

Bible Studies for Adventists



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January 10–16, 2009

Commentary on “Spiritual Gifts and Prophecy”

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Day 1: Sabbath Afternoon, January 10, 2009

This introduction to the week’s lesson states that Seventh-day Adventists believe in spiritual gifts. It then goes on to compare that belief to “many charismatic and Pentecostal churches” and their manifestations that include people making animal noises as well as the utterances of prognostications and prophecies such as the space shuttle being blown up because there was a public school teacher on board.

The lesson concludes with the statement that the Adventist’s belief in the gifts of the Spirit includes a belief that “everything should be tested by the Word of God.”

Problems

First, the statement that Seventh-day Adventists believe in spiritual gifts is not entirely true. By not allowing the speaking of tongues in an unknown language to be a true manifestation of a spiritual gift, they are denying a gift of the Spirit. “If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels...” (I Corinthians 13:1a) allows the speaking of an angelic tongue, which no human would know or understand.

Second, the lesson sets up a false comparison between the Adventist church and other churches. By only citing charismatic and Pentecostal examples, the writer leaves out the vast majority of Christians who believe in and use their spiritual gifts to build up the body of Christ. “And he gave them apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ...” Ephesians 4:11,12. Furthermore, people speaking in tongues do not generally exhibit the non-biblical behaviors of making animal noises.

Third, the concluding statement that “we believe everything should be tested by the Bible...” has an unspoken implication that other churches don’t believe that everything should be tested in this way. The normal Christian practice is to use the Word of God to test all things.

Summary

1. Seventh-day Adventists do not believe in the use of all the spiritual gifts as presented in the Bible, especially the gift of tongues.
2. Christians who don’t exhibit non-biblical behaviors do believe in and use their spiritual gifts for the building up of the body of Christ.
3. The normal Christian practice is to use the Word of God to test all things.

Day 2: Sunday, January 11, 2009

This day's lesson defines spiritual gifts as coming from the Holy Spirit. It also states that the reason they were given was to complete the mission entrusted to the church. The gifting of the apostles to go out and heal and cast out demons before Pentecost is used as an indication that it is possible to receive more than one baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Problems

In the E. G. White Notes it should be noted that Ellen White blurs the terms "talents" and "gifts of the Spirit". For instance, when she lists a few examples of gifts, the "gift" of singing is mentioned. What about accomplished singers who do not know Jesus? Singing is an ability that one is born with and is developed through years of study and practice, not a gift that is given when a person becomes a Christian.

The last sentence of the lesson is the most alarming, suggesting that it is possible to receive more than one baptism of the Holy Spirit. The Bible says about baptism, "There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all." Ephesians 4:4–6. When we become Christians and are born again, we are sealed by the Holy Spirit, just as the believers were sealed on Pentecost when they believed. (Acts 2:14-21, Ephesians 1:13,14) This only happens once. There are no Biblical examples of anyone being born again more than once. Equipping with gifts is not another baptism—it is a gift given when needed by the body of Christ.

The Teacher's Comments for this lesson include a question, which is leading towards the support of Ellen White's prophetic role in the church: "How do we recognize and affirm if there is a prophet among us?" The Bible's answer is clear. Deuteronomy 18:20, 22, gives the tests of a prophet. But even more powerful is the statement in Hebrews 1:1–2 which states:

"God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the World."

Jesus is the last Word and the greatest Word we have. God will give us no new light or "present truth" through a prophet.

Summary

1. Spiritual gifts are given when one becomes a Christian, and don't include talents and abilities that people are born with or develop.
2. There is one baptism of the Holy Spirit given when a person trusts in Jesus. Equipping with gifts is not another baptism—it is a gift given when needed by the body of Christ.
3. A person gifted with the gift of prophecy must speak in agreement with the Bible.

Day 3: Monday, January 12, 2009

The lesson begins by introducing two views in Christianity. The first group believes that the gifts are divided between sign gifts and edifying gifts. The sign gifts were only needed to give the apostles "credentials", and ended with the apostles. The second group teaches that all the gifts are present in the church until the Lord comes.

The study continues by stating that Paul teaches that the gifts will be in the church until Jesus comes, but that spiritual deterioration had caused the gifts to largely disappear. When the reformation occurred, many gifts were restored, but the gift of prophecy was not given. It would be manifested later in the remnant church.

Problems

The simplification of the views held in Christianity to only two views is misleading. In just one church you can have a much broader spectrum of views on what gifts are active and how those gifts are used. John MacArthur is quoted to support the viewpoint that the sign gifts are not given now, but he only represents the Reformed view—and not all Reformed Christians agree with him, including well respected pastor John Piper, who states that all the spiritual gifts are present today.

The next problem is the statement that spiritual gifts largely disappeared during the third and fourth centuries. These are the years leading to the decree of Constantine that made Christianity the state religion of Rome. This unsupported claim denies the clear teachings of scripture:

“To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills” (I Cor. 12:7–11).

This Bible passage states that *every Christian* is given the manifestation of the Spirit. The particular gift is chosen by the will of the Holy Spirit, and that same Spirit empowers each gift. To say that spiritual gifts disappeared is also stating that Christianity died. But that also goes against the Bible:

“And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matt. 16:18).

The idea that God restored some spiritual gifts at the Reformation, but not prophecy since none of the Reformers claimed to be a prophet is false. The gift of prophecy is misunderstood by the writer of the lesson. According to Revelation 19:10, the “spirit of prophecy” is “the testimony of Jesus”. The Reformers were using the gift of prophecy when they called the church out of the errors of legalism and false doctrine to follow the Gospel of Jesus.

The ending statement that the prophetic gift would be manifested again in the remnant church is not supportable by the Bible. The text the lesson gives as support is Revelation 12:17:

“Then the dragon became furious with the woman and went off to make war on the rest of her offspring, on those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus...”

The testimony of Jesus is just that—the words and witness of Jesus as found in the Gospels or as declared by His followers.

Finally, the notion that there is an end-time remnant church is not found in scripture. As stated above in Matthew 16:18, the church was built by Jesus and it will continue until the end. There is no Biblical support for an end-time “remnant” church with new or renewed blessings from the Holy Spirit.

Summary

1. Spiritual gifts have never died out. They are given and empowered by the Holy Spirit.
2. The Reformers exhibited the gift of prophecy by declaring the words and witness of Jesus, and by calling the church out of the errors of legalism and false doctrine.
3. There is no Biblical support for an end-time “remnant” church with new or renewed blessings from the Holy Spirit.

Day 4: Tuesday, January 13, 2009

The lesson tells the account of Moses and Aaron performing miracles before Pharaoh, including the staff turned into a snake, the Nile turned into blood, and frogs from the Nile covering the land. The Egyptian magicians were only able to duplicate the miracles that God allowed. Satan’s miracles looked like the real thing, but God sets the limits for what Satan can do. In the end time, Satan’s signs and wonders will be powerful enough to deceive many. We must test them by the Bible, our ultimate standard.

Problems

The lesson rightly states that Satan counterfeits spiritual gifts. But it goes on to make the claim that Satan will do miracles that are so powerful that they deceive many. “We need to be very careful not to be swept away by the existence of the supernatural,” states the lesson. This warning could create an unhealthy, unscriptural fear of the outpouring and manifestations of the Spirit.

Is it true that the saved can be deceived by Satan? One of the texts provided for study seems to say “no”. This passage clearly states that the deception is only for “those who are perishing” and not the saved:

The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness (2 Thess. 2:9–12).

On the other hand, those that are saved have eternal life:

"Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life" (John 5:24).

"For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect" (Matthew 24:24).

Jesus clearly states that the deceptions will so great that they would lead astray the elect if it was possible. By qualifying His statement, Jesus was showing that it is not possible for the elect to be deceived. We are safe and secure when we have trusted Jesus and are born again into God's family.

Summary

Satan's counterfeits are no danger to those who know Jesus and are safe in Him.

Day 5: Wednesday, January 14, 2009

The lesson first introduces some prophecies that came true even though the people making the predictions shared little with Biblical prophets. It then follows that testing a prophet by the accuracy of his predictions is not a valid way to discern whether the prophecies are from God. Then the lesson declares that the Bible teaches us that prophets and prophecies play an important part in salvation.

The lesson ends with a list of the purposes of the gift of prophecy.

The *E.G. White Notes* corresponding to this lesson include the following quote:

"I would call especial attention to the remarkable dreams given in this little work, all with harmony and distinctness illustrating the same things. The multitude of dreams arise from the common things of life, with which the Spirit of God has nothing to do. There are also false dreams, as well as false visions, which are inspired by the spirit of Satan. But dreams from the Lord are classed in the word of God with visions. Such dreams, taking into account the persons who have them and the circumstances under which they are given, contain their own proofs of their genuineness. *Testimonies*, vol. 1, pp 569, 570.

Problems

First, the quote from the E.G. White Notes needs to be addressed. The last sentence is our focus. Two "proofs of genuineness" of dreams are given: 1) the person, and 2) the circumstances. That is it. We don't need to look at the Biblical tests of a prophet! The Bible says:

"And if you say in your heart, 'How may we know the word that the Lord has not spoken?'--"when a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word that the Lord has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously. You need not be afraid of him (Deut. 18:21, 22).

The lesson's examples of false prophets with true prophecies is not the issue. The Bible test is not our looking at predictions that come true, but on checking for the ones that *don't happen*. Nowhere does the Bible suggest that our tests are to look at the person and his/her circumstances. This new method of testing a prophet will no doubt serve the lesson writer well, in a future lesson, as he introduces Ellen G. White as a true prophet, even though several of her prophecies failed to occur.

Finally, we must focus on the statement made by the lesson writer that prophets and prophecies play an important part of salvation. The Bible says:

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days *he has spoken to us by his Son*, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world (Hebrews 1:1,2).

The prophetic role of speaking new truth as the Old Testament prophets did is now superseded by the Lord Jesus. The Bible does not allow for a last-day "messenger" with a message of "present truth" not revealed in Scripture. Jesus is the final Word.

Summary

1. The Biblical proof of a prophet is whether his/her prediction fails to occur, not a look at the person or their circumstances, as Ellen G. White states.
2. Jesus is the final Word. The Bible does not allow for a last-day "messenger" with a message of "present truth" not revealed in Scripture.

Day 6: Thursday, January 15, 2009

This lesson's purpose is solely to identify what the gift of tongues is, and what it isn't. It is concluded that the gift of tongues is solely the speaking of human foreign languages. It is never speaking in unknown languages.

Problems

There are several Bible passages that clearly show the possibility that speaking in tongues can be exercised by speaking in an unknown tongue, only known to God and to someone gifted to interpret the tongue.

"And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues... (Mark 16:17).

"If I speak in the tongues of men *and of angels*, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal (I Cor. 1:1).

The passage from Mark says that believers will speak in new tongues. Are new tongues the same as known tongues? Notice that in I Corinthians there are two types of tongues mentioned, tongues of men and tongues of angels. Are the languages of angels known and understandable to humans?

It is very interesting that the lesson author only suggests that the student read the first five verses of I Corinthians 14. Let's read through verse 28 (italics added):

Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy. For one who speaks in a tongue *speaks not to men but to God; for no one understands him*, but he utters *mysteries* in the Spirit. On the other hand, the one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation. The one who speaks in a tongue builds up himself, but the one who prophesies builds up the church. Now I want you all to speak in tongues, but even more to prophesy. The one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues, *unless someone interprets*, so that the church may be built up.

Now, brothers, if I come to you speaking in tongues, *how will I benefit you* unless I bring you some revelation or knowledge or prophecy or teaching? If even lifeless instruments, such as the flute or the harp, *do not give distinct notes*, how will anyone know what is played? And if the bugle gives an *indistinct sound*, who will get ready for battle? So with yourselves, if with your tongue you utter speech that *is not intelligible*, how will anyone know what is said? For you will be speaking into the air. There are doubtless many different languages in the world, and none is without meaning, but if I do not know the meaning of the language, I will be a foreigner to the speaker and the speaker a foreigner to me. So with yourselves, since you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit, strive to excel in building up the church.

Therefore, one who speaks in a tongue *should pray for the power to interpret. For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays but my mind is unfruitful*. What am I to do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will pray with my mind also; I will sing praise with my spirit, but I will sing with my mind also. Otherwise, if you give thanks with your spirit, how can anyone in the position of an outsider say "Amen" to your thanksgiving when *he does not know what you are saying*? For you may be giving thanks well enough, but the other person is not being built up. *I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you*. Nevertheless, in church I would rather speak five words with my mind in order to instruct others, than ten thousand words in a tongue.

Brothers, do not be children in your thinking. Be infants in evil, but in your thinking be mature. In the Law it is written, "By people of *strange tongues* and by the lips of foreigners will I speak to this people, and even then they will not listen to me, says the Lord." Thus tongues are a sign not for believers but for unbelievers, while prophecy is a sign not for unbelievers but for believers. If, therefore, the whole church comes together and all speak in tongues, and outsiders or unbelievers enter, *will they not say that you are out of your minds*? But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or outsider enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all, the secrets of his heart are disclosed, and so, falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you.

What then, brothers? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up. If any speak in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn, and *let someone interpret*. But *if there is no one to interpret, let each of them keep silent in church and speak to himself and to God*. (ESV)

Read this passage through several times. Let it sink in. Ask God to teach you the truth about the gift of tongues. Notice that tongues are sometimes not understood by anyone but God. They edify only the speaker, unless someone can interpret for the congregation. Praying in a tongue is an activity done in the Spirit, not the mind. Paul acknowledges that he speaks in tongues more than any of the members of the church in Corinth. He counsels them to use restraint. He states that an unbeliever would think the church was out of their minds if the unbeliever visited when the whole church is

speaking in tongues. Paul contrasts prophesying and speaking in tongues. He states that prophesying is greater because it builds up the church, while tongues only builds up the one speaking.

In conclusion, the gift of tongues is more than just the gift of speaking foreign languages. It should be noted that there are church groups that claim the presence of this gift, but do not follow the Biblical instructions for its use. There are also groups that teach that everyone that is born again will receive the gift of tongues. This teaching does not agree with scripture that states, "...God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will (Heb. 2:4). The gifts are given according to the Spirit's will--not ours.

Summary

1. The gift of speaking in tongues includes unknown languages.
2. The gift of prophecy is to be desired over the gift of tongues.
3. One gifted with "tongues" can control the manifestation to times when someone is present to interpret the tongues and by so doing edify all those present, rather than only edify the one speaking the tongue.

Day 7: Friday, January 16, 2009

The last lesson for this week consists of three quotes from Ellen G. White (EGW), along with the suggestion for the student to read 11 pages from an EGW book, *The Acts of the Apostles*.

The first EGW quote states that special gifts of the Spirit, as well as all talents, whether original, acquired, natural, or spiritual, are in view in the parable of the talents.

The second deals with Satan's ability to perform wonders that appear to be genuine miracles.

The last EGW quote speaks of some being deceived by false talking in tongues, as well as other excesses.

Problems

The underlying problem with this lesson is the focus on what we do--with our gifts, talents, etc.--instead of who we are in Christ when we are born again. The parable of the talents is told by Jesus in the context of his telling his disciples about the kingdom of God. If we are in the kingdom, born again, adopted as sons, we will not be fearful about whether we are identifying and using each talent correctly. We will instead be joyfully submitting ourselves to our Lord Jesus.

If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you. So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs--heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him (Romans 8:11-17 ESV).

Have you submitted yourself to Jesus? Have you trusted everything to Him, including your identity, position, job, and even your beliefs? Is Jesus enough? Pray to Him right now and give up everything to him--trust His death and resurrection alone as your security. Let His Spirit guide you into all truth.

Summary

1. The parable of the talents is told in the context of people that are in God's kingdom (born again).
2. The gifts of the Spirit are given as the Spirit chooses.
3. We must be born again and members of God's kingdom to use our gifts properly. They are not about getting us ready for the kingdom, but they are for the building up of the body of Christ--those that are saved.