

THE GIFTS OF WHITSUNTIDE

– MAY 11. – I CORINTHIANS 12:1-11. –

"There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit." – Verse 4.

WHITSUNTIDE, or Pentecost, marks a very special period in God's great Program respecting mankind. It stands next in importance to the great events connected with our Lord Jesus; viz., His baptism at Jordan and the anointing of the Holy Spirit there, His finishing of His vow of consecration at Calvary, His resurrection from the dead on the third day – His glorious spirit-birth, as partaker of the Divine nature.

All that Jesus did necessarily preceded the acceptance of any members of the human family to joint-heirship with Him, or to any recognition of God as His children. God acknowledged Adam as His son on the human plane, "a little lower than the angels," so long as he remained obedient and loyal; but when he disobeyed and came under the Divine sentence of death, he broke the covenant between God and himself. (Hosea 6:7, margin.) From that time onward, God had no sons amongst men until Jesus' time, because all were imperfect, sharing in Father Adam's imperfection by laws of heredity.

Then God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, with a life uncontaminated, a life that was not derived from Father Adam and was therefore not involved in his sentence. This One, "holy, harmless, undefiled and separate from sinners," God recognized as His Son. When He made consecration of His life at Jordan and symbolized it in His water baptism, God accepted the sacrifice and bestowed upon Him the Holy Spirit in begetting power.

Thenceforth He was the Son of God in two senses – first, according to the flesh; and second, according to the Spirit. But in

God's order the spirit-begotten One was to triumph by fully offering up the fleshly one. This work of Jesus was accomplished at Calvary, where He laid down His life on behalf of the sins of the whole world.

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But still God could not recognize the world. They were all sinners, and continued so to be until Jesus ascended on High, appeared in the Father's presence, and made satisfaction for sins. Be it noted, however, that He did not make satisfaction for all sins then, but merely for the sins of the Church – for the sins of those who would be called of the Father, and who would accept the call and walk in the footsteps of Jesus. As for the world, their sins are still on them.

The only way to obtain forgiveness of sins during this Age, therefore, is to become a disciple of Jesus. Thus, as the Apostle says, we, Jesus' followers, have escaped the condemnation that is still on the world. The Scriptures show us that God has a different *way* of dealing with the world, and a different *time*. He will deal with the world through Christ's Millennial Kingdom, for a thousand years, to scatter their darkness, to forgive their sins and lift them up to human perfection. Meantime, God deals with the Church only; and it is the Church class that the Apostle discusses in today's lesson.

This Church class began its existence at Pentecost – Whitsuntide. Hence, we say that this marks a most important era in the affairs of the Church. It is true that Jesus called His disciples and told them various things during His ministry; but when He left them, He instructed them to tarry and not to begin their work at all until they should be duly authorized by the Father, duly anointed with the Holy Spirit. This anointing which they would receive would be their authority, and would give them the necessary qualification to be the mouthpieces and ambassadors of the Father and of the Son.

The Father could not recognize them sooner than Pentecost; for until Christ's presentation of His merit on their behalf, they were like the remainder of the world – still sinners, still condemned. When the Pentecostal blessing came, it manifested the fact that Jesus had ascended to the Father's presence; and that the Father had graciously received Him, had appreciated His great work of sacrifice, and had accepted it as satisfactory for the sins of the Church – the Household of Faith. It was on the basis of this forgiveness of sins, as well as on the basis of the consecration of the disciples to God and His service, that the spirit-begetting of Pentecost came upon them.

THE GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT

We are to distinguish between the gifts of the Spirit and the fruits of the Spirit. The fruits of the Holy Spirit are developments of the heart and character, which come more or less slowly, according to the personality and the environment of each of the spirit-begotten ones. These fruits of the Spirit, the Apostle tells us, can be seen; they are manifest – "Meekness, gentleness, patience, long-suffering, brotherly-kindness, love."

These fruits must be developed in our hearts; and this will mean more or less of a manifestation of them in our words and deeds, as well as in our thoughts. The riper the Christian, the riper these fruits; and if no fruits, then no Christian; for as the Apostle says, "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His." But this Spirit of Christ, these fruits of the Spirit, may be more or less overshadowed by weaknesses of the flesh; and all may not be able to see to what extent the brother who is weak in the flesh is really fighting a good fight against the spirit of the world, the spirit of the Adversary, and the mind of his own flesh.

God alone knoweth the heart; therefore, we are to judge nothing as respects the degree of faithfulness. We may, however, and should judge as to whether or not we see good fruits or bad fruits in ourselves, or in others who profess to be followers of Jesus. The

Master said, "By their fruits ye shall know them. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?" Surely not! The thorns and the thistles are bad fruits, belonging to the evil nature, and not fruits of the Spirit, of the Lord, appertaining to the New Creature.

But when Pentecost came, those disciples who had already accepted Jesus were not prepared to manifest immediately rich, ripe fruitage of the Holy Spirit. It requires days, weeks, months, years, for such development. Up to this time they were natural men. Only a few days before Jesus had said to them, "Except ye become as little children, ye shall in no wise enter into the Kingdom." He perceived that there was strife amongst themselves as to which should be greatest; and that this was entirely contrary to the proper spirit which they must have if they would finally be accounted worthy of participation in His Kingdom. We see then why the brethren waiting at Pentecost in the upper room could not have a manifestation of the fruits of the Spirit at that time. But it was very necessary to them and to us that they should have some manifestation of God's favor; that there should be some way in which God would show that Jesus had accomplished the Father's work, and that His sacrifice had been acceptable to the Father on our behalf. God manifested this acceptance by the bestowment of certain gifts, which were not fruits of the Spirit, in any sense of the word. **[R5224 : page 124]**

Those gifts were widely distributed in the early Church, and were miraculous. Some who had received the gift of the Spirit spoke one language and some another, of which they had previously no knowledge; some had the gift of interpreting the foreign languages which the others spoke; some received the gift of healing; and some had power to work other miracles.

These gifts served a three-fold purpose: **(1)** They proved God's favor, and that it had come through Christ, and therefore proved that He had ascended, and that His entire work of redemption had been satisfactory to the Father. **(2)** They were proofs to the public that

God was with these people. This would lead lovers of God to investigate the Message they bore. (3) They were an assurance to the disciples themselves that they were following in the right way, and that God was blessing them and leading them.

All these experiences, indispensable for the establishment of the early Church, came at a time when such manifestation was most necessary. The early Church could not walk by faith as we do. They needed the assistance of sight, to the extent that was there granted; for they had no Bibles. They had no instruction from God except such as came through these channels.

St. Paul explains the matter in today's lesson. When they came together, one would speak in an unknown tongue. Another would arise in another part of the audience, and with a power not his own give an interpretation of the foreign language used by the speaker with "tongues." This drew the brethren together every day, especially on the first day of the week. They wanted to have fellowship and instruction; and in this way they obtained it, God guiding in respect to the messages delivered in unknown tongues and to the interpretations.

Thus God taught them in almost the only way they could have received instruction at that time, but very differently from the way in which He now instructs His people, or has ever instructed them since the Apostles' day. Such instruction is no longer necessary, and is therefore no longer given. Instead, we have something much better. We have the Gospels, recording our Lord's words, parables, dark sayings, etc.; we have the Epistles of the New Testament, comments of the inspired Apostles on the Old Testament writings; and we have the prophecies of the Old Testament, to which St. Peter declares, "We do well to take heed, as unto a light which shineth in a dark place, until the Day dawn." – 2 Peter 1:19.

OURS A BETTER EXPERIENCE

With these Divinely provided helps, the man of God, as St. Paul declares, "may be thoroughly furnished unto every good work." Through these channels the Holy Spirit is instructing the Church. But the gifts of the Spirit were necessary at Pentecost. Instead of those gifts, we now have the fruits of the Spirit, as testifying God's favor, and our own progress in the good way. With our further enlightenment the Lord requires of us more than was required of the early Church – that we walk by faith and not by sight.

St. Paul points out that all these variations in the manifestations of the Spirit meant, not different spirits, but the one Spirit, working in the entire Church, with the one purpose of building them all up as various members in the one Body of Christ. He says, "There are diversities of operations, but it is the same God that worketh all in all. To one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another, the word of knowledge; to another, faith; to another, gifts of healing; to another, miracles; to another, prophecy; to another, discerning of spirits; to another, diversity of tongues and interpretations."

"YE ARE ALL ONE BODY"

The oneness of the Church with each other and with their Lord, the Head, St. Paul repeatedly sets forth, and particularly in today's lesson. He shows that the different gifts enabled the different members of the Body to co-operate for their mutual welfare, edification and upbuilding, in preparation for the glories of service in the coming Kingdom. He says that as the human body is one, but has many members, all under the control of the head, so also is the Body of Christ. The Church is one Body, but composed of many members, all under the control of the Head, Jesus, operating through the Spirit of Truth, by the Word of Truth and by Divine providences.

The object of the organization of the Church is not the conversion of the world, but it is the upbuilding of herself and

preparation for a future service. That future service is to be the blessing of the world. But before that service for the world can be properly begun, the Church herself must be developed, proven, approved of God, and [R5225 : page 124] glorified by a share in the First Resurrection.

A MORE EXCELLENT WAY

St. Paul, further on in the chapter, tells how the various members of the Body should co-operate with each other, offsetting each other's imperfections, compensating for each other's shortcomings and weaknesses, and seeking only the welfare of the Body as a whole. There should be no schisms, no division, no sectarianism in the Body of Christ, the Church, and all the members should have the same love one for another. Sectarian love and sectarian pride should be unknown. Likewise, if any of the members suffer, all should feel a sympathy. He points out that God set the different members in this Body: first, the Apostles; and secondarily, prophets, or orators; and thirdly, teachers; after that, miracles, gifts, helps, diversities of tongues. All have not the same office given them of the Lord, but each should seek faithfully to use the talents which he possesses; and while using these gifts they should seek the best they are capable of exercising.

Then the Apostle adds, "Yet shew I unto you a more excellent way," still better than any of these gifts. Following along (chapter 13), he declares that one might have these gifts, and yet make shipwreck entirely; and that it was necessary, even with the gifts, to cultivate the fruits of the Spirit. For though we should have the gift of prophecy, understanding all mysteries and knowledge, and have all faith, but have not love – the great fruit of the Spirit – we would be nothing. Moreover, he declares that the gifts would vanish away, but that the fruits would last eternally.

It is important, then, in our consideration of Whitsuntide blessings, that we remember that without the fruits of the Spirit we

would be nothing, and would have no share in the glorious Messianic Kingdom, for which we are waiting and praying, "Thy Kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as in Heaven."

