

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

Adult Bible Study Curriculum

"Spiritual Gifts II"

Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Todd D. McDonald, Writer

Introduction “Prophecy and Discernment”

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 **reproving** “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.

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"Spiritual Gifts"

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Introduction

“Tongues and Interpretation of Tongues”

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”

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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Zion Assembly Church of God – Sunday School Services

Todd D. McDonald, Writer

Introduction

"A More Excellent Way"

In Zion Assembly Church of God, 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 [*philedonoi*] more than lovers of God [*philotheoi*]" (2 Ti. 3:1-4). On the contrary, the love of God is steadfast and true, devoted, pure, selfless, and unailing (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.

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“Prophecy”

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.

Faith-N-Focus : E-quip Your Faith

“Essentials”

Adult Bible Study Curriculum

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Spiritual Gifts II

Lesson Outlines

September 1

Topic: *Prophecy and Discernment*

Texts: 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; 1 Co. 2:15; 5:12; Ep. 5:10-11; 1 Jn. 2:21; 4:1, 5-6; 2 Pe. 2:1, 3, 10; 1 Jn. 4:1; 1 Co. 12:4; 1 Th. 5:19-21

Key Verse: Ro. 12:6

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

September 8

Topic: *Tongues and Interpretation of Tongues*

Texts: 1 Co. 14:2, 4, 14; Ac. 2:4; 10:44, 46; 19:6; Ac. 2:4-11, 38-39; Jn. 15:26; 1 Co. 14:5-14, 27-28, 39-40

Key Verse: 1 Co. 12:10

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

September 15

Topic: *Signs Following Believers*

Texts: Jn. 1:1, 14, 32-34; 14:9-17; Mt. 11:1-6; Lu. 4:18-19; Mk. 16:14-19; Ac. 5:12-16; 19:11-12; 28:1-10; Mt. 24:4, 11, 24; 2 Th. 2:8-11; Re. 13:11-16; Mk. 16:20; Ac. 4:29-30; 6:7-8; 8:4-7, 12-13

Key Verse: Mk. 16:20

Main Point: Miraculous signs of the Spirit serve to confirm the word of God.

September 22

Topic: *A More Excellent Way*

Texts: 1 Co. 12:31; Ro. 5:5, 8; Ep. 3:16-19; 1 Co. 13:1-3; Ro. 12:9-10; 2 Ti. 3:1-4; 1 Co. 13:4-8

Key Verse: 1 Co. 12:31

Main Point: The Holy Spirit's most excellent gift is love.

September 29

Topic: *Prophecy*

Texts: 1 Co. 12:31; 13:13; 14:1, 39-40; 1 Co. 14:1-5, 6-11, 18-19, 29-33

Key Verse: 1 Co. 14:1

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

In this month of Faith-N-Focus, we continue our study on spiritual gifts. God has placed the gifts of the Spirit in the church to edify the body and enable the ministry and mission of the church. God desires to speak to and through the members of the church. The Holy Spirit anoints and inspires individual members to declare the word of God in order to build up the whole body with words that comfort, direct, and strengthen the people. We can readily hear and receive the word of God with confidence when the gift of discernment is operating in the church, enabling us to know the truth through the Spirit. Moreover, the Holy Ghost speaks by tongues and interpretation of tongues, enhancing divine communication in the church.

The Spirit dynamically works through individual believers to build up the body and to confirm the word of God. Jesus explained that supernatural signs will follow believers, and those signs and wonders will serve to establish and strengthen the proclamation of the truth. However, to keep the church spiritually balanced, and to prevent the church from being overly preoccupied with spiritual demonstrations – signs and wonders – Paul emphasized that the greatest gift of the Spirit within the church is LOVE. The operation of all of the spiritual gifts should be motivated by divine love.

Finally, in cultivating a healthy, balanced spirituality within the church, Paul called attention to proper order in regard to the spiritual gifts. No gift, particularly tongues, should take priority over the word of God, or stand on its own over against the word of God. The Holy Ghost is the Spirit of truth. All of the spiritual gifts administered by the Spirit should therefore support the church in its ministry of prophesying the truth.



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