

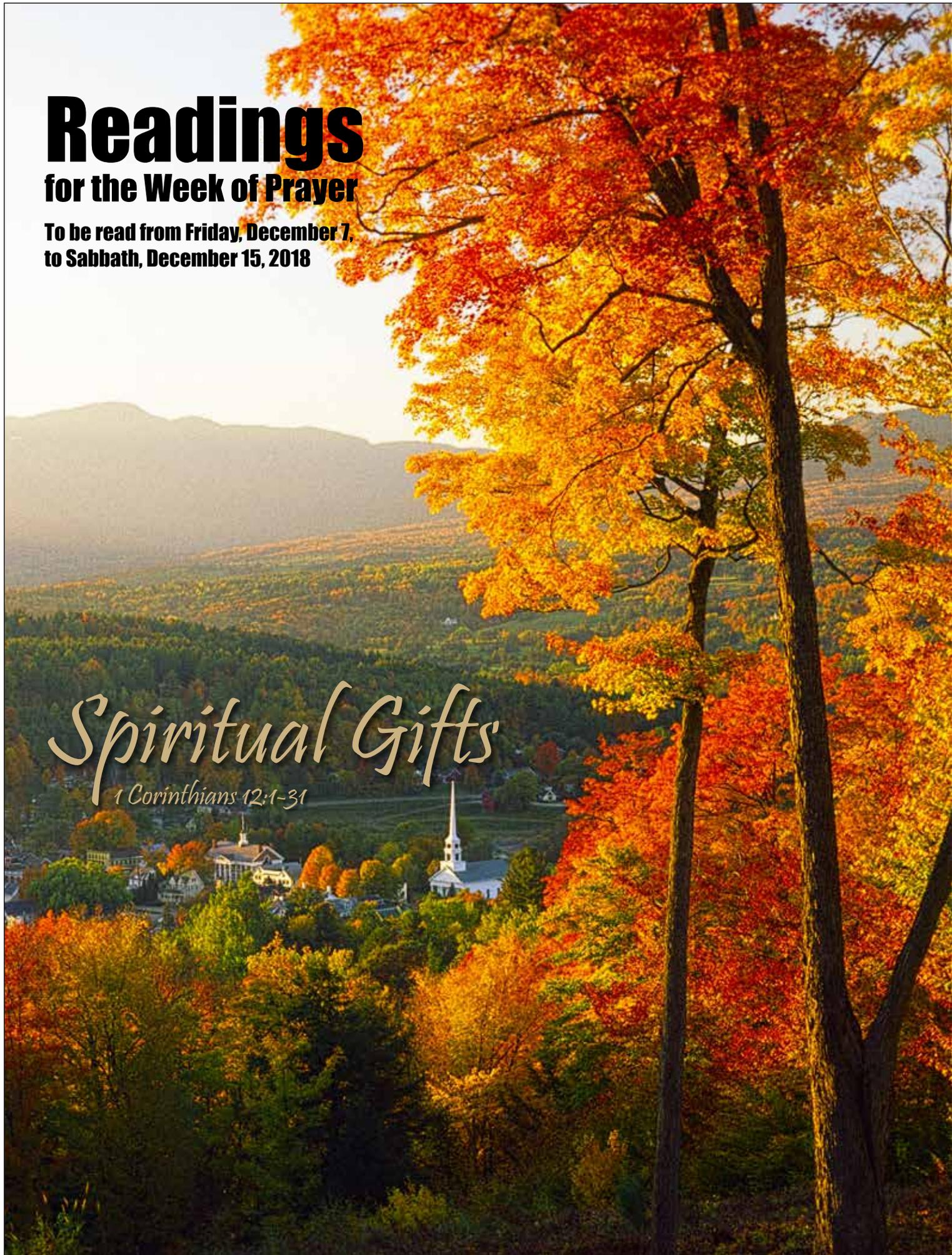
Readings

for the Week of Prayer

To be read from Friday, December 7,
to Sabbath, December 15, 2018

Spiritual Gifts

1 Corinthians 12:1-31



Introduction

Dear brothers and sisters in the Lord, it is a great joy to be able to share with you these seven Readings for the Week of Prayer. The days, weeks, and months have passed quickly, and we are at the end of 2018. It is time to take time from our hectic schedules to consider our walk with God. This is the special week that is observed every year to dedicate ourselves to reading God's word and to prayer. The theme is "Spiritual Gifts." "Thou hast ascended on high, Thou hast led captivity captive: Thou hast received gifts for men;..." Psalm 68:18.

As the end draws near, God's people need to root themselves in the Bible every day. We need to know more deeply what it means to do His holy will as revealed and written and also to apply that word practically and individually. Being faithful in "that which is least" will prepare us to go through the times of "anguish" that lie ahead and to be ready to meet our beloved Saviour Jesus Christ in peace.

Prayer is extraordinary and totally effective in communicating with God. As a church, we need to see prayer as the breath of the soul, or, as the Lord expressed it through the apostle Paul, we need to "Pray without ceasing." 1 Thessalonians 5:17. These Readings are meant to stimulate us to read, study, do research in the Bible, and pray. This is our opportunity to cling to the Lord with all our being, as did Jacob, and until the dawn breaks and God's people are delivered. It will be a great blessing during this special week to kneel and pray fervently three times a day and to surrender our wills to God. He is worthy of our deepest gratitude for His abundant blessings, even as we continue to plead for His mercy, His Spirit, and His guidance in the work that the church has been commissioned to complete in this world.

"For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance." "Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant." "Even so ye, forasmuch as ye are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek that ye may excel to the

edifying of the church." Romans 11:29; 1 Corinthians 12:1; 14:12.

As we consider these "Spiritual Gifts," we desire to inspire the members and all who wish to be enriched by these Readings to discover the gifts with which God has blessed us so we can bless others. At the same time, let us cultivate the gifts that are so necessary to advance the kingdom of Christ here on earth. There are many branches of service in which consecrated hands are needed to reach the world.

"The Lord would have us careful to do our best, making wise use of our faculties and opportunities. He has endowed men with gifts with which to bless and edify others; it is our duty so to educate ourselves that we may be fitted for the great work committed to us..." —*Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students*, p. 239.

That is why we extend this invitation not only to adults and the elder-

ly, but particularly to the young people and children to prepare and train to serve the Lord. We need to unite knowledge and youthful strength with experience to be able joyfully to fulfill the great commission to preach "the gospel of the kingdom ... for a witness unto all nations." Matthew 24:14. In the past, it was said to the apostles, "... and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine,..." Acts 5:28. How wonderful it will be when it is said of us that we have filled the world with the doctrine of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ! Then the end will come.

Sabbath, December 15, 2018, will be a special day of fasting and prayer. On that day, we will afflict our souls "between the porch and the altar" in the presence of God. Joel 2:17. The special Week of Prayer Offering for the General Conference will be gathered at the end of the service, to be used to expand the gospel into countries that have not

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yet heard the present truth. It is customary for each of us to place our offerings in an envelope on which is written a Bible verse that has impressed us and that we desire to share with the congregation and with the Lord following the final Reading. The Bible texts and amounts can be read before the congregation at the end of the service as encouragement and in gratitude to God.

May the Lord in the heavens hear the prayers of His people, multiply the donations, and grant His blessing to all who cherish and use their spiritual gifts. God be with His people as they embark on the new year.

—*The brethren of the General Conference and the Ministerial Research Institute*

“Created to be ‘the image and glory of God’ (1 Corinthians 11:7), Adam and Eve had received endowments not unworthy of their high destiny. Graceful and symmetrical in form, regular and beautiful in feature, their countenances glowing with the tint of health and the light of joy and hope, they bore in outward resemblance the likeness of their Maker. Nor was this likeness manifest in the physical nature only. Every faculty of mind and soul reflected the Creator’s glory. Endowed with high mental and spiritual gifts, Adam and Eve were made but ‘little lower than the angels’ (Hebrews 2:7), that they might not only discern the wonders of the visible universe, but comprehend moral responsibilities and obligations.

“‘The Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there He put the man whom He had formed....’ Genesis 2:8. Here, amidst the beautiful scenes of nature untouched by sin, our first parents were to receive their education.”
—*Education*, pp. 20, 21.

Reading 1 – Friday, December 7, 2018

The Excellency of Knowledge

By Ellen G. White

“Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant. Ye know that ye were Gentiles, carried away unto these dumb idols, even as ye were led.”
“Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal. For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit.” 1 Corinthians 12:1, 2, 4-8.

If Adam and Eve had never touched the forbidden tree, the Lord would have imparted to them knowledge—knowledge upon which rested no curse of sin, knowledge that would have brought them everlasting joy. The only knowledge they gained by their disobedience was a knowledge of sin and its results. —(*Australian Union Conference Record*, March 1, 1904) *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 1083.

Age after age, the curiosity of men has led them to seek for the tree of knowledge; and often they think they are plucking fruit most essential, when, like Solomon’s research, they find it altogether vanity and nothingness in comparison with that science of true holiness which will open to them the gates of the city of God. The human ambition has been seeking for that kind of knowledge that will bring to them glory and self-exaltation and supremacy. Thus Adam and Eve were worked upon by Satan until God’s restraint was snapped asunder, and their education under the teacher of lies began in order that they might have the knowledge which God had refused them—to know

the consequence of transgression.—(Manuscript 67, 1898) *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 1083.

True wisdom is a treasure as lasting as eternity. Many of the world’s so-called wise men are wise only in their own estimation. Content with the acquisition of worldly wisdom, they never enter the garden of God, to become acquainted with the treasures of knowledge contained in His holy Word. Supposing themselves to be wise, they are ignorant concerning the wisdom which all must have who gain eternal life.” —*Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, p. 1156.

“And by knowledge shall the chambers be filled with all precious and pleasant riches.” Proverbs 24:4.

For the mind and the soul, as well as for the body, it is God’s law that strength is acquired by effort. It is exercise that develops. In harmony with this law, God has provided in His word the means for mental and spiritual development.

The Bible contains all the principles that men need to understand in order to be fitted either for this life or for the life to come. And these principles may be understood by all. No one with a spirit to appreciate its teaching can read a single passage from the Bible without gaining from it some helpful thought. But the most valuable teaching of the Bible is not to be gained by occasional or disconnected study. Its great system of truth is not so presented as to be discerned by the hasty or careless reader. Many of its treasures lie far beneath the surface, and can be obtained only by diligent research and continuous effort. The truths that go to make up the great whole must be searched out and

gathered up, "here a little, and there a little." Isaiah 28:10.

When thus searched out and brought together, they will be found to be perfectly fitted to one another. Each Gospel is a supplement to the others, every prophecy an explanation of another, every truth a development of some other truth. The types of the Jewish economy are made plain by the gospel. Every principle in the word of God has its place, every fact its bearing. And the complete structure, in design and execution, bears testimony to its Author. Such a structure no mind but that of the Infinite could conceive or fashion.

In searching out the various parts and studying their relationship, the highest faculties of the human mind are called into intense activity. No one can engage in such study without developing mental power.

And not alone in searching out truth and bringing it together does the mental value of Bible study consist. It consists also in the effort required to grasp the themes presented. The mind occupied with commonplace matters only, becomes dwarfed and enfeebled. If never tasked to comprehend grand and far-reaching truths, it after a time loses the power of growth. As a safeguard against this degeneracy, and a stimulus to development, nothing else can equal the study of God's word. As a means of intellectual training, the Bible is more effective than any other book, or all other books combined. The greatness of its themes, the dignified simplicity of its utterances, the beauty of its imagery, quicken and uplift the thoughts as nothing else can. No other study can impart such mental power as does the effort to grasp the stupendous truths of revelation. The mind thus brought in contact with the thoughts of the Infinite cannot but expand and strengthen.

And even greater is the power of the Bible in the development of the spiritual nature. Man, created for fellowship with God, can only in such fellowship find his real life and development. Created to find in God his highest joy, he can find in nothing else that which can quiet the cravings of the heart, can satisfy the hunger and thirst of the soul. He who with sincere and teachable spirit studies God's word, seeking to comprehend its truths, will be brought

in touch with its Author; and, except by his own choice, there is no limit to the possibilities of his development.

In its wide range of style and subjects the Bible has something to interest every mind and appeal to every heart. In its pages are found history the most ancient; biography the truest to life; principles of government for the control of the state, for the regulation of the household—principles that human wisdom has never equaled. It contains philosophy the most profound, poetry the sweetest and the most sublime, the most impassioned and the most pathetic. Immeasurably superior in value to the productions of any human author are the Bible writings, even when thus considered; but of infinitely wider scope, of infinitely greater value, are they when viewed in their relation to the grand central thought. Viewed in the light of this thought, every topic has a new significance. In the most simply stated truths are involved principles that are as high as heaven and that compass eternity.

The central theme of the Bible, the theme about which every other in the whole book clusters, is the redemption plan, the restoration in the human soul of the image of God. From the first intimation of hope in the sentence pronounced in Eden to that last glorious promise of the Revelation, "They shall see His face; and His name shall be in their foreheads" (Revelation 22:4), the burden of every book and every passage of the Bible is the unfolding of this wondrous theme—man's uplifting—the power of God, "which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." 1 Corinthians 15:57.

"... The excellency of knowledge is, that wisdom giveth life to them that have it." Ecclesiastes 7:12.

He who grasps this thought has before him an infinite field for study. He has the key that will unlock to him the whole treasure house of God's word.

The science of redemption is the science of all sciences; the science that is the study of the angels and of all the intelligences of the unfallen worlds; the science that engages the attention of our Lord and Saviour; the science that

enters into the purpose brooded in the mind of the Infinite—"kept in silence through times eternal" (Romans 16:25, R.V.); the science that will be the study of God's redeemed throughout endless ages. This is the highest study in which it is possible for man to engage. As no other study can, it will quicken the mind and uplift the soul....

"The words that I speak unto you," said Jesus, "they are spirit, and they are life." "This is life eternal, that they should know Thee the only true God, and Him whom Thou didst send." John 6:63; 17:3, R.V.

The creative energy that called the worlds into existence is in the word of God. This word imparts power; it begets life. Every command is a promise; accepted by the will, received into the soul, it brings with it the life of the Infinite One. It transforms the nature and re-creates the soul in the image of God.

The life thus imparted is in like manner sustained. "By every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4) shall man live.

The mind, the soul, is built up by that upon which it feeds; and it rests with us to determine upon what it shall be fed. It is within the power of everyone to choose the topics that shall occupy the thoughts and shape the character. Of every human being privileged with access to the Scriptures, God says, "I have written to him the great things of My law." "Call unto Me, and I will answer thee, and show thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not." Hosea 8:12; Jeremiah 33:3.

With the word of God in his hands, every human being, wherever his lot in life may be cast, may have such companionship as he shall choose. In its pages he may hold converse with the noblest and best of the human race, and may listen to the voice of the Eternal as He speaks with men. As he studies and meditates upon the themes into which "the angels desire to look" (1 Peter 1:12), he may have their companionship. He may follow the steps of the heavenly Teacher, and listen to His words as when He taught on mountain and plain and sea. He may dwell in this world in the atmosphere of heaven, imparting to earth's sorrowing and tempted ones thoughts of hope and longings for holiness; himself coming closer and

still closer into fellowship with the Unseen; like him of old who walked with God, drawing nearer and nearer the threshold of the eternal world, until the portals shall open, and he shall enter there. He will find himself no stranger. The voices that will greet him are the voices of the holy ones, who, unseen, were on earth his companions—voices that here he learned to distinguish and to love. He who through the word of God has lived in fellowship with heaven, will find himself at home in heaven's companionship. —*Education*, pp. 123-127.

"Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift." 2 Corinthians 9:15.

The revelation of God's love to man centers in the cross. Its full significance tongue cannot utter; pen cannot portray; the mind of man cannot comprehend....

Christ crucified for our sins, Christ risen from the dead, Christ ascended on high, is the science of salvation that we are to learn and to teach.

"Who, being in the form of God, counted it not a thing to be grasped to be on an equality with God, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, becoming obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the cross." Philippians 2:6-8, R.V., margin.

"It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God." "Wherefore He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them." Romans 8:34; Hebrews 7:25....

Here are infinite wisdom, infinite love, infinite justice, infinite mercy—"the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God." Romans 11:33.

It is through the gift of Christ that we receive every blessing. Through that gift there comes to us day by day the unfailling flow of Jehovah's goodness. Every flower, with its delicate tints and sweet fragrance, is given for our enjoyment through that one Gift. The sun and moon were made by Him; there is not a star that beautifies the

heavens which He did not make. There is not an article of food upon our tables that He has not provided for our sustenance. The superscription of Christ is upon it all. Everything is supplied to man through the one unspeakable Gift, the only-begotten Son of God. He was nailed to the cross that all these bounties might flow to God's workmanship. —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8, pp. 287, 288.

"Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him." 1 Corinthians 2:9. Surely there are none that, beholding the riches of His grace, can forbear to exclaim with the apostle, "Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift." 2 Corinthians 9:15. —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 730. Amen. ■

"In many hearts there seems to be scarcely a breath of spiritual life. This makes me very sad. I fear that aggressive warfare against the world, the flesh, and the devil has not been maintained. Shall we cheer on, by a half-dead Christianity, the selfish, covetous spirit of the world, sharing its ungodliness and smiling on its falsehood? Nay! By the grace of God let us be steadfast to the principles of truth, holding firm to the end the beginning of our confidence. We are to be 'not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord.' Romans 12:11. One is our Master, even Christ. To Him we are to look. From Him we are to receive our wisdom. By His grace we are to preserve our integrity, standing before God in meekness and contrition, and representing Him to the world.

"Sermons have been in great demand in our churches. The members have depended upon pulpit declamations instead of on the Holy Spirit. Uncalled for and unused, the spiritual gifts bestowed on them have dwindled into feebleness. If the ministers would go forth into new fields, the members would be obliged to bear responsibilities, and by use their capabilities would increase.

"God brings against ministers and people the heavy charge of spiritual feebleness, saying, 'I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of My mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of Me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see.' Revelation 3:15-18.

"God calls for a spiritual revival and a spiritual reformation. Unless this takes place, those who are lukewarm will continue to grow more abhorrent to the Lord, until He will refuse to acknowledge them as His children.

"A revival and a reformation must take place, under the ministration of the Holy Spirit. Revival and reformation are two different things. Revival signifies a renewal of spiritual life, a quickening of the powers of mind and heart, a resurrection from spiritual death. Reformation signifies a reorganization, a change in ideas and theories, habits and practices. Reformation will not bring forth the good fruit of righteousness unless it is connected with the revival of the Spirit. Revival and reformation are to do their appointed work, and in doing this work they must blend." —(*Review and Herald*, February 25, 1902) *Selected Messages*, book 1, pp. 127, 128.

Faith That Overcomes the World

By Humberto Avellaneda, Colombia

“But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal.” “To another faith by the same Spirit:...” 1 Corinthians 12:7, 9.

To have faith is to **believe**, even when doubting might seem more logical and less risky. It is to **recognize** the divine designs, even though we do not understand or like them. It is to **look forward**, no matter how sad the past has been or how uncertain the future may appear. It is to **search** for the improbable, even when hope has disappeared. It is to **give** when we do not have, when we ourselves are in need. Finally, to have faith is to **rest** in Him as he carries us in His arms, instead of carrying our own burden and pain. Faith is to **trust** in God, believing that He loves us and knows what is best for us.

“Faith,” a small word with very great meaning, is the subject of today’s Reading. Faith is supremely important, because there is lack of it everywhere. We must begin with the concept that, whatever its definition, the first thing we should know is that it is a gift from heaven to humanity, but in a special way for the true believer. Without it, it is impossible to enjoy the other gifts of the Spirit; therefore, those who exercise faith do not deserve any credit for themselves.

What is the divine concept of faith?

“What is faith? ‘The substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.’ Hebrews 11:1. It is an assent of the understanding to God’s words.... Faith is rendering to God the intellectual powers, abandonment of the mind and will to God, and making Christ the only door to enter into the kingdom of heaven.” –*Faith and Works*, p. 26.

“Faith is not the ground of our salvation, but it is the great blessing—the eye that sees, the ear that hears, the feet

that run, the hand that grasps. It is the means, not the end. If Christ gave His life to save sinners, why shall I not take that blessing? My faith grasps it, and thus my faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things unseen.” –*Our Father Cares*, p. 151.

