

The Spirit's Gifts and the Church's Duty

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Over the next few Sunday mornings, the Lord willing, I want to talk on a chain of topics or ideas which the church of God needs very badly. And I'm going to read this morning, or rather, I'm going to let Paul talk to us and give us the Scripture, out of which later, over the next few Sundays, I expect to draw some truths.

Now I'm not going to tell you from where I'm reading, because I'm reading from Weymouth's translation, a very old and honored translation, deliberately this morning. I rarely do it, but I want to today.

The man of God is talking to us. He says, Now, about spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant. We can go astray as easily by being uninformed as we can by being wrongly informed. We have no right to be either.

You know that when you were heathens, pagans, that is, Americans, you went astray after dumb idols. By dumb he means idols that couldn't talk. Paul wanted his God to talk. And what disgusted him was that the gods of the heathen couldn't talk. Jeremiah and Isaiah had something to say about that too. A dumb idol is no good. Dumb gods, no gods at all.

And he said, for this reason I inform you, that no one speaking under the influence of the Spirit of God says, Jesus is accursed. That is, it's quoted. Nobody says, and the quotation is, Jesus is accursed. And that no one is able to say, in quotes, Jesus is the Lord, except under the influence of the Holy Spirit. That is, I assume, he means, no one is able really to say. You can mouth anything. But nobody can actually say and believe that Jesus is the Lord except by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Now, he says, there are various kinds of gifts, but there is the same Spirit. Various kinds of official service, and yet the same Lord. Various kinds of effects, and yet the same God. Notice you have the Trinity here, the Spirit, the Lord, and God. The same God who produces all the effects in each person, but to each a manifestation of the Spirit has been granted for the common good.

God never gives a gift to anybody except for the common good. To one, he says, the word of wisdom has been granted through the Spirit. And we can use a little of that now.

And to another, the word of knowledge by the will of the same Spirit. And to another, in the same Spirit, special faith. And to another, various gifts of healing in the same Spirit. And to another, the exercise of miraculous powers. And to another, the gift of prophecy. To another, the power of discernment between Spirits. To one, varieties of the gift of tongues. To another, the interpretation of tongues. But all these results are brought about by one and the same Spirit allotting to them each individually as He pleases. For just as the body is one and yet has many parts, and all its parts, many as they are, constitute one body, so it is with Christ. In fact, in one Spirit all of us, whether Jews or

Greeks, slaves or free men, were baptized to form one body. And we all are imbued, or were imbued, with one Spirit.

Now, he writes to a different group and says this. To each of us individually, His grace was given, measured out with the munificence of Christ. For this reason, Scripture says, He ascended on high, He led a host of captives and gave gifts to man. And he puts in parentheses this explanation. Now this ascended, what does it mean but that he had first descended into the lower regions of the earth? He who descended is the same who ascended again far above all the heavens in order to fill the universe.

And He Himself, which is Jesus of course, appointed some to be apostles, and some to be prophets, and some to be evangelists, some to be pastors and teachers, in order to fully to equip His people for the work of serving, for the building up of Christ's body, till all of us arrive at oneness in faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and at mature manhood and the stature of full grown men in Christ.

So, we shall no longer be babes, nor shall we resemble mariners tossed on the waves and carried about with every changing wind of doctrine; according to men's cleverness and unscrupulous cunning, it makes use of every shifting device to mislead. But we shall lovingly hold to the truth and shall in all respects grow up into union with Him who is our head, even Christ. Dependent, he says, on Him, the whole body, its various parts closely fitting and firmly adhering to one another, grows by the aid of every contributory ligament with power proportioned to the need of each individual part, so as to build itself up in the Spirit of love.

And he wrote to another, not a group this time, but to one of his boys. He wasn't going to be around too long, and he wanted to get everything straightened out, so he said, now, begins now, doesn't he, about every time, says, Now the Spirit speaketh, or expressly declares, that in later times some will fall away from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and the teachings of demons.

Paul, obviously, had not been taught not to offend. This is offensive language, that some people are listening to deceiving spirits and the teachings of demons, and this through the hypocrisy of men who teach falsely and have their own consciences seared as with a hot iron, forbidding people to marry and insisting on abstinence from foods which God has created to be partaken of with thankfulness by those who believe and know the truth.

Paul wasn't married, but he was determined that nobody was going to lay the yoke of celibacy upon anybody. They could marry if they wanted to, as far as he was concerned. He told them that they would have double trouble, but he said, If you want to get married, it's natural. He told them that somewhere else.

And then he was a man who wasn't a great eater. He was a frugal, careful man, practicing fasting in long cryings and tears, but he was determined that nobody was going to lay compulsory fasting on anybody. So, he says, these false teachers are forbidding people to marry and insisting on abstinence from foods which God has created to be partaken of with thankfulness by those who believe and know the truth.

For everything that God has created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if only it is received with thanksgiving. It is made holy by the Word of God and prayer.

Now he said, If you put this to the brethren, you will be a good servant of Jesus Christ, nourished on the lessons of the faith and of the good teaching which you have faithfully followed. But profane stories, fit only for old women, have nothing to do with them. Train yourself for godliness. Exercise for the body is not useless, but godliness is useful in every respect. Physical exercise helps you, a little, but godliness helps you in every way, possessing the promise of the present and the future life.

Faithful is this saying and deserving of universal acceptance, and this is the motive of our toiling and wrestling that we have our hopes fixed on the living God who is the Savior of all mankind and especially of believers. Command this and teach this. Let no one think slightingly of you because you are a young man. I don't need that. But in speech, conduct, love, faith, and purity, be an example to your fellow Christians. Until I come, pay attention to public reading.

Now what do you suppose he wanted them to publicly read? Scriptures. Exhortation and teaching. Whether that says public reading or not, I don't know. We'd have to look it up in the Greek, and mostly it simply says reading. But he says public reading in this translation.

Do not neglect the gifts with which you are endowed, which were conferred on you by prophetic indication when the hands of the elders were placed upon you. Practice these duties and be absorbed in them, so that your progress in them may be evident to all. Take pains with yourself and your teaching. Persevere in these things, for by doing this you will secure your own and your hearer's salvation. Well, now, of course, I read from 1 Corinthians 12, from Ephesians 4, and from 1 Timothy 4.

Now, it is my duty and my high Christian privilege first to pray for this church. No man has any right to talk to a crowd he hasn't prayed for. No man. So, it is my duty, if you want to allow the word "duty" in your Christian thinking, most people don't. I think the old word duty might well come back again.

A colt out in the pasture field knows no such word as duty. But his well-trained, hard-working mother in the harness, pulling the wagon of the plow, she knows duty. The colt only knows freedom, but the mother knows duty.

And I wonder if our inordinate desire for freedom and our strange fear of duty, may not be one thing that's wrong with us now. But it is a duty nevertheless, but a privilege, certainly a high privilege, to pray for this church. And it is another, though perhaps not such a high duty and privilege, to preach to the people who foregather here. And by church I do not mean this organization. Strictly speaking, you cannot organize a church, and the church is not a church by organization.

We live in society and we live under laws, and therefore, being what we are, it is necessary for us to organize. I believe in organization, a free, loose organization. I think it's necessary. Paul told Titus to set things in order and to appoint men. That meant organization. It could have meant nothing else.

But I say you can't organize a church, the same as you can't organize a ball club. You can have a ball club which has a captain and so many pitchers and so many catchers and so many outfielders and so many infielders and so many basemen, but that doesn't make a club as a certain Chicago club proves. It's just an organization. And so, you can't organize a church.

You can have your pastor, elders, deacons, deaconesses, and all the rest, and under law, a constitution, but you don't have a church. The church is something else altogether. The church is within that organization, maybe, but that organization is not the church. The church is the assembly of the saints. And wherever the saints meet, you have the church. And wherever they habitually meet, then you come to name the church, maybe, and thus you have a church, such as this one or some other church.

And so, it's a joy to preach to those who have over the past years and who do now and who will preach or foregather in this place, and it's a privilege to preach to them and to guide and to plan for the future.

Now I try to see the church whole. I want to see you as a part of something vastly bigger. I'd like you to think of yourself as part of something bigger than you are. You know, the sociologists and psychologists talk about the need for belonging. They say that a rejected child is, maybe, developed dangerous mental or nervous traits because he has no sense of belonging.

And they explain the clubs of youngsters, the wolf packs that tramp our streets, as those who in the main come from homes where they have been rejected, where the father drinks, the mother too, and where they're out nights, and where they're not loved after they're five years old or six, and where they feel they don't belong to anything, and they want to join something in order to feel that they belong. There's strength, there's human strength in a sense of belonging to something. That's why we have secret orders.

Men who are pushed around by their wives and pulled off by their bosses until they get the feeling, they have no soul they can call their own, not a tattered shred of self-respect is left, they go join a lodge. And as the cartoon had it, the wife is speaking to her husband, and she says, the high exalted potentate can't go tonight because I won't let him.

And they become high exalted potentates and name themselves big names, but the point is, little men want to belong to something. And that is not a bad thing, that's a good thing, because we're gregarious by nature. We're not wolves to go alone or travel in narrow packs which break up immediately, but we're sheep to travel in flocks that stay together a lifetime.

So, when I talk about the church, I talk about the whole church. Unless I say this church, because I want you to know that this church is a part of a great church. I can imagine how lonely, now I'm talking in the presence of a young soldier who's just back, and he may contradict me for this good-naturedly afterward, but I don't think he will. I can imagine how lonely a soldier would feel in a foreign land among a people whose

language he can't speak except for his uniform, that identifies him with a vast crowd of such fellows all over the world, and particularly with his homeland and his flag.

The sense of belonging is necessary. The young fellow somewhere in some remote corner of the earth wearing an American uniform received a cable or word somewhere from the commander-in-chief that he'd received a dishonorable discharge and was no longer a part of the army. I can imagine what an utter collapse it would be to him, psychologically he'd break down, and half his manhood would leak away from his broken heart.

Belonging to something is what matters, my brethren. Belonging to something that's going to last, and something that's worthy, something that's valuable. I couldn't belong to a man-made society; I couldn't possibly do it.

Imagine me getting on my knees and swearing to follow the order of this and that lodge. God made my knees hard to bend, and my American upbringing has made them impossible to bend, unless God bends them. Now imagine that I could ever do that, I never could, but I want to belong to something.

No man is ever individualistic enough to go it alone, no man. The man who does is sick, the hermit is sick. A man who lives alone in his attic, and who refuses even to answer the door, and who sneaks out in the dark, and buys something at a delicatessen, and sneaks back, that man's sick.

He's not a normal man. A normal man, good or bad, sinner or saint, wants to walk out and look around at others of his kind and say, I belong. This is my race. These are my people. This is my language I hear spoken there. That's my flag flying there on top of that school building. I belong here.

That is necessary to our welfare, necessary to our health, our mental health. And that is why rejection, unwanted children, and persons who feel themselves rejected, can sometimes develop very serious and dangerous trends. I want to think of this church then as its relation to the whole church of Christ.

That's why I like to sing songs about the church, the church of Jesus Christ, which He purchased with His own blood, part in heaven and part on earth, and of every color and tribe and nation and tongue around the world, as the Bible says. And we're a part of that.

We didn't begin when Dr. A. B. Simpson organized the Society for Christian Missions back in New York in 1884. If I thought that for a second. I'd never finish this sentence. I'd break off with a semicolon, and I'd close this Bible and leave and resign, and find the church that went back to Pentecost.

But I believe that we're a part of that which does go back to Pentecost. I believe in the apostolic succession. And I believe that it's not a succession of bishops and men with names and organizations. I believe it's a group, it's a living organism. Just as I believe that my organism goes back to my great-great grandfather Adam, and that I'm a part

that the living stream floated down the centuries, and ties me organically and racially and vitally with the first man.

