

# "HEAR YE HIM"

## A Devotional Series For Radio

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The Sermon: PROPHECIES SHALL FAIL

Scripture: I Corinthians 13:8-12

Whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether they 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 shall I know even as also I am known.

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Whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.

Complete and perfect objectivity in Bible interpretation is impossible, because no matter how hard a man strives to be honestly unbiased, he can never completely escape from the influence of his past experience, of his social, cultural, doctrinal, and denominational background. He sees largely what he brings with him to the task of interpretation.

An example of this inevitable slanting of opinion is to be found in the interpretation placed upon Paul's statement that prophecies shall fail, tongues shall cease, and knowledge shall vanish away. Men who have never experienced or observed the gift of prophecy or tongues are very apt, because of this lack of experience, to interpret Paul's statement to mean that prophecy and tongues have already ceased long ago; that in fact they ceased with the apostles. The viewpoint held by the great majority of present-day Christians is that there were only twelve apostles, who had no successors, and that when they died, all spiritual gifts died with them. To explain this cessation of spiritual gifts in the church, this school of thought says that apostles and prophets and spiritual gifts were needed only to establish the infant church, but that when the church grew up, there was no longer any need for them.

In previous sermons we have pointed out that the church is the body of Christ, and that an adult body is merely the fully grown, perfected body of infancy. The adult body needs every organ, member, and function that exists in the infant body. The infant does not achieve adult status

by lopping off an arm or a leg, or discarding the heart or lungs or liver, or by dispensing with the function of digestion because he no longer needs these members or functions. Rather, he grows to adulthood by keeping every member, organ, and function in its proper place, and letting all grow to maturity together. The church is the body of Christ. If an infant church needed living, functioning apostles and prophets, and spiritual gifts, then the mature or adult church also needs living, functioning apostles and all the spiritual gifts that were promised to the believer in the infant church.

Note too that spiritual gifts were never the exclusive prerogative of the apostles. Jesus said (John 14:12-13): "He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also, and greater works than these shall he do." This promise is made not only to apostles, but to all true believers of all time.

Why then did spiritual gifts cease within the first two or three centuries after Christ? John Wesley says in sermon #94: "The real cause was that 'the love of many waxed cold,' and the Christians had no more of the Spirit than the heathen." When a church no longer has the Spirit of Christ, it is a dead church, and none of the functions or processes of spiritual life can be manifested through it.

How long did God intend that spiritual gifts should remain in the church? Did Jesus ever say that prophecy, mira-

ber of the body of Christ receives some gift -- some function which he is to perform for the edifying of the church. Therefore the list of such spiritual gifts is not necessarily limited to the few which Paul mentions; but let us consider a few of his suggestions.

The first gift, and the most important (because it must be shared by every living, healthy cell in the body of Christ) is the gift of knowing that Jesus is the Christ. "No man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost." Every cell in the body knows that it is a part of the body. There is no confusion as to whether it is a part of this body or that; every cell knows the spirit or mind or life which it obeys. Every member of the body of Christ must know where his life comes from, must know the nature of that life, must know the personality of which he is a part. Every member who is truly and functionally related to the body of Christ will know who Jesus is, will know that Jesus is the Christ. He will live in Christ, and will function under Christ's life and power.

In the human body, every cell seems to manifest a degree of intelligence or wisdom. Without being taught, it knows how to function so that the best interests of the body are served. There is also a network of nerves in the body by which the knowledge acquired by the senses in any part of the body is immediately made available in every other part of the body so that the whole body may know how to respond to its environment. If the eye is about to be hit by a flying object, it is not only the eye which knows it, but the whole body, which functions as a unit to protect the eye. In like manner, wisdom and knowledge are two of the spiritual gifts to be expected in the body of Christ. The Holy Spirit, which is the life of the body, is given to teach you all things, to bring all things to your remembrance, and to guide you into all truth.

The gift of faith is resident in the physical body. Each part of the body trusts every other part to perform its function. Each part of the body trusts implicitly the overruling, unifying, life-giving spirit of the body to give directions that will preserve the life and health and safety of the body, to marshal its defenses against disease, and to direct the work of repair in case of injury. So in the church, the body of Christ, there should be implicit faith in Christ,

and there should be gifts of healing for the physical bodies of those members of the spiritual body who may be attacked by illness or disease.

In the physical body there are gifts of miracles. No one understands half of the processes which are hum-drum, daily routine in the body. No one knows how the dead, lifeless, inert food we eat becomes living tissue. No one knows how the body's thermostat works to keep the body temperature constant in health, or to raise it to destroy disease germs. No one knows why the stomach digests meat, but does not digest itself. Miracles are not violations of natural law. They are operations of natural law that we do not understand. Members of the body of Christ should be able to do naturally and normally that which those outside the body cannot do. Gifts of miracles are normal for the body of Christ.

If there were no way for the spirit or life of the body to make its will known to the members of the body, the body would soon die for lack of direction. The body of Christ should have certain officers or members whose function is to receive truth from the guiding Spirit, interpret it for the body, and speak it forth for the direction and guidance of the body. Prophets are spokesmen of God for the body. Prophetic ministry is essential to the body of Christ if the work of that body is to be directed by the Spirit of Christ. It is also necessary that there be a discernment or recognition of what is God's Spirit, and what is not, or the body may be divided and destroyed. It is sometimes necessary that this Spirit speak in different ways, in different tongues, to different races and nationalities and conditions of people who compose the body of Christ, that all may be served according to their needs.

Spiritual gifts follow the believer. They are not the cause, but the natural result of the life of Christ as it resides in the body of Christ. If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his; he is not a part of the body. Therefore he cannot function as a part of the body, and there will be no signs following. We must therefore expect that in the body of Christ, so long as it lives, there will always be a need for the testimony of Jesus, for gifts of wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, discernment and tongues. If you do not enjoy all these gifts in your church fellowship, why not?