This is only natural since Lamoni was founded early in the history of the church and for many, many years has been one of the leading seats of culture, spiritual development, and religious thought. It is inevitable that following such long periods of culture there should be fruit of a high order, otherwise there would be scant encouragement to engage in religious work and devotion. Lamoni had the advantage of being for years the headquarters of the church, where the leading religious teachers of the church resided. It was the center of thought. There, too, was located the publishing house. Moreover Lamoni was more self-controlled than most other gatherings of the Saints, being remote from many worldly influences. Also we must reckon with Graceland College, whose influence has been pronounced. That institution helped to maintain a high level of thought. From it came a constant procession of keen, able, and consecrated men, helping Lamoni year by year to render a contribution to the missionary, pastoral, and literary

forces of the church such as have not been excelled by any other group of Saints on earth. We might then expect, if the argument previously mentioned is to hold good, that in Lamoni we would find a pronounced diminution of the more miraculous manifestations of the spiritual gifts. Not so, however. Particularly at their annual reunions we have observed a richer, fuller, more pentecostal outpouring of these gifts than we have encountered in any other place in our travels. These manifestations have been of a high order, both spiritually and intellectually, one evidence of careful and wise administration of affairs for years past.

As We Recede From God They Decrease

This demonstration of actual experience, this leaf from life, this cross-section of church development, indicates that as we draw near to God and rise to a higher plane of spiritual development these blessings become more frequent and more rich and powerful in their manifestation. Other experiences that we have observed indicate that as we recede from God and drift away from him these blessings diminish or cease. That is in harmony with the position taken by John Wesley in his very well-known declaration found in Sermon 94 where he says:

It does not appear that these extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghost were common in the church for more than two or three centuries. We seldom hear of them after that fatal period when the Emperor Constantine called himself a Christian. . . . From this time, they almost entirely ceased. . . . The cause of this was not as has been commonly supposed, because there was no occasion for them, for reason of the world becoming Christian. This is a miserable mistake, as not a twentieth part was at that time even nominally Christian. The real cause was that the "love of many had waxed cold," and the Christians had no more of the Spirit than the heathen. . . . This was the real cause why the gifts of the Spirit were no longer retained in the church, because the Christians had turned heathen again, and had only a dead form left.

That position also is in harmony with the one taken by Calvin, who in his comments on the Corinthian letters says:

We may conjecture how very illustrious that church [the early Christian church] was, in respect of an extraordinary variety and abundance of spiritual gifts. There were schools or colleges of prophets, so that pains had to be taken that they might have their respective turns. . . . We now see our leanness, nay, our poverty; but in this we have a just punishment sent to requite our ingratitude. For neither are the riches of God exhausted, nor his benignity lessened; but we are neither deserving of his bounty nor capable of receiving his liberality.

As We Draw Near They Increase

Experience and our reading of the Scriptures indicate to our mind that as we draw near to the Lord and develop spiritually we receive more and greater

spiritual blessings. And we do not believe that any one of those spiritual gifts can well be abandoned or belittled. We cannot break even one point from a snow crystal without injuring its beauty and symmetry. Not one thing that God has done or set in the church or given to the church can be destroyed or removed without loss and damage.

When then will the gifts cease? Our opponents have cited us to 1 Corinthians 13:8-13, "Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, *they shall fail*; whether there be tongues, *they shall cease*: whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then I shall know even as also I am known. And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity."

