

“Comforter”

Main Point

The Holy Ghost comforts us in our relationship with Jesus Christ.

Introduction

Sometimes we need a friend to talk to and encourage our hearts. Other times, we need a counselor to advise us in our decisions. Perhaps, we just need to know someone is there – that we are not left alone. Maybe we need assurance that everything is going to work out in the end. Whatever we need, “the God of all comfort” and consolation can supply (2 Co. 1:3-4). In today’s lesson, we will see that the Holy Ghost comforts us in our relationship with Jesus Christ.

Key Verse

“And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever” (Jn. 14:16).

Lesson Summary

For some three years, Jesus walked with his disciples teaching and instructing them in the truth. They heard his voice, saw his actions, and physically touched the Lord (1 Jn. 1:1). During that time, he daily was with them conversing and sharing in their lives and experiences. Jesus called and empowered his disciples (Mt. 10:1); he gave them commands and sent them forth to minister (Lu. 9:2-6); and he encouraged and even reproved them (Mt. 16:17, 22-23). Indeed, Jesus was their comforter – their spiritual mentor, guide and counselor. But soon, according to God’s will, he was scheduled to depart from them. Jesus told his disciples, “I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also” (Jn. 14:2-3). Although he was leaving, he nevertheless promised not to leave them alone on their own without a comforter (v. 18). Jesus promised to send them another Comforter, the Holy Ghost (Jn. 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7). The Holy Ghost took over right where Jesus left off (16:12-14). Although the Holy Spirit was different from the Lord Jesus in person, he was not different in his work and ultimate purpose. Like Jesus, he also came to comfort – thus he is “another” comforter. Therefore, the Spirit came to assist and console the saints of God in the same ways that Jesus comforted them. The Holy Spirit came to continue Christ’s role as helper and guide in the lives of his disciples. Though Jesus left them physically when he ascended to the Father, the Holy Ghost was Christ’s spiritual presence, not only abiding with the disciples, but actually indwelling them. Thus, Christ abides at the right hand of the Father in heaven, but he also abides in our hearts through his indwelling Holy Spirit. Because Jesus was leaving them, the disciples were heavyhearted and filled with sorrow (Jn. 16:5-6, 20-22). In this context of sorrow, Jesus promised to send the Holy Ghost (Jn. 16:7). Of course, this speaks to the comfort of the church today. In times of great sorrow and tribulation, we have the consolation of God’s Spirit, for Jesus said, “I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world” (Mt. 28:20). The Holy Ghost, the Comforter, came to fill the church with Christ’s joy and peace until he comes again (Ro. 14:17; 15:13). The disciples, of course, did not want Jesus to leave them; nevertheless, it was absolutely necessary that he go away. Otherwise the other comforter, the Holy Ghost, would not come (Jn. 16:7). Clearly, the Holy Ghost is now here in a special way to comfort the church and to help every believer in his Christian walk.

Scripture Study

Jesus was comforter – 1 Jn. 1:1; Mt. 10:1; Lu. 9:2-6; Mt. 16:17, 22-23

The Holy Spirit as comforter – Jn. 14:2-3, 16, 18, 26; 15:26; 16:7, 12-14

Comforting our sorrow – Jn. 16:5-7, 20-22; Mt. 28:20; Ro. 14:17; 15:13

Conclusion

In what sense does the Holy Ghost comfort and help the church? When we are in need, the Holy Ghost will be there to lend his support. Certainly, the Holy Ghost was not sent to do everything for us. He did not come to do the work for us while we sit back and do nothing. Instead, we must take up the responsibility of Christ’s mission, and as we do so, the Holy Ghost will help us along the way, especially doing what we cannot do. He will not leave us alone, comfortless, but he will teach, guide, and lead us into God’s will in Christ. He will do mighty works through us to the glory of God. He will manifest the presence of Christ through us. Today, the Holy Ghost continues to support the saints, just as Jesus did when he walked upon this earth



“Teacher”

Main Point

The Holy Ghost reveals Jesus Christ and teaches the depths of the knowledge of God.

Introduction

God has given teachers and placed them in the body of Christ. They are gifts to the church. The teaching ministry edifies the body through expounding the Word of Truth and equipping the saints for service. While teachers are instrumentally essential, even critical, for the spiritual growth and perfection of the church (Ep. 4:11-13), the primary and most important teacher in the church is the Holy Ghost. In today’s lesson, we will see that the Spirit is the one who actually teaches and establishes the saints in the truth of Jesus Christ and God’s Word.

Key Verse

“But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you” (Jn. 14:26).

Lesson Summary

When God spoke of a future time of restoration for the people of God, he promised to make a new covenant, saying, “I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people” (Je. 31:31-34). No longer would the Word of God be written (engraved) merely in tables of stone, but it would be written inwardly – in fleshy tables of men’s hearts by the Spirit of God (2 Co. 3:3-8). Under this new covenant through Jesus Christ, the true knowledge of God cannot be taught by the precept of men but by the Holy Ghost himself indwelling us (Is. 29:13; He. 8:10-11; 1 Jn. 2:26-27). The Spirit writes (engraves) the Word of God upon our hearts. Furthermore, God has placed his Spirit within us to be an ever-abiding Teacher. When Jesus promised the Holy Ghost, he said, “He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you” (Jn. 14:26). The Spirit’s work is teaching. He will give us understanding in all things – whatever we need from God in order to fulfill the mission of Christ and the church. Specifically, the Holy Ghost will teach us all things pertaining to Christ and his teachings (Jn. 15:26; 16:14-15). Moreover, until the Spirit reveals the truth of Jesus Christ within our hearts, we have not learned Christ, heard him, and been taught by him (Ep. 4:20-21). The knowledge of the truth is therefore more than head-knowledge and knowing facts about Jesus Christ; it is a relational, spiritual knowledge of God’s saving grace and his love in our hearts (Ro. 5:5; Ep. 3:19). Finally, the Holy Ghost is the one who guides the church into all truth. Jesus plainly taught his apostles, saying, “I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now” (Jn. 16:12). Jesus left many things unsaid – truths that the Holy Ghost would later reveal to the apostles from the Word of God: “Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth” (v. 13). The Holy Ghost would even reveal “things to come,” future insights relevant to the church (v. 13). The apostle Paul explained that the Spirit of God is the key to discerning the depths of the knowledge of God (1 Co. 2:9-14). While the wisdom of the natural man is limited, the Holy Spirit is unlimited in his ability to reveal Godly wisdom and give spiritual understanding to the saints. Since the Word of God was divinely inspired and spoken by the Holy Ghost (2 Ti. 3:16; 2 Pe. 1:21), we need the Spirit to reveal and unlock the depths of the knowledge of God’s Word in the church today. Certainly, as we rely on the Spirit of truth for guidance and direction, he will take what is of Christ and reveal it to us from God’s Word (Jn. 16:15).

Scripture Study

Written inwardly – Je. 31:31-34; 2 Co. 3:3-8; Is. 29:13; He. 8:10-11; 1 Jn. 2:26-27

Learning Christ – Jn. 14:26; 15:26; 16:14-15; Ep. 4:20-21; Ro. 5:5; Ep. 3:19

The revealer – Jn. 16:12-13; 1 Co. 2:9-14; 2 Ti. 3:16; 2 Pe. 1:21; Jn. 16:15

Conclusion

As disciples and followers of Jesus Christ, we never stop learning about God and growing in the knowledge of his love and truth. Even the most knowledgeable and spiritually established among us still have something to learn in their relationship with Christ. Therefore, all of the members of the church are students of God’s Word, and the Holy Ghost is our Teacher.



“Intercessor”

Main Point

The Holy Ghost prays for us making intercession to the Father on our behalf.

Introduction

Jesus taught “that men ought always to pray, and not to faint” (Lu. 18:1). We should “pray without ceasing” and daily intercede with God, making our petitions known (1 Th. 5:17; 1 Ti. 2:1; Ph. 4:6). As saints of God filled with the Spirit, not only do we pray, but the Spirit also prays with us on our behalf and through us for others. As we seek God, the Spirit is our intercessor. In today’s lesson, we will see why we need the intercession of the Spirit when we pray to the Father.

Key Verse

“Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints” (Ep. 6:18).

Lesson Summary

Why do we need the Holy Spirit to make intercession when we pray? First of all, we do not always know how we should pray or for what we should pray (Ro. 8:26). Have you ever come to a spiritual roadblock or to a point that seemed to be a dead-end in your life, and you needed divine direction and guidance because you were uncertain of what to do next? Even when the will of God is clear, the specifics surrounding his will may not be so clear (1 Co. 2:11). We are therefore limited in our human understanding of what and how to pray. In regard to this, Paul used himself as an example when writing of his own infirmities and weaknesses. At one point, Paul was afflicted and prayed three times for his deliverance, but the Lord would not take this affliction from him. Instead, the Lord promised to give him sufficient grace (2 Co. 12:7-9). Clearly, Paul wanted to be free from his “thorn in the flesh,” but God had something different in mind. What we think is best, our perspective, does not always align to God’s mind and thinking. When we do not understand the perfect will of God, the Spirit helps and assists us as we pray. Moreover, he prays and intercedes in ways that go far beyond our human ability in order to make our praying effective (Ja. 5:16; He. 4:15-16). Humanly, we cannot ascend up to God (Jn. 3:13). Instead, when we pray, we rely on God to condescend to our lowly condition (Ps. 8:4; Ps. 136:23; Lu. 1:48). However, when the Holy Ghost prays on our behalf, he translates our prayers uniquely and communicates our need directly to God. Paul described the Spirit’s intercession as “groanings which cannot be uttered” (Ro. 8:26). “Groanings” indicate intercession from deep within the believer. The indwelling Spirit prays in and through us with groanings that surpass any words we ourselves can speak, clearly distinguishing his prayers from our own. When Paul instructed the saints to be strong and spiritually armored, he admonished them to pray in the Spirit: “Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit” (Ep. 6:18). This kind of praying is faith-building (Jude 20). Finally, when we pray in the Spirit, we receive great consolation and comfort. God searches our hearts as we pray. Our own prayers fall short of God’s perfect will, therefore we need the Holy Spirit to help us because he always prays in perfect agreement with the will of God (Ro. 8:27). Although we might not understand his groanings, God knows the mind of the Spirit: he understands the utterances of the Spirit and knows exactly what we are praying when we cry, groan, weep, and speak in tongues. When we consider all three of these aspects of praying in the Spirit, we see how important the Spirit is in our prayer life. We need the Spirit to make intercession for us “according to the will of God” (1 Jn. 5:14-15).

Scripture Study

The Spirit helps us – Ro. 8:26; 1 Co. 2:11; 2 Co. 12:7-9

His groanings – Ro. 8:26; Ja. 5:16; He. 4:15-16; Ep. 6:18; Jude 20

God’s will – Ro. 8:27; 1 Jn. 5:14-15

Conclusion

Every believer desires the assurance of knowing that “all things work together for good” (Ro. 8:28). But we cannot presume the blessings of Romans 8:28 without the operation revealed in verses 26-27. Only as we pray and intercede by the Holy Ghost can we be fully persuaded that we are praying according to the will of God and have the full assurance that God is working on our behalf “for good.”

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“Witness”

Main Point

The Holy Ghost enables us to be true, effective witnesses of Jesus Christ in the world.

Introduction

In today’s lesson, we will see the importance of the Holy Ghost in the witness of the church. The Spirit is vital to the success of our mission and evangelism because he is the life and power of our witness. He gives force and impetus to our efforts, enabling us to be true, effective witnesses of Jesus Christ in the world.

Key Verse

“The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God” (Ro. 8:16).

Lesson Summary

The writer of Hebrews explained that the Holy Spirit is a witness of Christ to us, not an external witness only, but an *indwelling* witness (He. 10:15-16). “Because the Spirit is truth,” the Spirit of God always gives witness to the truth *within* the believer (1 Jn. 5:6-10). His witness always agrees with and confirms the Word of God (v. 7). Thus, every true child of God has the *inner* witness of the Spirit of truth abiding in him (Jn. 14:17; Ro. 8:14-16). Regarding the ministry of the Spirit, Jesus taught that the Spirit of truth would speak to the church, not of himself, but rather declaring the things pertaining to Christ and his church (Jn. 16:13-14). The Spirit has a voice. Historically, the Spirit’s ministry through holy prophets has been an important part of God’s plan for the church (2 Pe. 1:21). The Spirit speaks specifically to the needs in the church in every generation where believers will receive his wise counsel (1 Co. 2:13). When writing to Timothy, the apostle Paul declared, “Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith” (1 Ti. 4:1). The Holy Ghost spoke specifically to warn the church of a falling away (see also 2 Ti. 3:1; 4:4; 2 Th. 2:3). Warnings are an important part of the Spirit’s witness to the church especially in times of apostasy (Re. 1:10, 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22). Moreover, not only does the Spirit speak to the church within the fellowship of the saints, but the Holy Ghost also speaks through the church to the world of sinners, the unchurched, and the scattered sheep. Jesus assured us that the Holy Ghost would fill our mouths with the right words when we give our defense of the gospel (Mt. 10:17-20; Lu. 12:11-12). We can therefore depend on the Holy Ghost to speak a true witness of Christ through us (Jn. 15:26). However, since the Holy Ghost is our inner witness, we must remain filled with his Spirit after being baptized with the Holy Ghost. Only when our testimony is saturated with the Holy Ghost are we assured of being true, effective witnesses of Jesus Christ. Finally, the apostles were eye-witnesses of Christ’s ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension (Ac. 2:21-22, 25; Lu. 1:1-2; 24:46-48; 2 Pe. 1:16). Their witness was authorized by Jesus Christ (Mt. 28:18-20), but also empowered by the Holy Ghost (Ac. 1:8). Although the apostles were Christ’s eye-witnesses, the Spirit himself was/is God’s witness having raised Jesus from the dead (Ro. 8:11). Therefore, we are not eye-witnesses, but we are Christ’s faithful witnesses, having received the same power and anointing of the Holy Ghost, who not only raised up Christ but has quickened us spiritually through faith in Jesus (Ac. 5:32; Ep. 2:1, 5-6).

Scripture Study

The inner witness of the Spirit – He. 10:15-16; 1 Jn. 5:6-10; Jn. 14:17; Ro. 8:14-16

The Spirit speaks to the church – Jn. 16:13-14; 2 Pe. 1:21; 1 Co. 2:13; 1 Ti. 4:1; Re. 1:10; 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22

The Spirit speaks through the church – Mt. 10:17-20; Lu. 12:11-12; Jn. 15:26

We are his witnesses – Ac. 2:21-22, 25; Lu. 1:1-2; 24:46-48; 2 Pe. 1:16; Ro. 8:11; Ac. 1:8; 5:32; Ep. 2:1, 5-6

Conclusion

The world today desperately needs a true witness of Jesus Christ. With some seven billion inhabitants on the face of the earth, fulfilling the mission of the church is humanly impossible. Therefore, we must rely on the Holy Ghost to empower our witness and help us finish Christ’s mission. Clearly, he came for this purpose.



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“Edification of the Body”

Main Point

Spiritual gifts should function to edify the body of Christ.

Introduction

When writing to the church in Corinth, Paul stated, “Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant” (1 Co. 12:1, 8-10). Why did the Lord place spiritual gifts in the church? The apostle Paul did not want the saints to misunderstand the function and purpose of these gifts. By explaining God’s will concerning spiritual gifts, the saints would know how the gifts should operate in the church, and at the same time be able to discern the spirit of error. In today’s lesson, we will examine God’s purpose in the operation of spiritual gifts.

Key Verse

“Even so ye, forasmuch as ye are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church” (1 Co. 14:12).

Lesson Summary

Paul taught the principle of the edification of the body as an objective/goal for the church (Ep. 4:12). Jesus Christ wants his body, his church, to be edified, built up, and established in the faith (Ep. 4:13). Since the church is not one member but many members in one body, each individual member should seek to benefit the whole body (1 Co. 12:14, 20). In the same way that each part of the physical body serves to support the needs of the whole man, each individual member of the church should serve to build up the corporate whole of the church. For example, we should build each other up through cultivating love and peace among ourselves (Ro. 14:19; 12:10; He. 10:24), by comforting and supporting each other (1 Th. 5:11, 14), and by speaking gracious words of encouragement to one another (Ep. 4:29; He. 10:25). However, an unhealthy body is one in which a particular member becomes sick, no longer serving to strengthen the body, but rather draining life from it. The church at Corinth was spiritually immature and prone to fleshly attitudes and behaviors (1 Co. 3:1-3). Paul wrote to the church to correct them on many divisive issues, spiritual gifts being one of them. He wrote to instruct them and to clarify the work of the Spirit and spiritual gifts. God has given a variety of spiritual gifts, but the same Holy Ghost operates all of them (1 Co. 12:1, 4-6, 11) – that is, there are many gifts but one mind of the Spirit. Paul taught edification as a basic guiding principle in the operation of spiritual gifts in the church. As we “covet earnestly the best gifts” (1 Co. 12:31), we should always seek to edify the church above our own will and desires (1 Co. 14:3-5, 12, 26). The gifts of the Spirit manifest through individual members, not only for their own edification, but even more so for the profit of the whole church (1 Co. 12:7; 14:5). The operation of the gifts should benefit all of the members, rather than satisfying the will of one or two. Moreover, the Lord distributes spiritual gifts among the members of the church in such a way as to unite the body of Christ (1 Co. 12:24-26). “But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him” (v. 18) – and he has set them in the body with gifts. However, the spiritual gifts are not for the individual’s use; for such use would produce division and disrupt the harmony and unity of the church. But the Spirit operates the gifts through individual believers to produce mutual care and support among all (v. 25). In this way, the whole church suffers and rejoices together, sharing a common experience in the Spirit (v. 26).

Scripture Study

The principle of edification – Ep. 4:12-13, 29; 1 Co. 12:14, 20; Ro. 12:10; 14:19; He. 10:24-25; 1 Th. 5:11, 14

Edification through spiritual gifts – 1 Co. 3:1-3; 12:1, 4-7, 11, 31; 14:3-5, 12, 26

The unity of the body – 1 Co. 12:18, 24-26

Conclusion

The spiritual gifts are given for the good of the whole body. They should operate within the church to build up and unite, not tear down and divide. In 1 Co. 13:1-13, Paul went on to explain that the key to edification in the operation of spiritual gifts is love. When the operation of spiritual gifts is motivated by love, the gifts will function to edify the body of Christ.



“Wisdom and Knowledge”

Main Point

Wisdom and knowledge are spiritual gifts of inspired understanding that help us to serve Christ and build up his church.

Introduction

Throughout the Scriptures, God gave certain individuals special gifts of wisdom and knowledge to help them in their service to him. Bezaleel was filled with the Spirit “in wisdom, in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship” for the building of the tabernacle (Ex. 35:30-35). The prophet Daniel was a man full of godly wisdom, knowledge, and understanding who became a chief ruler in Babylon (Da. 5:5-14), and of course, the wisdom and knowledge of King Solomon is well known (1 Ki. 3:5-12). Today, God has given us spiritual gifts of both wisdom and knowledge in order to help us serve Christ and build up his church (1 Co. 12:8).

Key Verse

“For the Lord giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding” (Pr. 2:6).

Lesson Summary

“For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit” (1 Co. 12:8). The apostle Paul appropriately listed wisdom and knowledge at the beginning of the spiritual gifts, not because they are more important than the others but likely because they are the basis of understanding among the spiritual gifts – a wise place to begin. Wisdom and knowledge are similar, and often operate in an interrelated way (Ep. 1:17; Co. 1:9), yet they are distinct and separate attributes. So what are the differences between wisdom and knowledge? “Wisdom” (*sophia*) indicates a depth or quality of “understanding” (1 Co. 2:7, 10, 13), while “knowledge” (*gnosis*) indicates an increase or a quantity of “insight” (Co. 1:10). Wisdom is the foundation of all spiritual knowledge and understanding. A wise man seeks the knowledge of God, but a fool refuses his knowledge and instruction (Pr. 1:5, 7, 22; 15:14). For the sake of distinction, wisdom has the capacity to grow in knowledge, but knowledge without wisdom may prove unskillful, even destructive. For example, knowledge means comprehending the right answer; wisdom means the ability to understand and communicate (explain) the answer. Knowledge understands what to say; but wisdom knows when and how to say it. Thus, knowledge should build upon wisdom (Pr. 4:7). Solomon, who God endowed with wisdom, explained this building principle in Proverbs 24:3-5. Literally speaking, the wisdom (the “know how”) to construct a building is necessary in order to build a house; then after it is built, further knowledge is necessary to finish and beautify the rooms throughout it (vv. 3-4). Knowledge builds upon wisdom. Likewise, wisdom is comparable to being strong; whereas knowledge is like becoming stronger and stronger (v. 5). Again, knowledge builds upon wisdom. Clearly, wisdom and knowledge are interrelated and should complement one another. We need both gifts operating within the church. Paul’s unique designation of these special gifts, referring to them in terms of “the word” of wisdom and knowledge, demonstrates that God’s Spirit supplies both wisdom and knowledge through individual members of the body for the edification of the whole church. “The word” indicates something spoken. In these gifts, the Holy Spirit enables a believer to speak and communicate an understanding needed within the body of Christ. Therefore, these gifts clearly are not operated by the Spirit for the individual’s benefit alone, since both gifts are manifested as “the word,” and words are spoken in order to be heard. The Holy Ghost then moves through one member to *speak* wisdom or to *speak* knowledge for the benefit of the other members. Furthermore, “the word” also implies the written Word of God, thus, the Spirit enables an individual believer to understand wisdom and knowledge consistent with the Holy Scriptures, and as a result, to speak by the gift. Thus, these gifts of the Spirit will never contradict the principles of sound teaching based on the Holy Scriptures, for the Spirit always agrees with the Word of God.

Scripture Study

Examples of wisdom and knowledge – Ex. 35:30-35; Da. 5:5-14; 1 Ki. 3:5-12

Comparing wisdom and knowledge – Ep. 1:17; Co. 1:9-10; 1 Co. 12:8; 2:7, 10, 13; Pr. 1:5, 7, 22; 15:14; 4:7; 24:3-5

Conclusion

The church needs wisdom and knowledge to fulfill its mission, but this means individual members of the body must be yielded to God as instruments of the Spirit (Ro. 6:13). God desires to speak through us words of wisdom and knowledge to give help and guidance to our ministries; but we must be spiritually prepared to be used of the Spirit (2 Ti. 2:21).



“Faith”

Main Point

The spiritual gift of faith provides the divine enablement to believe God’s Word and to receive from the Lord.

Introduction

How important is faith to every believer? How important is faith in the life of the church? In Hebrews 11:6, faith is essential to our acceptance with God, for we cannot please him unless we believe in him (Jn. 3:16). Truly, we cannot serve the Lord and follow him in discipleship without genuine faith and trust in Jesus Christ. In today’s lesson, we will consider the importance of faith itself and the significance of the spiritual gift of faith.

Key Verse

“But without faith it is impossible to please him; for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him” (He. 11:6).

Lesson Summary

Because faith in Jesus Christ is required for salvation, faith is a gift of God’s grace. That is, every man has the capacity to believe the gospel and follow faithfully in Christ’s service. When Paul wrote to the saints in Rome, explaining about gifts of grace functioning in the body of Christ, he explained that God has distributed to every believer “the measure of faith” or “a measure of faith.” “For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man *the measure of faith*” (Ro. 12:3). Paul was explaining that the gifts of God are just that, gifts given to us from the Lord. We are not so special in and of ourselves. Instead, God has blessed and equipped us by his grace with special abilities in order to serve him by faith. So every member of the body has the faith to serve the Lord and benefit the whole church in some unique way, because “God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith” (Ro. 12:3-6). Thus, none are excluded in God’s plan, but every member of the body has the faith it takes to please God. “The measure of faith” enables an individual to believe in God, embrace his Word, trust in Jesus Christ, obey his commandments, and to serve the Lord faithfully. In other words, when God calls a person to follow Jesus Christ and serve him, he also supplies him with the necessary faith to please the Lord in all things. “The measure of faith” itself is therefore a gift of God’s grace. How does faith impact the church, its mission and ministry? Faith in Jesus Christ is powerful – it can move mountains (Mt. 21:17-22). Though Jesus referred to a literal mountain when teaching his disciples about faith, he actually meant that any major obstacle in our lives could be moved through faith. By faith, nothing is impossible with God (17:20); therefore, Jesus compelled us to believe in him, abide in him, and ask in his name (Jn. 14:1; 15:7; 16:23-24), for great and mighty works are ours for the asking (Jn. 14:12-14). To help the church reach its fullest potential, God has given the spiritual gift of faith as a special, divine enablement to believe in God’s Word and to receive freely from the Lord (1 Co. 12:9). Reasonably, this gift could be exercised by the Spirit through an individual in order to receive a blessing from the Lord personally or to administer a blessing upon another member of the body. Either way, the gift serves to edify and build up the body of Christ, fulfilling the joy of the Lord in the church. Genuine faith is spiritually productive – it produces good works through the believer that validates his faith (Ja. 2:17-26). Therefore, anytime this spiritual gift operates through a member of the body, something profitable is taking place in the life of the church: prayers are being answered; souls are turning to Christ; saints are being encouraged; and many other blessings are being received.

Scripture Study

The measure of faith – He. 11:6; Jn. 3:16; Ro. 12:3-6

The power of faith – Mt. 17:20; 21:17-22; Jn. 14:1, 12-14; 15:7; 16:23-24

The spiritual gift of faith – 1 Co. 12:9; Ja. 2:17-26

Conclusion

Indeed, faith itself is a gift of God, and faith in God is powerful. Clearly, when the spiritual gift of faith is operating through individual members of the body, the church is strengthened because faith in Christ produces good works among us. When we see God working in the church by the gift, the faith of the whole church is emboldened to continue asking and believing for even greater works. In this way, the spiritual gift of faith operating in the church helps the body of Christ to grow in faith and proves essential in fulfilling the mission of the church.



“Healings and Miracles”

Main Point

The gifts of healing and the working of miracles help us to minister powerfully and effectively in a world filled with needs.

Introduction

The world is filled with suffering, needy people. In Matthew 9:35, Jesus had been travelling village to village, teaching, preaching, and healing the sick. At one point, Jesus looked on the multitude and was overwhelmed by what he witnessed. The people were like sheep without a shepherd. There were so many needy people everywhere that one man simply could not minister to them all (vv. 36-38). In today’s lesson, we will see that the Spirit has placed the gifts of healing and the working of miracles in the body of Christ in order to help us minister to those in need and to magnify the name of Jesus.

Key Verse

“Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us” (Ep. 3:20).

Lesson Summary

The Lord is our healer (Ps. 103:1-3). A major part of Jesus’ earthly ministry was healing the sick and diseased (Mt. 8:13-17). He provided healing for all through his atoning work – through his sacrifice when he shed his blood and died on the cross. Moreover, Jesus suffered and died for the healing of the whole man: mind, soul, spirit, and body. By his stripes we are (were) healed (Is. 53:4-5; 1 Pe. 2:24). Healing is therefore possible for everyone who believes in Christ (Mk. 9:23). While healing is provided through Christ, it is accomplished by the power of the Spirit. Jesus himself healed the sick by the power of the Holy Spirit, and he promised to baptize every believer with that same Spirit and power (Jn. 1:32-34; Lu. 4:18; Ac. 1:5, 8; 2:39). In fact, the Holy Spirit has placed “gifts” of healing in the body of Christ (1 Co. 12:9). When Paul referred to healing, he wrote in terms of “gifts” rather than “gift.” Since the Spirit demonstrates many healing gifts through individual members of the body as he wills (vv. 7, 11), we can conclude that God can and does heal all types of sicknesses, diseases, and oppressions (addictions, mental illnesses, cancers, emotional scars, to name a few) by the Holy Spirit through faith in Christ. We should consider, however, that healings in this present world are not entire or absolute. Though someone is completely healed of an illness (Ac. 3:16), his body remains imperfect. For example, the Lord may heal my broken bones, so that I walk again, yet I still suffer with arthritis in my body. Also, the person through whom the gifts of healing flow should not be confused with the person being healed. In other words, the Spirit could use me to bring healing to another person, while I continue to suffer through my own infirmity (see the apostle Paul’s suffering in 2 Co. 12:7-9). Such distinctions only serve to remind us that the gifts of healing are not ours to exercise as we please, but the gifts are operated by the Spirit through members of the body as it pleases God (1 Co. 12:11, 18). Likewise, the Spirit also gives the working of miracles for the edification of the whole church and for the glory of Jesus Christ (1 Co. 12:10). Miracles are indeed supernatural works of God’s Spirit and power. Although healings and miracles are in many ways similar, for many healings are nothing short of miraculous signs (Jn. 4:46-54), perhaps the primary distinguishing mark of a miracle is that it defies human explanation, leaving us in awe and wonder of God’s mighty power and glory (Lu. 8:25; 9:42-43; Jn. 2:23; 6:14; 7:31). Consider, Jesus turned water into wine (Jn. 2:1-11), multiplied the loaves and fishes (Lu. 9:12-17), calmed the raging storm (Mt. 8:24-27), walked on water (Mk. 6:47-51), cast out devils (Lu. 8:26-37), and even raised the dead to life again (Jn. 11:32-45). Through the spiritual gift of the working of miracles, Jesus can still do mighty wonders by his Spirit in the church today. Since the gift of miracles is the work of the Spirit and not of man, this gift should never exalt an individual member of the body but rather bring glory and honor to Jesus Christ (Ac. 8:9-24).

Scripture Study

Gifts of healing – Ps. 103:1-3; Mt. 8:13-17; Is. 53:4-5; 1 Pe. 2:24; Mk.9:23; Jn. 1:32-34; Lu. 4:18; Ac. 1:5, 8; 2:39; 1 Co. 12:7, 9, 11, 18; Ac. 3:16; 2 Co. 12:7-9

Working of miracles --1 Co. 12:10; Jn. 4:46-54; Lu. 8:25; 9:42-43; Jn. 2:23; 6:14; 7:31; Ac. 8:9-24

Conclusion

By the gifts of healing and the working of miracles, God’s Spirit is powerful and active in and through the church enabling us to fulfill Christ’s mission in the world. Certainly, the needs of mankind are much greater than Zion Assembly can humanly fill, but God’s Spirit is able to do above and beyond all we can possibly imagine (Eph. 3:20).



“Prophecy and Discernment”

Main Point

Through the gifts of prophecy and discernment, the church can hear from God freely with confidence and assurance in knowing the truth.

Introduction

In 1 Corinthians 12:10, Paul identified the gift of prophecy and the gift of discerning of spirits. In today’s lesson, a general explanation of these two gifts will be provided, and then the relationship of these gifts to each other will be explained. As we will see, these gifts are essential to the healthy functioning and spiritual balance of the church.

Key Verse

“Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith” (Ro. 12:6).

Lesson Summary

First, what is the gift of prophecy? Down through the ages, God has spoken by his Spirit through prophets revealing his will for mankind (He. 1:1-2; 2 Pe. 1:21). Although the *office* of prophet is no longer needed since the foundation of the church has been laid (Ep. 2:20; 1 Co. 3:10), God nevertheless speaks through “prophets” today. We typically call them “preachers.” Moreover, though God has finished speaking in as far as the Holy Scriptures are complete, he continues to speak through individuals by his Spirit to the church today through the gift of prophecy (Ro. 12:6). The Holy Ghost anoints individual believers to speak God’s word with power and authority (1 Co. 2:4-5; 1 Th. 1:5). In the gift of prophecy, believers declare the Word and will of God with the unction of the Holy Ghost (Ac. 2:18; Re. 19:10; Ac. 21:10-11). On the day of Pentecost, Peter spoke by the gift of prophecy when he “lifted up his voice” and preached the baptism with the Holy Ghost to the multitude: declaring their experience to be the fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy (Ac. 2:12-18). The gift of prophecy continues to work in this same manner – the Spirit clarifying and declaring the mind of God in the church. Second, what is the gift of discernment? To discern means to distinguish between right and wrong, good and evil, truth and error. Discernment therefore requires righteous and spiritual judgment in the church (1 Co. 2:15; 5:12). The church has the responsibility of both “proving what is acceptable unto the Lord” (Ep. 5:10) and reproofing “the unfruitful works of darkness” (v. 11). We must be able to prove the right and reprove the wrong. The gift of discerning of spirits is the divine ability to distinguish the nature of spirits, whether they are of God or not (1 Jn. 4:1). Of course, the one exercising this gift must himself know the truth and word of God, for by knowing the Spirit of Truth, one recognizes spirits of error. Reasonably then, the gift of discernment has as much to do with discerning truth as discerning error (1 Jn. 2:21; 4:5-6). Third, what is the relationship between the gifts of prophecy and discernment? The gift of prophecy is the divine enablement to speak the words of God by the special inspiration of the Holy Spirit. It functions to provide divine understanding and guidance for the ministry and mission of the church. God speaks by this gift of the Spirit through individual members to direct the course of the church. The potential danger regarding the gift of prophecy is when someone speaks in error and leads the church contrary to God’s will. The apostle Peter decisively warned against false teachers who follow after greed and the lust of the flesh, being “presumptuous” and “self-willed” (2 Pe. 2:1, 3, 10). Likewise, the apostle John implored the faithful to “try” (test, prove) the spirits “because many false prophets are gone out into the world” (1 Jn. 4:1). Hence, the gift of discerning of spirits is given to keep the church from such error. On this note, we should keep in mind that the Spirit of prophecy is also the Spirit of discernment. Therefore, the church should not be fearful of the gift of prophecy because the same Spirit has also given to the church the gift of discernment (1 Co. 12:4). These two spiritual gifts provide the necessary check and balance within the church. The church should be neither spiritually gullible nor suspicious. Instead, we should give the Spirit complete liberty to speak in the church (1 Th. 5:19-20), because we are enabled to discern fully the true Spirit of the Lord (v. 21).

Scripture Study

The gift of prophecy – He. 1:1-2; 2 Pe. 1:21; Ro. 12:6; 1 Co. 2:4-5; 1 Th. 1:5; Ac. 2:12-18; Re. 19:10; Ac. 21:10-11

The gift of discernment – 1 Co. 2:15; 5:12; Ep. 5:10-11; 1 Jn. 2:21; 4:1, 5-6

Balance in the church – 2 Pe. 2:1, 3, 10; 1 Jn. 4:1; 1 Co. 12:4; 1 Th. 5:19-21

Conclusion

Clearly, the gifts of prophecy and discernment should operate in the church for the edification of the whole body. When the word of the Lord goes forth with the inspiration and power of the Spirit by the gift of prophecy, and the saints exercise the gift of discernment in their spiritual experience, the church can then hear from God freely with the confidence and assurance of knowing the truth.



“Tongues and Interpretation of Tongues”

Main Point

Tongues and interpretation of tongues are given by the Spirit to enhance divine communication in the church.

Introduction

Tongues refer to spoken language. When thinking of languages, several typically come to one’s mind. But literally thousands of languages are actually spoken in the world today. Some languages, like English, are widely international and intercultural, and extend worldwide geographically, while other languages like Telugu in India are more limited to an ethnicity or people group. Spoken languages are complex, yet basic and elemental to human interaction and communication (Ge. 11:1-9). Thus, the ministry of the church centers on the exercise of language among us. In today’s lesson, we will see how the Spirit supernaturally uses language to speak through us and to us in order to edify the church.

Key Verse

“To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues” (1 Co. 12:10).

Lesson Summary

Tongues and interpretation of tongues have to do with divine communication: our communicating with God and his communicating with us (1 Co. 12:10). Most of the time, when we pray we talk to God in our own native tongue or in a language we already know and speak. Because we who speak and those who hear us already know the language, everyone understands and benefits from what is communicated in the church. But at times, the Holy Ghost prays through us supernaturally in “unknown” tongues which we do not know and cannot speak by our own ability; for we speak directly to God in the Spirit in mysteries and thus are individually edified by the Spirit in a special way (1 Co. 14:2, 4, 14). All Spirit-baptized believers speak with “unknown” tongues because tongues-speech is the evidence of the baptism with the Holy Ghost (Ac. 2:4; 10:44, 46; 19:6). There is also the gifts of divers (that is, diverse or different) tongues and interpretation of tongues, which the Spirit may exercise and demonstrate in the church as he wills (1 Co. 12:10). Through the gift of diverse tongues, the Holy Ghost can speak through Spirit-baptized believers in languages which are actually known and understood. Although the individual who speaks has no understanding of what is spoken, someone in the gathering of the saints may fully comprehend the language because it is his own native tongue (or a language he understands). For example, all of the saints who are gathered together may speak Spanish, except for a few who speaks Swahili and cannot understand the worship. The Holy Ghost can speak Swahili through one of the Spanish-speaking members in order to edify the whole body. We find an example of this spiritual gift on the day of Pentecost when every man heard the wonderful works of God in his own language (Ac. 2:4-11). When the Holy Ghost fell on the saints and they spoke with other tongues, the nearby crowd was ethnically diverse because the Jews from many nations had traveled to Jerusalem for the feast. The gift of diverse tongues operating through individual believers enabled the onlookers to understand what was being spoken by the Spirit (v. 11). Of course, this manifestation of the Spirit served as a powerful witness for Jesus Christ (Ac. 2:38-39; Jn. 15:26). Nevertheless, the majority of the times when we speak in tongues, as evidenced by Paul’s teaching in 1 Corinthians 14, we speak in “unknown” tongues (that is, no one but God understands what we are saying). Therefore, we primarily speak to God in mysteries when we speak in tongues. Unless the Spirit is speaking by the gift of diverse tongues to someone who already understands the spoken language, the only other way we can understand the tongues is by the interpretation of the Spirit. God has given the gift of interpretation of tongues in order to provide understanding for the edification of the whole church (1 Co. 14:5-14). Paul instructed the church to pray for the operation of the gift of interpretation (v. 13). When thinking about tongues and interpretation of tongues, we should keep in mind that the Spirit is not limited by any language for God understands and speaks all languages. Thus, that which God speaks by the Spirit, he can also interpret by the Spirit. Yet when no interpretation is given by the Spirit, the individual believer should be quiet in the church (the *ekklesia*) and speak “to himself, and to God” (vv. 27-28).

Scripture Study

Tongues – 1 Co. 14:2, 4, 14; Ac. 2:4; 10:44, 46; 19:6

Diverse tongues – Ac. 2:4-11, 38-39; Jn. 15:26

Interpretation of tongues – 1 Co. 14:5-14, 27-28

Conclusion

The apostle Paul’s emphasis on spiritual gifts is the edification of the body. Speaking in tongues edifies individual believers. The gift of diverse tongues edifies those who understand the spoken language. The interpretation of tongues edifies the whole body. How does Paul sum up his teaching on tongues and interpretation of tongues? “Forbid not to speak with tongues. Let all things be done decently and in order” (1 Co. 14:39-40).



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“Signs Following Believers”

Main Point

Miraculous signs of the Spirit serve to confirm the word of God.

Introduction

Signs are an important means of communication. They convey thought, ideas, principles, direction, and so on. The significance of any sign is not the sign itself, but the idea it communicates and represents. For example, the purpose of a street sign is not its cosmetic appearance, but rather to identify a location. Therefore, an attractive sign bearing the wrong street information has no value and is confusing. In fact, it may even cause you to go in the wrong direction. In today’s lesson, we will see the importance of “true” signs following believers in the mission and ministry of the church.

Key Verse

“And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen” (Mk. 16:20).

Lesson Summary

Miraculous signs and wonders accompanied Jesus’ earthly ministry. The Spirit worked all kinds of miraculous signs through him, signs which confirmed that he was indeed the Christ, the Son of God, the Word made flesh (Jn. 1:1, 14, 32-34; 14:9-11; Mt. 11:1-6; Lu. 4:18-19). Jesus taught that his disciples would continue in this same ministry of miraculous (supernatural) signs through the power of the Holy Ghost. The Holy Ghost (the Comforter, the Spirit of truth) would indwell and enable believers to do mighty works in Jesus’ name, “that the Father may be glorified in the Son” (Jn. 14:12-17). After Christ’s resurrection and before his ascension, he instructed the church regarding signs following believers, providing a representative list of miraculous wonders. Believers will cast out devils, speak with new tongues, take up serpents, be protected if they drink something deadly, and lay hands on the sick and heal them (Mk. 16:14-19). Indeed, the Holy Ghost manifested great wonders through the ministry of the New Testament church. For example, Peter did so many signs among the people that they brought their sick into the streets, hoping his shadow would fall on them when he passed (Ac. 5:12-16). Also, Paul sent handkerchiefs or aprons (“prayer cloths”) to the diseased and spiritually tormented, and they were healed and delivered (Ac. 19:11-12; see also 28:1-10). Such mighty works of the Holy Ghost characterized the New Testament church. Nevertheless, while Jesus taught about miraculous signs and wonders that follow believers, he also warned in the last days of deception and false prophets with their “great signs and wonders” (Mt. 24:4, 11, 24). Understanding that “signs” and “lying wonders” can be deceptive (2 Th. 2:8-11; Re. 13:11-16), how then should we think about miraculous signs in the mission and ministry of the church? A miraculous sign must communicate (corroborate, confirm) truth in order to be a true sign. Miraculous signs follow believers, but they actually serve to confirm the preached word, rather than the messenger himself (Mk. 16:20). Therefore, when we witness a manifestation of the Spirit, a supernatural work of God, our focus should not be on the messenger, per se, but rather on the Word of God, for signs serve to confirm the Word, Jesus Christ (Ac. 4:29-30; 6:7-8; 8:4-7, 12-13). Moreover, only when the preached word aligns with the truth of God’s Word should we accept any accompanying signs as a true work of God. Christians who automatically accept outward manifestations as a confirmation of the messenger place themselves at a great risk for deception. By keeping our focus on the Word and the Spirit, not the signs or the messenger, we avoid this critical error.

Scripture Study

Jesus and miraculous signs – Jn. 1:1, 14, 32-34; 14:9-17; Mt. 11:1-6; Lu. 4:18-19; Mk. 16:14-19

The New Testament church and signs – Ac. 5:12-16; 19:11-12; 28:1-10

Lying wonders – Mt. 24:4, 11, 24; 2 Th. 2:8-11; Re. 13:11-16

Signs confirm the Word – Mk. 16:20; Ac. 4:29-30; 6:7-8; 8:4-7, 12-13

Conclusion

Although signs and wonders serve an important function in the witness of the church in these last days, we should not be overly preoccupied with miraculous signs, but rather focused on proclaiming the truth of God’s Word in the power of the Spirit. As we declare the truth with God’s anointing and power, the Spirit will confirm the Word with signs following, as needed.

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“A More Excellent Way”

Main Point

The Holy Spirit's most excellent gift is love.

Introduction

In Zion Assembly, we want to be our very best – we want to excel in all that we endeavor to do for Christ. The gifts of the Spirit are vital when striving for excellence because these gifts enable us to minister beyond our own human capabilities. While all of us have certain God-given gifts and abilities, the gifts of the Spirit take us beyond ourselves and limitations, giving us supernatural ability to minister to others and build up the body of Christ. In today's lesson, we will consider the Spirit's most excellent gift.

Key Verse

“But covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet show I unto you a more excellent way” (1 Co. 12:31).

