

"HEAR YE HIM"

A Devotional Series For Radio

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Program Number 280
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World Headquarters: The Auditorium, Independence, Missouri

The Sermon: SPIRITUAL GIFTS

Scripture: I Corinthians 12:1-11.

Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant. Ye know that ye were Gentiles, carried away unto those dumb idols, even as ye were led. Wherefore I give you to understand that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed; and that no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost. How 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. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal. For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of Spirits; to another divers kind of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues. But all these worketh that one and the self-same Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will.

Forasmuch as ye are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek
that ye may excel to the edifying of the church.

In a previous sermon we have discussed the church as the "body of Christ." In every healthy body there are certain functions which indicate life and health. A doctor who wanted to know whether or not there was life remaining in a body would check it for those bodily functions. He would look first, perhaps, for any visible signs of muscular activity, or motion. He would perhaps speak, and watch for any response to the sense of hearing. He might inflict a mild pin prick to test the sense of touch, or he might hold smelling salts under the nose to see whether there was any reaction from the sense of smell. He would listen for a heart beat, for respiration. He might test the reflex actions, such as the contraction of the pupil of the eye under varying degrees of light. The absence of even some of these normal reactions would indicate some bodily impairment or perhaps partial paralysis. The absence of all of them could mean only one thing -- that the body was dead.

Paul says that the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal. Every cell in the body must partake of the spirit or life of the body, or it dies. Every cell in the body has its proper function under the direction and control of the spirit or life of the

body. There is diversity of function, but unity in that diversity. Because the function of each cell in the body of Christ is directed by the Spirit of Christ, every gift is a spiritual gift; every function is a spiritual function, no matter what it is, and no matter who receives it or who exercises it. It is spiritual because it is empowered and directed by the mind, the life, the Spirit of Christ.

Just as the body is handicapped by the absence of any member or organ, so it is handicapped and oftentimes jeopardized by the absence of any function. Some functions are minor, and the body may continue to exist without them, although with impaired efficiency and health. Other functions are so essential that if they are stopped for even a moment, the body dies. The body of Christ must maintain certain functions, too, if it is to survive.

What are some of these functions? What are some of the spiritual gifts or spiritual functions which should be found in the church if it is entitled to be called the body of Christ? Paul gives a partial and suggestive list, rather than a complete or exhaustive list, in the 12th chapter of First Corinthians. Every mem-

cles, healing, and tongues would be enjoyed for a century or two, and then gradually die out? In the 16th chapter of Mark Jesus is quoted as saying to the apostles: "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature and these signs shall follow them that believe." Twelve apostles in their short lifetime could not possibly have preached to "every creature" in the then-known world, to say nothing of all the unknown peoples and continents which have been discovered since. Evidently apostolic authority was to be delegated, shared, and transmitted to future generations; and this promise of signs following the believer was to be shared by all who believed. If signs do not follow the believer today, either this promise is false, or else the gospel is not being properly and authoritatively preached -- the conditions of the promise are not being fulfilled.

In one of the first sermons after the resurrection Peter promised the Holy Ghost to all who should repent and be baptized, and added: "For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call." (Acts 2:38, 39) Prophecy is the forth-telling as well as the foretelling of truth. The function of the Holy Ghost is to testify of Christ, to guide into all truth, to teach all things, to bring all things to remembrance, and to show things to come. If the promise of the Holy Ghost is to all who are afar off, both in space and time, where is there any basis for the assumption that prophecy was to cease with the apostles?

The prophet Joel spoke in the name of the Lord to say: "I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions...." On the day of Pentecost when the Spirit descended as a rushing wind and the assembled church spoke in tongues, Peter declared: "This is that which was spoken of by the prophet Joel." Was this the complete fulfillment of Joel's prophecy, or was it only a partial fulfillment with a larger and more complete fulfillment to be expected?

Read the entire prophecy, and that

question is easily answered. The complete fulfillment of Joel's prophecy was to include the restoration and gathering of Israel. It was to come in the "great and terrible day of the Lord," when there should be wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke, the sun turned to darkness, and the moon into blood. Obviously this part of the prophecy was not fulfilled on Pentecost, nor has it been since. And if Joel's prophecy is still unfulfilled, we may expect prophecy, tongues, and other spiritual gifts to continue on earth until it has been fulfilled in its entirety.

Paul says that prophecies shall fail and tongues shall cease. He also adds that knowledge shall vanish away. Has knowledge vanished from the earth along with prophecy and tongues? No one would be so foolish as to answer "Yes" in this day of intellectual and scientific enlightenment. Paul does not say that all prophecy, all tongues, and all knowledge shall vanish with the apostles, but that "when that which is perfect is come," then our imperfect knowledge, our fragmentary prophecy, and our imperfect, temporary gifts of tongues shall be swallowed up in the totality of perfect, as a pool of water left on the beach is swallowed up by the incoming tide. We do not achieve perfection by destroying the imperfect, but we do away with the imperfect by making it complete and perfect.

When shall "that which is perfect" come? Men will not be perfect until they have been resurrected in the likeness of Jesus. The church will not be perfect until she is presented to Christ as his bride, without spot or wrinkle or blemish. Then there will be no more need of prophecy to testify that Jesus is the Christ, or to teach us or guide us or tell us things to come; for Jesus himself will be in the midst of the church. Our partial knowledge will be swallowed up in a complete and perfect knowledge of God. All will speak the language of God, and there will be no more need for divers kinds of tongues. But until "that which is perfect" is come the church may always claim God's promise of gifts such as prophecy, tongues, miracles, healing, wisdom, knowledge, and faith, for the edification and the perfection of the church.