So, I believe that this church is organically and vitally a part of the true church of Christ that began when the Holy Ghost fell on a body of believers and made them one, and baptized them into one body and made them God's people in a way that no people ever had been before. And therefore, every Christian is a part of us, and we're a part of every Christian group around the world.

When I hear a good thing or read a good thing that's said or done by some great man or good man or good woman anywhere in the world for Christ's sake, I have a good feeling in my heart that's part of me. That's part of me. That belongs to me, and I belong to that. And whether I ever meet that person on earth or not doesn't matter. The church of our Lord Jesus Christ is one. She's one around the whole earth.

So, I want to think of her that way, and I want to think of you as belonging to the great Church of our Lord Jesus around the earth. And I want to think of you and your relation to God first of all. Your relation to God first of all. A man got into the papers here the other day by starting a little campaign to get all of his people to vote. Whether you vote or not is your business. I expect to. If you do or don't, I'm not going to needle you about that.

I'm only going to tell you that every country has the kind of leaders it deserves. But I'm not concerned so much with whether you're a Democrat or for a Republican, or I'm not concerned so much for whom you're going to vote. But I'm deeply concerned about your relation to God. That's first. That's first.

Before there were any Tories or Whigs or Democrats or Socialists or Republicans or what have you around the world, there was God. Before man ever knew the privilege of the ballot, there was God. And your relation to God is absolutely first.

And then your relation to others is very important too. And your habits and your tastes and your service, all this is very important. And so, we're going to think about what a church must do and what it's our privilege to do and what God will give us power to do, and the gifts of the Spirit and all this over the next weeks. And to do all this requires itself a gift of the Spirit.

Now, back in the book of Isaiah, if I can find it without keeping you waiting too long, in the book of Isaiah there's a passage which I love very much. There shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. Now that, of course, is Jesus.

And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord, and shall make him a quick understanding in the fear of the Lord. And he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears, but with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth.

Now, that's said about Jesus, but that's true, or ought to be true of the members of the body of Christ. For just as the oil was put upon the high priest's head, and it ran down to the skirts of his garment, and cleared down to his feet, and gave fragrance and sweetness to his whole body, so the mighty power that was poured upon the head of Jesus must trickle down and flow down to every member of the body. And so what was true of him can be true of his ministers. The Spirit of wisdom shall rest upon him, and the Spirit of understanding, and the Spirit of counsel and might, and the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of Jehovah and shall make him a quick understanding.

And he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes. The curse of modern leadership is looking around and getting your bearings from what you see. Neither shall he reprove after the hearing of his ears, listening carefully to see which way things are moving, and then judging accordingly. No, he'll never make that mistake.

But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and with equity the meek of the earth. And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins. And he'll always be right in his spirit, and right in his wisdom, and right in his judgment. And he'll not be judged, nor allow himself to be judged by what's going on round about.

Now, my dear friends, I'm going to break this off here within five minutes. This is Communion Sunday, and I've got lots more to say developing this thesis, perhaps until Brother Reidhead comes. But it takes a lot of patience and a lot of persistence and a lot of courage in this day in which we live to find the will of God and to take it.

And I believe that God wants to help us. I believe that He wants to do something new for us here in this church, in our fellowship, I believe it. He's doing something new for me, and I can't see why it should not flow out and down and over and up and around until we're all swimming in it. And I can't see why God should omit any of us in the breaking of the bread nor in the pouring of the oil.

You and I stand here and mingle together here and foregather here as an assembly of the saints, with all of the obligation resting upon us that rested upon them at Pentecost. It has not diminished one little bit, and there is not anywhere one sentence of Scripture to be found, nowhere is there any proof or a line that could be twisted nor tortured into teaching that the organic, living, vibrating church of Jesus Christ, just before He comes, won't have every obligation and every privilege and every right and every power at her disposal that she had when she first was born in the early part of the book of Acts.

