

GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT

Operating outside the realm of Scripture, the gifts of the Spirit are nevertheless confirmed and defined by the Scriptures. To deny the existence of these gifts is to deny that part of the Bible which declares that when Christ ascended up on high, He "gave gifts unto men." (Ephesians 4:8)

These gifts resultant upon Christ's enthronement as High Priest forever after the Order of Melchizedec (Acts 2:33) are seen operating in the book of Acts. On the Day of Pentecost, the disciples, on whom the Spirit rested, "began to speak with other tongues," so that the astonished multitude questioned, "how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?" (2:4, 8) "By the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people" (5:12). Prophets and teachers were instructed to "separate [unto] me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them" (13:1-2). In this instruction was a call to one who, in turn, would write Scripture by which the "gifts" would be tested. In fact, it is in the Epistles of Paul that we find the justification for the doctrine of spiritual gifts. The book of Acts even goes further and reveals a "prophet" giving instruction to Paul as a person, but not instructing nor interpreting what he wrote, or directing what he was to write (21:11).

Paul addresses the doctrine of spiritual gifts in two epistles, I Corinthians and Ephesians. The letter to the Corinthian Church divides the gifts given to individuals (12:7-11) from those possessing gifts qualifying them to sit in the church in an official capacity (12:28). One may have the gift of "prophecy" (12:10) and yet not be "set" in the church as a "prophet" (12:28). The gifts of the Spirit are given "to each for the profit of all" (12:7 NKJV). The letter to the church at Ephesus - a general Pauline epistle - specifies four offices qualified by a spiritual gift and defines their combined purpose as "the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry" (4:12 NKJV).

The four major categories of the gifts of the Spirit as given in Ephesians - apostles, prophets, evangelists and pastor-teachers - need to be carefully and clearly defined.

An apostle is literally "one sent." Jesus told those gathered together in the upper room on the day of the resurrection - "As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you." (John 20:21) In the book of Acts this objective was enlarged to include administrative duties. It was the apostles who "called the multitude of the disciples" (Acts 6:2) into session and advised them to nominate "seven men of honest report" (Acts 6:3) to whom they could give authority to handle mundane business which had arisen. Paul, "called to be an apostle" (Romans 1:1), exercised "daily, the care of all the churches" (II Corinthians 11:28), which he had raised up. This oversight of the Church was passed to "elders" (presbuteros; I Peter 5:1) and "bishops" (episkopes). The question is - Were the men appointed to the office of "overseer" (episkopes) only those made so by the gift of the Holy Spirit? (Acts 20:28) In other words, did they receive the gift of apostleship? Obviously not, as history has demonstrated.

A prophet is one who "speaks forth" for God. Interestingly, not one writer of any New Testament book, claims to be a prophet. Jesus designated John the Baptist as a prophet. (Matthew 11:9) He Himself indirectly claimed the office of a prophet. (Luke 13:33) We perceive of John the Revelator as a prophet because of the visions he received on the Isle of Patmos. (Revelation 22:9)

An evangelist is one who announces "glad tidings" or "joyful news," in other words, a preacher to those who have not heard the gospel.

Pastor-teacher: (The Greek of the text in Ephesians 4:11 indicates that this is a single gift) The pastor-teacher is one who feeds the flock. This raises an interesting question. Were the "overseers" (episkopes) of the church whom Paul addressed at Miletus, "apostles," or were they possessors of the gift of "pastor-teachers"? Paul instructed them "to feed the church of God." (Acts 20:28) This in turn raises some other interesting questions. Was the office of "apostle" a limited office, restricted to those who saw the Lord? (Acts. 1:21-22; I Corinthians. 15:8-10) Peter's observation, noted earlier, is worthy of more thought. While he classified himself with other elders (presbuteros), he added an additional factor, "and a witness of the sufferings of Christ." (I Peter 5:1) (John also considered himself an "elder." See II John 1; III John 1) To these elders, Peter gave the same admonition which Paul gave to the overseers, "Feed the flock of God," taking the "oversight," a verbal form of the word, episkopos. (v. 2) In the New Testament, the two words are used interchangeably (Titus 1:5, 7; Acts. 20:17, 28), with the word, elder, predominating. At the first Christian Council, the leadership is termed, "apostles and elders." (Acts. 15:2, 4, 6, 22, 23)

It is critical in the understanding of "spiritual gifts" as to their authority in the Church today, to know the relationship between "apostles" and "elders." Both were appointee offices. Christ appointed apostles, and the apostles and their designated successors appointed elders. Paul is emphatic that though appointed, the elders served under the Holy Spirit. It was the Holy Spirit who made them "overseers." (Acts 20:28) We are apt, because of the history of church administration from elders to bishops, to monarchical bishops, to the pope; and because of the struggle which developed in the early church between the appointed leadership and the pneumatikoi (men of the Spirit), to miss the intent of Christ for His church. Further, the picture is complicated by the fact that the New Testament involves the laying on of hands as a part of the procedural means for receiving the gift of the Spirit. (Acts 8:16-17; 19:6) While this procedure is not followed in each recorded instance of baptism (Acts 2:41; 10:44-47), it is connected with not only gifts to the individual as such but also to gifts bestowed when ordained as an elder. Timothy received a "gift" when Paul laid his hands upon him (II Timothy 1:6); he also received a "gift" with "the laying on of the hands of the presbytery." (I Timothy 4:14) He was also told to "do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry." (II Tim. 4:5) It is also apparent that he had a leadership role from the instruction given to him by Paul. (II Timothy 2:2)

From this seemingly contradictory and overlapping mass of recorded incidents and instruction given in regard to how spiritual gifts functioned in the apostolic period, what conclusions can be drawn?

- 1) The gifts of the Spirit can be understood by the parable of the talents. While one received five talents, no one was left without at least one talent. (Matthew 25:14-30)
- 2) Certain gifts came with baptism, and the laying on of hands; other gifts were bestowed when one was ordained to the ministry.
- 3) The gift of leadership was subject to appointment and recognition by the whole church. While the diaconate was selected by the body of believers, the eldership came by authority of the previously appointed leadership. There was in this sense, "apostolic succession." The fact that a thing is corrupted, does not nullify the fact of its usage, at least, at one time in its purity.
- 4) The gift of prophecy, and the functioning of one as a prophet, does not necessarily follow. However, to be a prophet, one must have the gift. It is not an office merely to be filled by a "nominating committee."

The actual gifts themselves as listed in Ephesians, when "set in the church" do bestow an

authority. While one may receive the gift of leadership ("governments" - I Cor. 12:28) unless ordained as an "elder" he would not function in the role of an "apostle." This simply serves to recognize the tremendous authority which Christ bestowed upon His church, and the awesome consequences of its corruption. Those who have corrupted Christ's way for His Church can point to the Scriptures to justify their illegitimate use of power. Further, our failure to recognize the specific authority bestowed in a gift when recognized by the Church - "set in the church" - can cause just as much spiritual damage as can the perversion of power.

This now brings us to the authority of Spiritual Gifts as given in the Bible itself. We shall center our attention on the list as found in Ephesians 4 - apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers. How do we line these up? Vertically or Horizontally? Does it make a difference? Yes! If we perceive the list as vertical, then there is an order of authority. The first authority in the Church is the "apostle" or "elder." The "presbytery" speaks with more authority than those with the other "gifts." There is Biblical support for this order. Paul wrote to the Corinthian Church - "God hath set some in the church, first, apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, and after that..." (I Corinthians 12:28)

This plays havoc with the present "independent ministry" in the Adventist Community. It is true that one can show that the leadership of the "regular" Church has apostatized as a corporate voice. But there still must be a voice of authority in the body of Christ. Do you drop to the "second" on the list? Or do you go to the authority which gives "spiritual gifts" its viability - the Scriptures themselves? Here is the source of the confusion in peripheral Adventism today.

Now let us consider the horizontal listing of the gifts, placing them all on the same plane. This gives equal authority to all. This is to say several things. The evangelist is to be as inspired as the pastor-teacher, and both as inspired as the prophet. There are no degrees of inspiration, or are there? If none, what responsibility does it lay upon any assuming either the role of pastor-teacher, or evangelist, let alone the work of an elder. It does tell us one thing, whether there are degrees of inspiration or not, all things spoken or written by any, whether he or she be an elder, prophet, evangelist, or pastor-teacher, must be measured by the Bible. In other words, the doctrine of Spiritual Gifts teaches one thing, and that one thing is the primacy of the Holy Bible. The regular Church, as well as many of the "independent" ministries, have substituted for the infilling and direct guidance of the Holy Spirit, the Writings of one to whom God did give the gift of prophecy. These Writings have been used as so many rules by which to merit the favor of Heaven. In so doing, we have violated her counsel as to the use to be made of her Writings.

No position paper on Spiritual Gifts would be complete for a Seventh-day Adventist unless we addressed the role of Ellen G. White in relationship to the Community of Adventism.

First, what are her claims, and how did she perceive herself? Three statements made by her in her lifetime need to be noted:

- 1) "I do not claim to be a prophet." (Selected Messages, bk 1, pp. 31-32)
- 2) "Why have I not claimed to be a prophet? - Because... my work includes much more than the word, 'prophet' signifies." (ibid, p. 32)
- 3) "From the year 1846 until the present time [1903], I have received messages from the Lord, and have communicated them to His people. This my work - to give to the people the light that God gives to me. I am commissioned to receive and communicate His messages. I am not to appear before the people as holding any other position than that

of a messenger with a message." (Letter dated Nov. 17, 1903)

Two things need to be noted from her own statements. First, she does claim to have received a spiritual gift. She indicated she received messages from God for His people. Secondly, she did not claim the office of a prophet because the work assigned to her involved much more than the office would indicate.

How then has Ellen G. White become an inspired, infallible interpreter of Scripture? The Seventh-day Adventist Church posthumously made her that kind of a prophet. In 1950, when the General Conference gave official recognition to the 1931 Statement of Beliefs, the session added to the statement on Spiritual Gifts, the following two sentences - "That the gift of the Spirit of Prophecy is one of the identifying marks of the remnant church. The church recognizes that this gift was manifest in the life and ministry of Ellen G. White." (1950 GC Bulletin, p. 230) In 1980, the General Conference session in Dallas raised her Writings to the level of Scripture voting that "her writings are a continuing and authoritative source of truth." This position is also being taken by various "independent" voices either in outright declaration, or by usage. Such a position cannot be justified either by Scripture or by the personal testimony of Ellen G. White herself while living.

In the claims which Ellen G. White herself made, there is the absence of any claim that her Writings are an inspired commentary on the Scriptures. The recognition of this one fact would do much to alleviate the confusion in Adventism today. The attempt to place the Writings of Ellen G. White as a "teaching magisterium" has caused untold division and dissension in Adventism since her death in 1915.

The Doctrine of Spiritual Gifts is Biblical, and one seeking to follow the Word of God will accept all genuine manifestations whether through apostles, prophets, evangelists, or pastor-teachers. But in accepting any of these gifts, one will accept them as indicated in the Word of God, even as the voice of the Holy Spirit to Christ's Church. "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches." However, he will also recognize that the manifestation of the Spirit whether through apostle, prophet, evangelist or pastor-teacher must conform to the teachings of the Holy Bible.

Pioneer Position

"The gifts of the Spirit should all have their proper places. The Bible is an everlasting rock. It is our rule and practice. ...

"Every Christian is therefore duty bound to take the Bible as a perfect rule of faith and duty. He should pray fervently to be aided by the Holy Spirit in searching the Scriptures for the whole truth, and for his whole duty. He is not at liberty to turn from them to learn his duty through any of the gifts. We say that the very moment he does, he places the gifts in a wrong place, and takes an extremely dangerous position. The Word should be in front, and the eye of the church should be placed upon it, as the rule to walk by, and the fountain of wisdom, from which to learn duty in 'all good works.'" (R&H, April 21, 1851, p. 70; an unsigned editorial by one of the Publishing Committee, assumed to be James White)