These verses properly analyzed bring to us a wonderful lesson and indicate that the gifts are to continue *until "that which is perfect is come."* They bring to us a conclusion quite the reverse of that intended by those who have cited us to these passages. What is meant by "that which is perfect"? Apparently from the reading of the text it means a certain stage of development within ourselves. Now we know in part, then we shall know as we are known. Now we prophesy in part, then our knowledge of futurity and of the will of God will be more full. Now we see darkly; then we shall see clearly. These things cease then when that stage of perfection is developed within us. That day is far distant, perhaps not to be expected in this mortal life. Another illuminating scripture which bears out our argument is found in the fourth chapter of Ephesians:

Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, *unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.*

Until So Common Are No Longer Gifts

The perfect state of man indicated here comes from a development of the individual to his fullest capacity in the likeness and stature of Christ. When that stage of development is reached that individual has reached perfection for him. That which is perfect has come into his life. And we may assume that when that stage is reached in the experience of the Saints collectively these things that have been denominated gifts will no longer continue in the church *as gifts*. As principles and experiences they will not cease; but they will have become a perma-

ment part of our own spiritual equipment and being. A gift is something received from an outside source, not earned, but given through grace or charity. In our present state these gifts are given to help us on the road of development; but when that which is perfect is come, when we reach our fullness in the stature and likeness of Christ, these things will no longer be given to us, but will have become a part of our own spiritual equipment. Thus, though it may seem paradoxical, they cease but do not cease. Now we receive a temporary illumination, as a gift, forecasting futurity, revealing the will of God; then having a knowledge of past things and of present things, having within ourselves the radius of truth, being moreover in touch with God we will constantly know his will and be able so far as necessary to forecast the future—so also with knowledge and faith and wisdom and the power to perform those things which now seem miraculous. As temporary gifts they will cease; as a part of our own endowment they will continue.

The City of God

By A. M. Baker

And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.—Revelation 21: 1-4.

Be Ye Perfect

This was shown to John as a closing climax to his visions while upon the lonely Isle of Patmos. It represents the combined efforts of all of God's children from the foundation of the world, to the end of time, as the finished product. The great Apostle Paul refers to this same subject matter in the Ephesian letter (5: 27) in this language: "That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish," or in other words *perfect*.

We are also reminded of that other passage of scripture given by our blessed Lord: "Be ye therefore, perfect, even as your father which is in heaven is perfect." (Matthew 5: 48.) When we poor mortals here upon this earth begin to talk about perfection we feel somewhat timid and bashful. I remember one lady over in Illinois who told me publicly that she had not committed a sin for over seventeen

years. At the close of the service her husband told me that he knew better, and I expect he was in a very good position to know. But we do not wish to make any compromises or apologies for the man who sins. As Paul states the proposition clearly: "Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid." (Romans 6: 1, 2.)

The church militant was organized for the express purpose of assisting humanity to overcome the imperfections of human nature and to carry out the ideals of the perfect law. Did not Jesus declare to his disciples: "Upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." (Matthew 16: 18.) There is a power divine at work through this church of the living God that is supreme, all powerful and is able to resist and rebuke the powers of Satan.

This was abundantly demonstrated in the life of Christ and the apostles. Should we as a church be satisfied until we have attained to this high mark? "Go on unto perfection" (Hebrews 6: 1, 2) should be our slogan. How are we going to do this? By adding the Christian graces. Growing in grace and in the knowledge of the truth, by becoming more and more like God (1 Peter 2: 1, 2). We must follow the perfect copy—Jesus Christ.

The public-school teachers years ago taught that "practice makes perfect." They had the idea that much writing made a good penman. But after a while they discovered that the poorest writing in these old-fashioned copy books was always to be found at the bottom of the page. So the theory of penmanship was changed—"practice under direction and proper criticism makes good writers." Now the steel engraved copy is always pushed down close to the student so that his own imperfect line is always covered up. Examine the copy books after this method and you will notice the best writing is always at the bottom of the page.

Now if we can apply this method to our church work—we are going to make progress. Then when the Holy City comes down from heaven to meet the Bridegroom, those who have been laboring with him during the thousand years will be permitted to join forces and enjoy the redemption for which they have labored. I am sure we all want a part in that glorious throng of those able to say, "I have fought a good fight, . . . I have kept the faith." (2 Timothy 4: 7.)

Zion Built by Celestial Law

The Lord gives us to understand in latter-day revelation that "Zion cannot be built up except it be by the principles of the law of the celestial kingdom. "No room here for man-made theories. I also wish to quote the great Gentile apostle, Paul: