

George Q. Cannon's Teachings Concerning Spiritual Gifts

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Gifts Given for Perfection of Saints

The Prophet Moroni explains more fully even than Paul does concerning these gifts. He said "that if the day cometh that the power and gifts of God shall be done away among you, it shall be because of unbelief."3 Not because God is not willing to bestow gifts upon His children, for as this Prophet says, "God is not a partial God, neither a changeable Being; but he is unchangeable from all eternity to all eternity." His dealings with the children of men are alike. If they come to Him with faith and obey His Gospel, He is bound by the promises that He has made to bestow upon them the same blessings and not to discriminate between His children; for if He did so, He would not be a just Being. But justice is His attribute, and He deals justly with His children. He gives unto them His gifts and blessings according to their faith. To one He gives one gift, to another He gives another gift.

These gifts are given by Him for the perfection of His people, that in this vale of tears, shut out as we are from His presence, a veil of darkness having been drawn, as it were, between us and Him, those who will exercise faith in His promises and will keep His commandments may receive the aid that is necessary to enable them to walk before Him and to enjoy His power.... (p.194)

Gifts Distinguish Saints From the World

He can receive the evidences from the Lord, by the exercise of faith, that will convince him of the existence of his Father in heaven and also of His willingness to hear and answer the prayers and supplications which are addressed to Him in sincerity.

It is for this purpose that these gifts are bestowed, that those who do obey the commandments of God shall have privileges, blessings and powers that those who do not take this course cannot have. The bestowal of these is to create a distinction between the people of God and those who are not His people, to give them that superiority which the enjoyment of these gifts bring.... (p. 195).

Our Duty to Seek After Gifts

How many of you are seeking for these gifts that God has promised to bestow? How many of you, when you bow before your Heavenly Father in your family circle or in your secret places, contend for these gifts to be bestowed upon you? How many of you ask the Father in the name of Jesus to manifest Himself to you through these powers and these gifts? Or do you go along day by day like a door turning on its hinges, without having any feeling upon the subject, without exercising any faith whatever, content to be baptized and be members of the Church and to rest there, thinking that your salvation is secure because you have done this?

I say to you, in the name of the Lord, as one of His servants, that you have need to repent of this. You have need to repent of your hardness of heart, of your indifference and of your carelessness. There is not that diligence, there is not that faith, there is not that seeking for the power of God that there should be among a people who have received the precious promises we have....

If any of us are imperfect, it is our duty to pray for the gift that will make us perfect. Have I imperfections? I am full of them. What is my duty? To pray to God to give me the gifts that will correct these imperfections.... They are intended for this purpose. No man ought to say, "Oh, I cannot help this; it is my nature." He is not justified in it, for the reason that God has promised to give strength to correct these things and to give gifts that will eradicate them.... That is the design of God concerning His children. He wants His Saints to be perfected in the truth.

The Lord has said in a revelation to the Church that the Saints should "seek ye earnestly the best gifts, always remembering for what they are given; for verily I say unto you, they are given for the benefit of those who love me and keep all my commandments." How many Latter-day Saints are there who supplicate the Lord for the gifts which they need? ...

Every defect in the human character can be corrected through the exercise of faith and pleading with the Lord for the gifts that He has said He will give unto those who believe and obey His commandments. (p.196)

We All Need Gifts

Is there any one among us that does not need these gifts? I need prophecy. How can I magnify my office, how can I stand in my calling, how can I do my duty to the Latter-day Saints in the office to which God has called me, unless I have the gift of prophecy? That gift I should seek to have increase upon me. The gift of revelation should increase within me. I should seek for the gift of wisdom, to have it increase within me, the gift of knowledge also. Should we not all do so?

You need to have patience, long-suffering, forbearance. A presiding officer in the Church needs the gift of instruction, the gift of counsel and, when needed, the gift of reproof and warning. He needs to understand the plan of salvation and what constitutes godliness; he needs to have the gift of healing and the gift of the discernment of spirits.

We all need to have the gift of a broken heart and a contrite spirit, for that is the offering that is acceptable to the Lord. When we come to Him with broken hearts and contrite spirits, He hears us, and He accepts the offering. It is the offering that He asks at our hands.... (p. 197)

Gift of Tongues

If I were called on a mission to a people speaking a foreign language, I should pray constantly for the gift of tongues and for the gift of the interpretation of tongues.... I know that such a gift is within the reach of those who seek for it. It is not alone given to us to get up in our testimony meetings and speak in tongues and somebody interpret it. That is very comforting and a very desirable gift when it is governed properly. It appeals to many people; they think it is a wonderfully great gift. But in my experience it is a gift that is apt to lead people astray unless it is properly controlled. Under its influence people sometimes give way to a wrong spirit....

This gift, as I have said, is a desirable gift; but it is especially desirable for our Elders who go to foreign lands. They should seek for it with all earnestness and faith. I testify to you that there is such a gift as the gift of interpretation of tongues.

So in relation to all these precious gifts. Why, what is our religion if we divest it of these gifts and we do not possess them? It is a powerless thing. But with the bestowal of these gifts, with the Lord giving them to us according to our needs, each one in his or her place, there is power in our religion. (p. 197)

Gifts for Mothers

The sisters have as much right to these gifts as the brethren. They have the right to go unto God and ask Him in the name of Jesus to bestow upon them such gifts as they need. How good a gift it would be for a mother to have the gift of governing her children, the gift of wisdom to train them and to point out to them the path that they should pursue. The mother who seeks for these gifts and exercises them before the Lord will have great joy in her children and will get amply rewarded for all the faith that she has exercised and the prayers she has offered in their behalf.... (p. 197)

Patience and Integrity

The Lord said to Joseph in the beginning, "Be patient in afflictions; for thou shalt have many." So it is with all of us. We have great afflictions from time to time. It seems to be necessary that we should be tried and proved to see whether we are full of integrity or not. In this way we get to know ourselves and our own weaknesses; and the Lord knows us, and our brethren and sisters know us.

Therefore, it is a precious gift to have the gift of patience, to be good-tempered, to be cheerful, to not be depressed, to not give way to wrong feelings and become impatient and irritable. It is a blessed gift for all to possess.

The gift of integrity also is a splendid gift. Men may do many wicked things, and repent of them and the Lord will forgive them, if they have integrity. I value that gift exceedingly.... The gift of integrity is a good thing. It is good also to have steadfastness, valor and courage in the hour of trial and danger—in the hour when men's lives are in danger. (P. 198)

Discerning of Spirits

One of the gifts of the Gospel which the Lord has promised to those who enter into covenant with Him is the gift of discerning of spirits—a gift which is not much thought of by many and probably seldom prayed for; yet it is a gift that is of exceeding value and one that should be enjoyed by every Latter-day Saint.... No Latter-day Saint should be without this gift, because there is such a variety of spirits in the world which seek to deceive and lead astray. In a revelation to the Church upon the spirits which have gone abroad in the earth the Lord says:

Behold, verily I say unto you, that there are many spirits which are false spirits, which have gone forth in the earth, deceiving the world.

The Lord warns the Saints and says: "Beware lest ye are deceived." And that they may not be deceived, He commands them to seek earnestly the best gifts.

The Apostle John says:

Behold, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.

This counsel of the beloved Apostle applies as much to us in these latter days as it did to the Saints of his age. All manner of spirits have gone forth to deceive, to lead astray and to obtain possession of the children of men; and many people yield to them because they are invisible and cannot, perhaps, think that they can be possessed by invisible influences. Anger, backbiting, slander, falsehood and various passions are manifested by people under the influence of false and deceptive spirits....

Now, the gift of discerning of spirits not only gives men and women who have it the power to discern the spirit with which others may be possessed or influenced, but it gives them the power to discern the spirit which influences themselves. They are able to detect a false spirit and also to know when the Spirit of God reigns within them. In private life this gift is of great importance to the Latter-day Saints. Possessing and exercising this gift they will not allow any evil influence to enter into their hearts or to prompt them in their thoughts, their words or their acts. They will repel it; and if perchance such a spirit should get possession of them, as soon as they witness its effects they will expel it or, in other words, refuse to be led or prompted by it.

The gift of discerning of spirits, also, is one that is of great importance to the Elders who are laboring in the ministry. We have known Elders become so filled with zeal and so desirous to do good, or what they supposed to be good, that they exposed themselves to the influence of the adversary. They would be filled with a species of what has been called "wildfire," and, carried away by zeal, they would go too far; they would say and do imprudent things and yet, being prompted by the purest and best motives, would feel entirely justified in their course. In the history of the Church there have been many illustrations of this. Elders can work themselves up beyond that which is proper and wise and be led to say and do many imprudent things and overstep the line of propriety. Now, the gift of discerning of spirits is necessary to keep these kind of feelings in check.

The gift of discerning spirits is not only necessary for this purpose, but it is necessary in the branches of the Church. Newly baptized members, anxious to obtain the gifts, are liable sometimes to be taken advantage of by the adversary and to imbibe or yield to a wrong spirit. A

newly organized branch of the Church, where the gifts are manifested, especially the gift of tongues, has to be watched with great care. The Elders laboring in the branch or presiding in the conference must be in a position to discern between the Spirit of the Lord and other spirits that may seek to steal in....

In all the situations in life, therefore, in which Latter-day Saints can be placed there is great need for them to possess the gift of discerning of spirits. Fathers and mothers need it for their own benefit. They need it in their families, in the training of their children. All Saints need it to enable them to escape from the many evil influences that are abroad. The Elders need it for their own sakes; they need it also in the government of the branches, of the conferences, of the wards, of the stakes and, indeed, the entire Church. It is a great and blessed gift, and it should be sought for by all. (pp. 198-200)

Gifts of Gospel Not Confined to General Authorities

I hope the idea will never prevail among our people that God confines his gifts and graces to the First Presidency or to the Twelve Apostles or to the Seven Presidents of Seventies. I know that God is the God of this people, and every young man or middle-aged man or aged man who will seek for the power of God can obtain it, and he can declare the truth of God in the power and demonstration of the Holy Ghost, and it is just as good as if it were told by the President of the Church or by one of the Twelve Apostles....

The field is white for the harvest, and laborers are wanted. It is beyond the power of the First Presidency and Twelve to do all the labor. Therefore, the Elders are called to the ministry, and they should seek for the gifts and for the power and authority of the Holy Priesthood and exercise it and not think because they are not Apostles or Presidents that therefore they have not the right to teach and to speak with authority. If you have any doubts upon this, read... what the Lord says upon this point. (p.200-201)