

The Prophetic Gift

Spiritual Gifts and Prophecy

Lesson #3 for January 17, 2009

Scriptures: Acts 2:1-11; Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 1:6,7; 13:9; Ephesians 4:11; 2 Thessalonians 2:9,10.

1. What do you think is the role of spiritual gifts in the Seventh-day Adventist church today? What should the role be? Does the Seventh-day Adventist church have the “gift of prophecy” because Ellen G. White helped to establish our church and left us some books? If the criteria for having the “gift of prophecy” is belonging to a group that has some books written a long time ago (the Bible), then every Christian group qualifies! Do we need to have a “live prophet” in order to be blessed with the gift of prophecy? Should every church—every congregation—have every gift in it?
2. Does the Seventh-day Adventist church have the gift of tongues? What gifts do you personally have? Many modern charismatic and Pentecostal churches really focus on spiritual gifts. Is it possible that some of those gifts are counterfeit, i.e. not from the Holy Spirit?
3. Spiritual gifts are given to the church by the Holy Spirit. What other major gift is given to the church by the Holy Spirit? Scripture! Are we making enough use even of that gift?
4. Read Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12:8-10;28-30; Ephesians 4:11-16. Why do these lists of spiritual gifts differ? Can a person be truly Christian and not know what his spiritual gift is? Can we have more than one spiritual gift at a time? Should we seek to have more than one at a time? (Read Ephesians 4:11-16) Do we need to grow up and mature (become “perfect”) before Jesus comes?
5. If God gave His spiritual gifts in abundance to the apostolic church and the purpose of those gifts was to complete the mission which had been given to the church, what happened? Why are we still here 2000 years later? Does a Christian need to accomplish certain things to qualify to receive one or more spiritual gift? Have spiritual gifts been manifested right down through the history of the Christian Church? Or have they at times “died out”? If spiritual gifts are for the purpose of “maturing” the church, shouldn’t the end-time church be really blessed with spiritual gifts?

As many of you know, there has been a huge argument in the Christian church down through the generations as to whether the “gift of tongues” seen in Acts 2 is the same as the one Paul talked about in 1 Corinthians 12-14. Were the people in Corinth speaking real languages? What happened to the disciples and apostles at Pentecost?

6. Read Luke 9:1; Matthew 10:8; Acts 2:1-4. Were those abilities that Christ gave to His disciples the same as the gifts of the Spirit? Do we need to broaden our definition of spiritual gifts? Are we to imply from this that the disciples possessed multiple gifts of the Spirit?

The Holy Spirit did for them that which [40] they could not have accomplished for themselves in a lifetime. They could now proclaim the truths of the gospel abroad, speaking with accuracy the languages of those for whom they were laboring. This miraculous gift was a strong evidence to the world that their commission bore the signet of Heaven. From this time forth the language of the disciples was pure, simple, and accurate, whether they spoke in their native tongue or in a foreign language. {*Acts of the Apostles* 39.2}

Who has that kind of gift today? Did God give them instantaneous angel translators so that as they spoke their own language, it came out in the recipient's language and vice versa? Most of those people had a common language. Why did God use individual languages to speak to them? They were excited to hear the message in their own languages. There are "simultaneous translators" at the United Nations which translate into many different languages as people address the United Nations. So surely the angels could do just as well. It has often been demonstrated that the people who get the most excited about hearing the "good news" are those who have never heard it before. Look at the nations behind the iron curtain just after the wall came down!

7. Does God expect every true Christian to have at least one spiritual gift? What happens to spiritual gifts if we do not use them? Is it possible to identify spiritual gifts with certainty? Can we know which Christians have spiritual gifts? Can you know if you have a spiritual gift or multiple spiritual gifts? How would you identify a spiritual gift in yourself?
8. Read Ephesians 4:11-15. If one of the main purposes of spiritual gifts is to bring the church to more spiritual maturity, what has happened? If the church is not maturing—becoming more nearly perfect—where is the failure?
9. Are certain spiritual gifts more appealing to Christians? Would you rather be a prophet, a preacher, teacher, healer, or "speaker in tongues"? Could you be a Christian preacher, teacher, or healer without "the spiritual gift"? If I have a degree in medicine, is that proof that I have the gift of healing? What about teachers and preachers? Do they necessarily have those gifts? Why do some Christian groups emphasize some gifts much more than others? If someone stood up in your church and began to speak in a "strange tongue," would you feel uncomfortable? What would you do? If someone claimed to speak for God as a prophet, how would you respond? If I stand up in front and teach a Sabbath School class, has God given me a gift to do that? Often, in this class I find that things "come out" that are wonderful but about which I had no idea until the class began discussion of the lesson! Where did those things come from? Is not the Holy Spirit at work as we discuss His Word? Sometimes, it is easier for others to recognize our gifts than it is for us. If others think that we have a gift, we should be willing to try out that gift. God may be trying to tell us something. If I am the only one who thinks I have a certain gift, am I narrow-minded or even arrogant? Is a boring preacher one who does not have the gift of preaching?
10. In the middle of Paul's discussion of spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12-14, we find the love chapter, 1 Corinthians 13. If we followed all the rules Paul spelled out in 1 Corinthians 14, would it eliminate all the counterfeit gifts? Is Christian love a spiritual gift? Does it take true Christian love to exercise any of the gifts correctly? Or does it require true Christian love for people with different gifts to work together for the accomplishment of God's work?
11. Are God's gifts going to waste in the Seventh-day Adventist church today? Are we afraid to use the gifts God has given us?
12. The *Adult Teacher's Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for Monday, January 12 says:

These days we find two views among Christians in regard to the permanency of spiritual gifts. Some believe that *edifying gifts*, such as knowledge, wisdom, teaching, exhortation, faith, and mercy, are permanent gifts but that the *sign gifts*, such as prophecy, healing, tongues, and miracles, ceased with the death of the apostles. Defenders of this view claim: "The sign gifts had a unique purpose: to give the apostles credentials, that is, to let the people know that these men all spoke the truth of God. Once the Word of God was inscripturated,

the sign gifts were no longer needed and they ceased.”—John F. MacArthur, Jr., *Charismatic Chaos* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1993), p. 199.

Other Christians believe that all the spiritual gifts will be present in the church until the Lord comes.

Do we live in a time when “apostles” and “prophets” are no longer needed? God has always seemed to indicate His desire to be with or even among His children.

Why is it that many conservative Protestants believe that “prophets” were active from about 1450 B.C. until about 425 B.C. and then again for about 70 years after Christ died, but that now prophets have been out of the picture for almost 2000 years? SDAs believe that Ellen G. White was a prophet who lived from 1827 to 1915. Was that the end of all prophets of God? Has God ignored people in other language groups and other cultural groups?

Was Balaam a true prophet? What about Jonah? The older prophet in 1 Kings 13?

13. So, which side do you agree with? Do you believe that we have “prophets,” those who “speak in tongues,” and “interpreters of tongues” alive in the church today? What about miraculous healers?
14. Read 1 Corinthians 1:6,7; 13:9,10; Ephesians 4:11-15. These verses seem to suggest that the gifts of the Spirit will be active until Jesus comes again. Does this imply that all gifts will be active at all times in all churches? Is one “prophet” enough for the entire “remnant church” in our day? Do you have any miracle workers, prophets, “speakers in tongues” in your church? Iranaeus who lived from A.D. 120-195 wrote about the manifestation of spiritual gifts in his day. But after the great spiritual decline came in the 4th and 5th centuries, there is no record of spiritual gifts being manifested in the church.
15. At the time of the Protestant Reformation, we would be inclined to agree that a number of the reformers had certain of the spiritual gifts. Did any of them have the gift of prophecy? Or was that gift being reserved by God until it could be manifested in the final end-time remnant church? (Revelation 12:17; 14:12; 19:10) If we cannot find people in our church today with all the spiritual gifts, should we be looking for another church? During the “Dark Ages,” was God’s Spirit active in other cultural groups? Let us not come to the conclusion that God goes on a vacation from time to time! Or have we left God? Is God silent now?
16. Have you ever suspected that you had a spiritual gift which you have been afraid to use?
17. Is it possible to know for sure when a gift is counterfeit and when one is real?
18. We have been warned repeatedly that false Christs and false prophets will come making all types of claims. (Matthew 24:3; 1 John 4:1; Matthew 7:22,23; 2 Thessalonians 2:9,10; Revelation 16:13,14) This makes the challenge greater!
19. Did God give “spiritual gifts” to His prophets in the Old Testament? Did Moses and Aaron have the gift of miracles when they pronounced the 10 plagues on Egypt? Remember that the first two plagues were “duplicated” by the Egyptian magicians. That suggests two important principles when we see apparent miracles taking place. 1) Satan will perform miracles, as far as possible, to duplicate and counterfeit true miracles. (Revelation 13:13) 2) But, at times, God will set limits on what Satan can do in counterfeiting. How closely will Satan be allowed to counterfeit the second coming of Christ? What kind of miracles will he perform?
20. Does every counterfeit “gift” come directly from Satan? Are some human beings able to counterfeit gifts on their own? Revelation 13:14 tells us that Satan will apparently deceive the whole world! We need to be able to recognize true spiritual gifts, but we must also be able to

recognize counterfeits.

21. Read God's warning in Deuteronomy 13:1-3. People who claim to be prophets can lie—even prophets who were sometimes used by God Himself have lied! (1 Kings 13) We must have a thorough knowledge of the Bible and its principles, and that must be our ultimate standard for judging every spiritual gift.
22. Clearly, spiritual gifts are given by the Holy Spirit for the perfection and maturing of the Church of God particularly in preparation for the second coming of Jesus.
23. Read 2 Peter 1:19-21. Is this a clear definition of the gift of prophecy? A true spiritual gift should show evidence that it came from God.
24. Can you name some prophecies given by people who were apparently anything but Christian but which came true in startling ways? Nostradamus (1503-1566) is thought to have made a number of very precise predictions. In 1956 Jeane Dixon predicted that a Democrat would become president of the United States in 1960 and later be assassinated in office. That prediction was fulfilled exactly in the life experience of John F. Kennedy. If someone is able to make such a precise prediction, is that proof that he or she is a prophet of God?
25. Read Isaiah 8:19,20. People will try all kinds of methods to try to get in touch with the dead and with the supernatural. But, we must remember that Satan can counterfeit those things incredibly well. (2 Corinthians 11:14)
26. If you had to list one gift as being the most important for the work of the church, which would you choose? In looking at the four lists of spiritual gifts that Paul gave, the only gift which is mentioned in every list is prophecy. It is listed first in Romans 12:6 and second—after apostleship—in 1 Corinthians 12:28-30 and Ephesians 4:11-15. Think of all that prophets have done for God's people down through the millennia! Without prophets we would probably have only a fraction of our Bible. They have provided counsel, guidance, and warnings repeatedly to God's people, to kings, even to world emperors! While they have occasionally provided comforting messages, (Isaiah 40:1,2) more often, they have given stark warnings! (Jeremiah 1:14-16; Joel 2:12,13)
27. What methods has Satan used in the past to deceive people using "miraculous manifestations"? Even in ancient times, some people claimed to be speaking for dead people through the use of ventriloquism. (*The SDA Bible Commentary*, volume 6, page 330)
28. Scan 1 Corinthians 12-14. What kind of manifestations do you think Paul was talking about? Was that a true gift of tongues? Were the people in Corinth speaking true foreign languages? How did those "tongues" compare with the ones described in Acts 2:1-11? Would it be more correct to describe the gift in Acts 2:1-11 as a "gift of ears" since the disciples were speaking a single stream of words in a single language while the listeners were each hearing it his own language? This side of heaven, we probably will not be able to know for sure if the tongues spoken in Corinth were true languages or some kind of babbling. Jesus Himself warned us against babbling like the heathen. (Matthew 6:7) If we followed all the instructions that Paul gave in 1 Corinthians 14:26-40, would there be any problem with speaking in tongues in the church? Remember that spiritual gifts are supposed to be for everyone's benefit. (1 Corinthians 12:7; Ephesians 4: 13-15)
29. Some Pentecostal groups believe that if one cannot speak in tongues, s/he is not a true Christian. Is there any biblical evidence for that kind of spiritual test? What is the biblical test for those who have received the Holy Spirit? (Galatians 5:22,23)
30. The man who makes the working of miracles the test of his faith will find that Satan can, through a species of deceptions, perform wonders that will appear

to be genuine miracles.—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, Book 2, p. 52.

31. In Ellen White's day, a family known as the Ralph Mackin family began suggesting that SDAs should be speaking in tongues and manifesting other "spiritual gifts" of a remarkable nature. Ellen White indicates that she was shown:

In the future we shall have special tokens of the influence of the Spirit of God—especially at times when our enemies are the strongest against us. The time will come when we shall see some strange things; but just in what way—whether similar to some of the experiences of the disciples after they received the Holy Spirit following the ascension of Christ—I cannot say. . . .

We must go to the people with the solid Word of God; and when they receive that Word, the Holy Spirit may come, but it always comes, as I have stated before, in a way that commends itself to the judgment of the people. In our speaking, our singing, and in all our spiritual exercises, we are to reveal that calmness and dignity and godly fear that actuates every true child of God. . . . (also *LDE* 93)

I am afraid of anything that would have a tendency to turn the mind away from the solid evidences of the truth as revealed in God's Word. I am afraid of it; I am afraid of it. We must bring our minds within the bounds of reason, lest the enemy so come in as to set everything in a disorderly way. There are persons of an excitable temperament who are easily led into fanaticism; and should we allow anything to come into our churches that would lead such persons into error, we would soon see these errors carried to extreme lengths, and then because of the course of these disorderly elements, a stigma would rest upon the whole body of Seventh-day Adventists. . . .

During the years of Christ's ministry on earth, . . . The truth was proclaimed intelligently, and so plainly that all could understand. **Now I am afraid** to have anything of a fanatical nature brought in among our people. There are many, many who must be sanctified, but they are to be sanctified through obedience to the message of truth. I am writing on this subject today. In this message there is a beautiful consistency that appeals to the judgment. We cannot allow excitable elements among us to display themselves in a way that would destroy our influence with those whom we wish to reach with the truth. . . . (Compare *2SG* 50; *1T* 66; *LS* 215)

It is through the Word—not feeling, not excitement—that we want to influence the people to obey the truth. On the platform of God's Word we can stand with safety. The living Word is replete with evidence, and a wonderful power accompanies its proclamation in our world. *MS* 115, 1908; *Selected Messages*, vol. 3, pp. 369-375; portions in *Selected Messages*, vol. 2, pp. 43,44; *VSS* 290; *LDE* 93; "The Ralph Mackin Story," *Review and Herald*, August 17, 1972

God will use spiritual gifts right to the end of time. But, they must always be very firmly biblically-based. God wins people by careful, thoughtful evaluation of the truths given in the Bible.

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