

SPIRIT OF PROPHECY.

BY ELDER JAMES WHITE.

ONCE, man walked with God in Eden. With open face he beheld the glory of the Lord, and talked with God, and Christ, and angels, in Paradise, without a dimming vale between. Man fell from his moral rectitude and innocency, and was driven from the garden, from the tree of life, and from the visible presence of the Lord and his holy angels. Moral darkness, like the pall of death, has since cast its shadows everywhere, and everywhere the blight and mildew of sin have been seen. And amid the general gloom and moral wretchedness, man has wandered from the gates of Paradise for nearly six thousand years, subject to sickness, pain, sorrow, tears, and death. He has also been subject to the temptations and wiles of the devil, so much so that it is the sad history of man, throughout the entire period of his fallen state, that Satan has reigned with almost universal sway.

When all was lost in Adam, and the shades of night darkened the moral heavens, there soon appeared the star of hope in Christ, and with it there was established a means of communication between God and man. In his fallen state, man could not converse face to face with God, and with Christ, and with angels, as when in his Eden purity. But through the ministration of holy angels could the great God speak to him in dreams and in visions. "If there be a prophet among you, I the Lord will make myself known unto him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream." Num. 12:6.

The manifestation of the spirit of prophecy was designed for all dispensations. The Sacred Record nowhere restricts it to any particular period of time, from the fall to the final restitution. The Bible recognizes its manifestation alike in the patriarchal age, in the Jewish age, and in the Christian age. Through this medium God communed with holy men of old. Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied, and so extensive was the range of his prophetic vision, and so minute, that he could look down over long ages, and describe the coming of the Lord, and the execution of the last Judgment upon the ungodly. Jude, verses 14, 15.

God spake to his prophets in the Jewish dispensation in visions and in dreams, and opened before them the great things of the future, especially those connected with the first advent of Christ to suffer for sinners, and his second appearing in glory to destroy his enemies, and complete the redemption of his people. If the spirit of prophecy nearly disappeared from the Jewish church for a few centuries toward the close of that dispensation, on account of the corruptions in that church, it re-appeared at its close to usher in the Messiah. Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, "was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied." Simeon, a just and devout man, who was "waiting for the consolation of Israel," came by the Spirit into the temple, and prophesied of Jesus as "a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of Israel." And Anna, a prophetess, "spake of him to all them that look for redemption in Jerusalem." And there was no greater prophet than John, who was chosen of God to introduce to Israel "the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world."

The Christian age commenced with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and the manifestation of

various spiritual gifts. Among these was the gift of prophecy. After commissioning his disciples to go into all the world and preach the gospel, Jesus says to them: "And these signs shall follow them that believe: In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover." Mark 16:17, 18. On the day of Pentecost, when the Christian dispensation was fully opened, some of these gifts were manifested in a wonderful manner. Acts 2:1-11. Luke, in giving account of his travels with Paul and others, when a quarter of a century of the Christian age had already passed, after speaking of entering into the house of Philip the evangelist, says: "And the same man had four daughters, virgins, which did prophesy. And as we tarried there many days, there came down from Judea a certain prophet, named Agabus." Acts 21:9, 10. Again, still later, we see the beloved John, on the Isle of Patmos, imbued with the spirit of prophecy in all its fullness. The wonderful Revelation was given unto him when more than half a century of the Christian age had passed. And here the New Testament record leaves us without a single intimation that the gifts of the Spirit should cease from the church till the day of glory should be ushered in by the second appearing of Jesus Christ.

Since the great apostasy, these gifts have rarely been manifested; and, for this reason, professed Christians generally suppose that they were designed to be limited to the period of the primitive church. But from the time of the primitive Christians to the present, there have been manifestations among the most devoted followers of Jesus, which

have been recognized by nearly all of the leading denominations as the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Then should not the errors and the unbelief of the church be assigned as reasons why these manifestations have been so seldom, rather than that God has taken these blessings from the church? When the people of God attain to primitive faith and practice, as they most certainly will under the last message, the latter rain will be poured out, and all the gifts will be revived. The former rain was given at the commencement of the Christian age, in the time of the sowing of the gospel seed, to cause it to germinate and take good root. Then the church enjoyed the gifts. And when the latter rain shall be poured out at the close of the dispensation, to ripen the golden harvest for the garner of God, then will the gifts of the Holy Spirit be manifested in all their fullness.

To this agree the words of the prophet as quoted by Peter: "And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; and on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy; and I will show wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke; the sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come." Acts 2: 17-20. The spirit of prophecy is here seen among the especial signs of the last days. Its revival in the last days was to constitute one of the most noted signs of the approaching end. This is evident from its being classed with the most prominent signs, in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars, and

such wonders in the heavens above, and in the earth beneath, as blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke.

Of all the blessings which God has bestowed upon his people, the gift of his Son excepted, none have been so sacred, and so important to their welfare, as the gift of his holy law, and his Holy Spirit. And none have been so well calculated to thwart the plans of Satan, and, consequently, to stir his rage, as these. And when that people should arise in the last generation of men, who should be observing all ten of the precepts of God's holy law, and should recognize the revival of the spirit of prophecy, they might expect to feel that bitterness from their opponents which can arise only from the direct inspiration of Satan. "And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ." Rev. 12:17.

"The testimony of Jesus," said the angel to John, "is the spirit of prophecy." Rev. 19:10. It is the keeping of the commandments of God, and the recognition of the revival of the spirit of prophecy by the remnant of the church, or the Christians of the last generation, that stirs the ire of the dragon.

The Jewish age, notwithstanding its apostasies, opened and closed with special manifestations of the Spirit of God. And it is not reasonable to suppose that the Christian age, the light of which, compared with the former dispensation, is as the light of the sun to the feeble rays of the moon, should commence in glory, and close in obscurity. And since a special work of the Spirit was necessary to prepare a people for the first advent of Christ, how much more so for his second advent.

God has never manifested his power to his people

simply for their gratification; but according to their necessities has he wrought for them. Then we may safely conclude that, as his people are passing the perils of the last days in the final struggle with the aroused powers of darkness, when false prophets shall have power to show great signs and wonders, insomuch that, if it were possible, they would deceive the very elect, our gracious God will bless and strengthen his fainting people with the gifts, as well as the graces, of the Holy Spirit.

We have seen that the manifestation of the spirit of prophecy in dreams and in visions became necessary in consequence of man's being separated from the visible presence of God. But when the tabernacle of God shall be with men, and he shall dwell with them, and God himself shall be with them; Rev. 21:3; when Christ shall come again with all the holy angels, and receive his people unto himself, that where he shall be, there they may be also; John 14:3; and when man redeemed shall walk and talk with God, and Christ, and angels, in Eden restored; *then* there will be no further need of the spirit of prophecy.

When man in Eden stood in all the perfection of his manhood, before the blight of sin had touched anything that God had made for him, and with open face beheld the glory of the Lord, he could have no need of the spirit of prophecy. But when Eden was lost in consequence of transgression, and man was doomed to grope his way from the gates of Paradise, enshrouded in the moral gloom that resulted from the curse and the reign of Satan, he needed the light of the spirit of prophecy. And his need in this respect will continue more or less urgent until the restitution, when the redeemed shall walk and talk with God, and with Christ, and with the holy angels; in Eden restored.

The apostle to the Corinthians clearly sustains this position. He introduces the subject by stating, "Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant." 1 Cor. 12:1. He deemed the subject of too great importance to leave the church at Corinth in ignorance respecting it. He proposes to instruct them. We shall do well to avail ourselves of the benefit of his teachings.

In this chapter the apostle introduces the human body with its several members acting in harmony, one dependent upon the other, as an illustration of the Christian church, with its members, and the several gifts God has set in the church. He then makes the application of the figure thus: "Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular. And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues." Verses 27, 28.

Let it be borne in mind that *God has set* prophets, miracles, and gifts of healings, in the Christian church as verily as he has teachers, helps, and governments. And this expression, "God hath set" them in the church, means more than that he would communicate with this people by his Holy Spirit in the Christian age the same as he had in former dispensations. It conveys the idea that God had especially endowed the Christian church with them. He had established them in the church, to remain until the return of her absent Lord. This was done because the church needed them. Did the primitive church need them? So did the true church need them to light her pathway during the dark period of her persecutions and martyrdom. And much more does the church need the gifts in making her course through the perils of the last days, and in making ready to receive her soon-coming Lord.

The design of the gifts, and also the time of their continuance in the church, are definitely expressed by the apostle to the Ephesians: "And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ; till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." Chap. 4:11-13.

It cannot be shown that the church did, in the lifetime of Paul, reach the state of unity, knowledge and perfection, here mentioned. And certainly the church did not enjoy these during her apostasy, 2 Thess. 2:3, and the period of her flight into the wilderness. Rev. 12:6. Nor has she reached this state of unity, knowledge and perfection, since the labors of Martin Luther. The church to-day is almost infinitely below this state of unity, knowledge and perfection. And not until the Christians of the last generation of men shall be brought to the enjoyment of it by the last warning message, and all the means God may employ to prepare them to be translated to Heaven without tasting death, will the ultimate design of the gifts be realized.

But Paul, in 1 Cor. 13, has distinctly shown when the gifts would cease. In the first part of this chapter the apostle discourses upon the pre-eminence of love (improperly translated *charity*) over the gift of tongues, gift of prophecy, faith, liberality to the poor, and courage to give one's body to be burned. These, in the absence of love, are valueless. He then describes the virtues and riches of love, closing with these words: "Charity [love] never faileth; but whether there be prophecies, they

shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away." Verse 8. While love is not only the crowning Christian grace here, but will reach forward to all eternity and be the crowning glory of the redeemed, the gifts will cease with faith and hope. At the glorious appearing of the Lord, faith will be lost in sight, hope in fruition, prophecies will fail to be any longer a light to the church, tongues will cease to be a sign, and the faint knowledge of the present dim night will vanish before the perfect knowledge of the perfect day as the dim rays of the moon vanish before the light of the rising sun.

Next come the forcible words of verses 9 and 10: "For we know in part, and we prophesy in part; but when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away." We still wait for that which is perfect to come. And while we wait, may our dear, absent Lord manifest himself to his waiting people through the gifts. "For," says Paul, speaking of the present imperfect state, "we know in part, and we prophesy in part." How long shall the spirit of prophecy serve the church? When will it be done away? Answer: "But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away." This should settle the question of the perpetuity of the gifts in the Christian church.

The popular view, however, is this: The gifts were given to the primitive church, to remain only during the lifetime of Christ's first apostles. At their death, the gifts were to be removed from the church. But let it be remembered that a great change takes place when the gifts are to cease, and that change is from an imperfect state to that which is perfect; from the dimness of night to the glory of perfect day. We need not inquire if such a

change took place at the death of the first apostles; for all who have any knowledge of the history of the primitive church, know that whatever changes did take place in the church about the time of the death of the apostles, were not for the better, but decidedly for the worse. Even in Paul's day the mystery of iniquity already worked in the church. 2 Thess. 2:7. And the apostle, addressing the elders of the church at Miletus, says: "For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them." Acts 20:29, 30. But if we apply this great change to the close of the present dispensation, and the introduction of the eternal day of glory, all is plain. Here we have the clearest proof that the gifts were not to be done away until the second appearing of Christ.

Paul continues with an illustration of the present imperfect state, and the future state of perfection and glory: "When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things." Verse 11. His childhood represents the present imperfect state; his manhood, the perfection of the immortal state. This is evident. Now suppose we are wrong, and that Paul's childhood represents the church in his day, endowed with the gifts; and that his manhood represents the church after his death, stripped of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and fast sinking away toward the great apostasy! Absurdity!

And still the apostle continues with another beautiful illustration of the change from the present dispensation, during which the church was to enjoy the comparatively dim light of the gifts, as she

walked by faith and hope, to the open glories of the world to come, when the redeemed shall walk with God in Eden restored, and talk face to face with Christ and angels. He says: "For now we see through a glass darkly; but then, face to face." Verse 12. To the view that the gifts were to cease at the death of the first apostles, and that with their death came the glorious change illustrated by these words of the apostle, we need only to repeat, Absurdity!

The truth of God upon this subject is consistent and harmonious with itself, and with all divine truth. The spirit of prophecy, in consequence of the fall and man's separation from the visible presence of God, became a necessity. This necessity has not been obviated by any past change of dispensation. And no dispensation needs the gifts of the Holy Spirit more than the Christian age; and at no time in the long period of man's separation from God's visible presence, have they been so much needed as amid the perils of the raging tempests of the last days. But when the Redeemer shall come, the controversy be ended, the saints' rest given, and they, all immortal, meet around the throne with angels, and face to face behold the glory of God and the Lamb, the spirit of prophecy will be numbered among Heaven's choicest blessings of the past.

But the skeptical objector inquires, "Where are the gifts? If your position be correct, why have they not been manifested in the church all along down ever since God set them in the church? Why are not the sick healed by faith now?" We are aware that this is the principal objection brought against the Scriptural doctrine of the perpetuity of the gifts, therefore it demands especial notice. We reply as follows:—

1. The sick were not always healed by faith in Paul's day. He says (2 Tim. 4:20), "Trophimus have I left at Miletum sick." Again he says to Timothy (1 Tim. 5:23), "Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities." God could have answered the prayers of his servant Paul, and raised up Trophimus, and healed Timothy's infirmities, if this had been best. We conclude that God has not designed in any age of the church to manifest his power so far that there should be no sick among Christians. But in cases where it would be for the good of the afflicted, and for his own glory, he has manifested his power, and will manifest it.

2. The unbelief of the professed followers of Christ in the manifestation of spiritual gifts is sufficient reason why they are not more fully manifested. It is said of Christ, "And he did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief." Matt. 13:58. There is an impious unbelief with many at this day, even of some who profess to take the Bible as their guide, which resembles that of those who, mockingly, said of Christ as he hung on the cross, "Let Christ, the King of Israel, descend now from the cross, that we may see and believe." It is sometimes said in reply to the Bible evidences of the perpetuity of spiritual gifts, "Just work a few miracles, and we will believe your doctrine." It is not God's plan to gratify such spirits; for should they see as powerful manifestations as were seen in the days of Christ, of Paul, and Peter, they would scoffingly attribute it to the power of Satan, or some other cause besides the power of God.

It is humble, confiding faith that moves Omnipotence. Those only who have this faith may expect the manifestation of the gifts. Mark 2:5: "When Jesus saw *their faith*, he said unto the sick of the

palsy, Son, thy sins be forgiven thee." Chap. 9:23: "Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth." Matt. 9:21, 22: "For she said within herself, If I may but touch his garment, I shall be whole. But Jesus turned him about, and when he saw her, he said, Daughter, be of good comfort, *thy faith* hath made thee whole. And the woman was made whole from that hour." Chap. 15:28: "Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is *thy faith*; be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour."

3. The object of the gifts, as stated by Paul, was "for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come in the unity of the faith." But they have been superseded in the popular churches by human creeds, which have failed to secure Scriptural unity. It has been truly said, "The American people are a nation of lords." In a land of boasted freedom of thought and of conscience, like ours, church force cannot produce unity; but has caused divisions, and has given rise to religious sects and parties almost innumerable. Creed and church force have been called to the rescue in vain.

The remedy, however, for this deplorable evil is found in the proper use of the simple organization, and church order set forth in the New Testament scriptures, and in the means Christ has ordained for the unity and perfection of the church. We affirm that there is not a single apology in all the Book of God for disharmony of sentiment or spirit in the church. The means are ample to secure the high standard of unity expressed in the New Testament. Christ prayed that his people might be one, as he was one with his Father. John 17.

And Paul appeals to the church at Corinth in these emphatic words, "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment." 1 Cor. 1:10. "Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be like-minded one toward another according to Christ Jesus, that ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." Rom. 15:5, 6. The gifts were given to secure this state of unity.

But the popular churches have introduced another means of preserving unity, namely, human creeds. These creeds secure a sort of unity to each denomination; but they have all proved inefficient, as appears from the New Schools and Reformed of almost every creed-bound denomination under heaven. Hence the many kinds of Baptists, of Presbyterians, and of Methodists, etc., etc. There is not an excuse for this state of things anywhere to be found in the Book of God. These sects are not on the foundation of unity laid by Jesus Christ, and taught by Paul, the wise master builder. And the smaller sects who reject human creeds, professing to take the Bible as their rule of faith and practice, yet rejecting the gifts, are not a whit better off. In these perilous times they shake to fragments, yet cry, The Bible! the Bible! We, too, would exalt the Bible, and would say to those who would represent us as taking the gifts instead of the Bible, that we are not satisfied with a part of the Sacred Volume, but claim as ours the Bible, and the whole Bible, gifts and all.

All the denominations cannot be right, and it may not be wrong to suppose that no one of them is

right on all points of faith. To show that they cannot have their creeds and the gifts too, that creeds shut out the gifts, we will suppose that God, through chosen instruments taken from each sect, begins to show up the errors in the creeds of these different denominations. If they receive the testimony as from Heaven, it would spoil their creeds. But would they throw them away and come out on the platform of unity taught by Christ, Paul, and Peter? Never! They would a thousand times sooner reject the humble instruments of God's choice. It is evident that if the gifts were received, they would destroy human creeds; and that if creeds be received, they shut out the gifts.

4. When we consider the great apostasy of the church, the corruption of her pure doctrines, and her sojourn of 1260 years in the wilderness, we are not surprised that we do not find on the pages of her sad history any clearer records of the manifestations of spiritual gifts. We would here call attention to a work entitled "*Miraculous Powers*," for sale at the Office of the *Signs of the Times*, in which may be found testimonies from not only the eminently pious, but from many of the learned, and from some of the most reliable historians, fairly representing the faith of the church upon the subject of spiritual gifts. We do not rely upon the testimony of men as proof of our position; but after being established in the doctrine of the perpetuity of spiritual gifts from the plain testimony of God's Word, it is a matter of unspeakable joy to find that on this vital doctrine our faith is in harmony with the good, the humble, and the prudent, ever since Christ said to his first ministers, "These signs shall follow them that believe."

Infinite wisdom has doubtless withheld the gifts to a great extent lest Satan take advantage of the ignorance and weakness of the people of God, and

push them over into fanaticism. Many who have supposed that they were favored with manifestations of the Spirit of God, have regarded themselves as being quite out of danger. They soon became lifted up with pride in spiritual things, and were Satan's easy prey.

If it was necessary that Paul should have a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan, to buffet him, lest he become exalted through the abundance of revelations with which he was favored, it is a reasonable conclusion that all who seek to walk with God, and share all the spiritual blessings of the Christian age, are also in danger of exaltation and the wiles of the devil. If he can push one such to extremes in fanaticism, he disgraces the vital part of Christianity, and gains a greater victory than in holding a hundred souls in cold formality. The history of Luther, the Wesleys, and others, who by the power of a living faith led the church from the dark shades of error and formality to a clearer light, proves the necessity of the mind's being well balanced with caution. And he who sees no need of caution here is not far from some delusive snare of Satan. But in walking softly and humbly before God, in strict watchfulness and fervent prayer to be kept by the power of God from the wiles of Satan, there is safety. God has great blessings in store for his people, and will bestow them as fast as they can make a right use of them to their good and to his glory. Amen.

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