Lesson Summary

The spiritual gifts are operated by the Holy Ghost through individual members of the church in order to build up and strengthen the whole body of Christ. Although the nine spiritual gifts mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10 are extremely important to the spiritual health of the church and to the fulfillment of the mission of the church, the apostle Paul showed us “a more excellent way.” He instructed the saints to “covet earnestly the best gifts,” but emphasized the superior gift of God's Spirit – LOVE. Paul explained that the love that God demonstrated toward us in Jesus Christ is being poured out in our hearts by the indwelling Holy Spirit (Ro. 5:5, 8). From the moment we are gloriously saved (that is, justified and regenerated by the Holy Spirit) we experience God's great love in our hearts. When we are sanctified by the same Holy Spirit, we are immersed deeper into the love of God in Christ. When we are baptized with the same Holy Ghost, we are immersed even deeper into the love of God in Christ. Even as we are refilled with the Holy Ghost, again and again, we continue to plunge into the greater depths of God's love in Christ. In fact, the immeasurable love of God can be known only in Christ through the inner-working of the Holy Spirit (Ep. 3:16-19). Thus, every Spirit-filled believer possesses the divine enablement to go “deeper, deeper in the love of Jesus.” Indeed, no other gift of God furthers the mission of the church and builds up the body of Christ like the love of God. Paul described divine love as the superior gift in 1 Corinthians 13:1-13. He emphasized love above speaking in tongues. The ability to speak in diverse tongues, even in angelic, heavenly languages, has no value whatsoever without divine love. Such tongues are nothing more than a loud, reverberating noise, like a gong (v. 1). The apostle also elevated love above other gifts like prophecy and faith. Although we might consider someone with deep prophetic revelations and supernatural manifestations of faith to be highly important, still such an individual is nothing without love (v. 2). Moreover, divine love is greater than any charitable and sacrificial work that we do. Unless God's love abides in the believer through the indwelling Spirit, even the most virtuous acts provide no eternal benefits (v. 3). Essentially, Paul placed divine love above the spiritual gifts, because these gifts are meaningless apart from God's love. Furthermore, the apostle clarified the qualities of divine love. The love poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit (Greek: *agape*) is distinctly different from mankind's love (Greek: *phileo*), because man's love can be motivated by fleshly, sinful passions and desires. Such worldly, fleshly love is inferior, and may even be hypocritical, impure, self-centered, and subject to change (Ro. 12:9-10). When Paul described the last days, he explained that people will be “lovers of their own selves” (*philautoi*), “covetous” (*philarguroi*, those who love money), “without natural affection” (loveless, perverted affections), “despisers of those that are good” (*aphilagathoi*, those who do not love the good), “lovers of pleasures [*philedono*] more than lovers of God [*philotheo*]” (2 Ti. 3:1-4). On the contrary, the love of God is steadfast and true, devoted, pure, selfless, and unfailing (1 Co. 13:4-8).

Scripture Study

A more excellent way – 1 Co. 12:31; Ro. 5:5, 8; Ep. 3:16-19

Love: The superior gift – 1 Co. 13:1-3

The qualities of divine love – Ro. 12:9-10; 2 Ti. 3:1-4; 1 Co. 13:4-8

Conclusion

A well-noted hymn of the church reads, “O love of God, how rich and pure! How measureless and strong! It shall forevermore endure, the saints' and angels' song.” Love is a more excellent way – the superior gift of the Spirit excelling all others. Let every member of the church desire to excel in spiritual gifts, and above all, seek to excel in love.



“Prophecy”

Main Point

The Holy Ghost is the Spirit of truth. Spiritual gifts should therefore support the church in prophesying the truth.

Introduction

The Holy Ghost is the Spirit of Truth. His work in part is to teach the truth, testify of Christ, and guide into all truth (Jn. 14:17, 26; 15:26; 16:13). The many manifestations of the Spirit are given to comfort the believer and confirm the word of God, the truth. In today’s lesson, reflecting on the gifts of the Spirit, we will consider the priority of the spoken word of God.

Key Verse

“Follow after charity, and desire spiritual gifts, but rather that ye may prophesy” (1 Co. 14:1).

Lesson Summary

In 1 Corinthians 12:1-31, the apostle Paul taught about spiritual gifts, encouraging the saints to desire them (v. 31), because the gifts of the Spirit edify and build up the body of Christ. The gifts are necessary for the health of the church. Nevertheless, in chapter thirteen he went on to explain that spiritual gifts in the absence of divine love prove to be meaningless and profitless for the church (vv. 1-3). Paul then urged the church to make love its first priority, rather than spiritual gifts (1 Co. 13:13; 14:1). Nevertheless, he again exhorted the saints to desire spiritual gifts but then gave greater emphasis to prophesying (14:1). In other words, Paul was attempting to establish divine order in the church in regard to the operation of spiritual gifts. We must be yielded to the Holy Ghost in order to be used by God, but we, as instruments of the Spirit, are not out of control in the exercise of spiritual gifts. The Spirit desires order in the church; otherwise, Paul would not have taught order (1 Co. 14:39-40). Specifically, Paul contrasted prophesying with speaking in tongues (vv. 1-5). He considered both prophesying and speaking in unknown tongues to be divinely inspired communication. In both cases, God is speaking through individual members of the body. However, Paul gave the greater importance to the one who prophesies, simply because his words are spoken with understanding, whereas speaking in tongues remains a mystery without an interpretation (vv. 2, 5). Speaking in tongues edifies the one who speaks, but prophesying edifies all who hear. Speaking in tongues spiritually builds up the individual believer, but prophesying builds up the whole church (vv. 3-4). Clearly, Paul wanted the saints to have the freedom to speak in tongues when they gathered together, but his greater desire was that they prophesy in the church (vv. 5, 18-19), because the spiritual goal in our gathering together as one body is the edification of the whole church. Personal spirituality and communion with God are expressed in deep and mysterious ways, even humanly inexpressible ways, and thus the need for speaking in tongues. Paul declared, “I thank my God, I speak with tongues more than ye all” (v. 18). But our corporate spirituality in the church must attain a practical, applicable, and meaningful expression in order to benefit the whole body. In other words, individuals may speak in tongues, weep and groan in the Spirit, and shout and rejoice with joy unspeakable, and while this is spiritually edifying for the individuals who are so exercised of the Spirit, yet if such expressions do not produce something concrete, tangible, and beneficial for the whole church, many believers will not receive what they need in order to thrive spiritually. Paul explained it thus, that not only people, but inanimate things have sound. For example, instruments have distinct sounds by which they are identified. If their sounds have no distinction, then they cannot be identified for particular purposes, as when an alarm is sounded. In the same way, when we speak in the church, we must speak in distinct ways that communicate something concrete and understandable. Otherwise, people depart from the house of God spiritually unfulfilled (vv. 6-11). Therefore, when addressing spirituality in the church, Paul’s focus was not on tongues, but rather on the spoken word of God. When the Word is declared among the saints with the inspiration and anointing of the Spirit (that is, when we prophesy), the church is greatly strengthened in the will and mind of Christ. Prophesying edifies, exhorts, and comforts the church when it is done decently and orderly (vv. 3, 29-33).

Scripture Study

Divine order in the church – 1 Co. 12:31; 13:13; 14:1, 39-40

Prophesying rather than tongues – 1 Co. 14:1-5, 18-19

The spoken word of God – 1 Co. 14:3, 6-11, 29-33

Conclusion

Believers prophesy in various ways, such as in preaching, teaching, witnessing, testimonials, praise, and prayer. Moreover, many powerful messages from the Lord have been given from the pew (members), as well as the pulpit (ministers). When members of the body are yielded to the Holy Ghost, he will inspire them to declare the word of God in many wonderful ways in order to establish the church in the truth.