You know, there is such a thing as being tough about this, my brethren. There is such a thing as saying to God and to yourself, and at times maybe over your shoulder, to the devil, that you're not going to give up to the times. And that you're not going to give up to the ways of the world, or even to the common ways of religion round about you. And that you're not going to judge yourself by others, and you're not going to allow your Church to be judged by others. And if it looks a little better or a little worse, then worry about it or be glad.

But you're going to take the New Testament's standards as your standard. And just as sure as God sits in His high heaven, unless Christ comes within the next twenty-five years, unless He comes within the next twenty-five years, the Christian Missionary

Alliance and all such groups as we are, fundamentalists generally, are going to have to recall and have back upon us a revival that will eventuate in a new moral power, and a new separation, and a new cleanness, and a new bestowment of the mighty enablings of the Spirit, or God will have to raise up from somewhere a new group to carry the torch.

Now, I prophesied twelve years ago about something, and it came to pass that my only mistake was I didn't go far enough in what I said. I'll tell you about that next Sunday, if you honor me by appearing here, or honor your own soul by coming to the house of the Lord. And I'm prophesying this without fear.

If we do not do something, if the church doesn't do something, if we don't make a hard swing back to the roots of Christianity and beginning over again to seek the face of God, God is going to pass us up, as a farmer passes up, eggshells that are empty, throws them out and buries them. As you throw away tin cans that have been emptied and their contents taken, and they're thrown out to be carried away in the refuse. As we bury dead men whose spirit has left them, and who can no longer stand up or talk or hear.

We reverently lay away the shell where they were. There was a day when Israel, believing in the perpetuity of her place in the sun, said to Jesus, we be not born of fornication, we be the seed of Abraham, and this temple is the temple of God. And Jesus said, they are the children of Abraham who do the works of Abraham, and as for this temple, there'll be a day when not one stone will be upon another.

And that came to pass literally, and the Roman emperor sent his plows and plowed the foundation with plows. To fulfill, he'd never heard it said, and he didn't know Jesus had ever said it. But Jesus said, not one stone will stand on another. And they plowed up the foundations after knocking every stone down level with the ground. The very sacred temple, God will leave it when it ceases to fulfill His purpose and do His will. There isn't an organization in the world God won't desert.

The Salvation Army, the Christian Missionary Alliance, the Nazarenes, the Mariners, Christian Businessmen's Committee, any group anywhere, God will desert them in the hour that they cease to fulfill His will. There isn't a denomination on this wide earth anywhere, you can't make your robes long enough, nor your chains heavy enough, nor your titles long enough to say the church, when once she ceases to fulfill the will of God. There isn't a group anywhere, God will raise them up in 1884 and desert them in 1964, unless they continue to fulfill the will of God.

There isn't a group like this anywhere, my brethren, unless we follow on to know the Lord and humbly and meekly follow Jesus Christ in fear and godly reverence and in faith and in love and charity. There isn't a church, I say, anywhere that God won't turn away from and go to some colored mission or some group somewhere of simple-hearted people that don't know too much and don't have too much, but that do love God and want to obey him. I say, God will desert a crowd anywhere.

It doesn't mean the individual members of that group who are Christian people will be deserted, but it does mean that the cloud will lift from that assembly. Dear God, I pray that if it ever lifts from this church, God will tell me twenty-four hours before the

tragedy occurs, for I want time to get out of town. I want time to get away where I don't have to stand and look at the despoiling of a church.

Only when the cloud is there and the fire, only when the Holy Ghost is present, and the Shekinah glows is a church a true church. And then if you lack everything else, you still have a true church. Now I've read from Paul about the possibilities, the privileges, the obligation, the commission that is ours, the job we've got to do, our future, what we've got to do right here and to the ends of the earth.

I've read to you about the power that God gives to enable us to do it. Then I have read of the strange teachings that come in from everywhere to spoil that holy oil. So, over the next weeks we're going to talk about it, God willing. But that will be all for now.