“Faith, too, is the gift of God. Faith is the assent of man’s understanding to God’s words, that binds the heart to God’s service.” –*In Heavenly Places*, p. 221.

How is this precious gift obtained?

The gifts of the Holy Spirit cannot be bought; they are not for sale anywhere, so that is why they are classified as gifts. How can we obtain them, including, in this particular case, the gift of faith? God’s word gives us four answers to this question:

1. By hearing God’s word. “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” Romans 10:17. God designs for people to come to the knowledge of the truth through the preaching of His word. “For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.” 1 Corinthians 1:21. In reference to the millions of souls who do not know about the plan of salvation, the Scriptures say: “... How shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?” Romans 10:14.

2. In prayer. The disciples’ plea to the Lord was: “Increase our faith.” Luke 17:5. Asking for faith is the secret of success. Do you feel a lack of effective faith? Pray. Do you feel that others should be blessed with stronger faith? Pray. Do you feel the need of a revival that will empower the unbelievers with victorious faith? Pray. The prayer of faith will save the unbeliever.

3. Through the Holy Spirit. “To another faith by the same Spirit;...” “Howbeit when He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth: for He shall not speak of Himself; but whatsoever He shall hear, that shall He speak: and He will show you things to come.” 1 Corinthians 12:9; John 16:13. Faith is a gift of the Spirit to strengthen the believer.

4. Through the example of others. “... Be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.” 1 Timothy 4:12. Depending on whether our faith is strengthened or weakened through the influence of our fellow believers, our influence over others will also either strengthen or weaken their faith, according to the example that is given in one’s practical life.

Two kinds of faith

The Bible speaks of two kinds of faith—a “saving faith” that is a supernatural gift of God and a “dead” faith that is found in the unconverted natural man. That is why the apostle Paul wrote: “That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.” 1 Corinthians 2:5.

“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.” James 1:17. Those who receive the faith that is given by God enter through the narrow gate and carry their sins to the foot of the cross. Matthew 7:13. They bear much fruit for God’s glory. John 15:8. Those who have a dead faith enter through the wide gate with the filthy rags of their own righteousness. Matthew 7:13. These are the ones who produce bad fruit for their own glory. Matthew 7:15.

“True faith asks the Lord, ‘What wilt Thou have me to do?’ and when the way is marked out by the Master, faith is ready to do His will, at whatever hardship or sacrifice.” —*Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students*, p. 175.

“... Faith is in no sense allied to presumption. Only he who has true faith is secure against presumption. For presumption is Satan’s counterfeit of faith. Faith claims God’s promises, and brings forth fruit in obedience. Presumption also claims the promises, but uses them as Satan did, to excuse transgression.... It is not faith that claims the favor of Heaven without complying with the conditions on which mercy is to be granted. Genuine faith has its foundation in the promises and provisions of the Scriptures.” —*The Desire of Ages*, p. 126.

The test of faith

The apostle James refers to the practical side of faith when he says that “faith without works is dead.” James 2:20. It is easier to say, “I believe,” than it is to demonstrate our belief when we are exposed to trials and affliction. We can see an example of this in Jesus’ days. While there were loaves and fish to eat, everyone believed in Jesus; but when He preached His sermon about the bread of life, “many of His disciples went back, and walked no more with Him.” John 6:66. The faith of many was thus tested, revealing that the faith of some of them was false.

Do we have faith that is at least the size of a mustard seed? Is it strong and sufficient to face the final tests that will come upon the earth?

Think about how the faith of God’s servants was tested in the past (Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Elijah, Daniel and his companions, and many others). Let us focus our attention on Elijah on Mount Carmel after a very long, hard day. At the end of the afternoon, after the prophet’s prayer of faith, God manifested Himself by consuming the sacrifice. But there was more. The Bible says: “And Elijah said unto Ahab, Get thee up, eat and drink; for there is a sound of abundance of rain.... And Elijah went up to the top of Carmel; and he cast himself down upon the earth, and put his face between

his knees, And said to his servant, Go up now, look toward the sea. And he went up, and looked, and said, There is nothing. And he said, Go again seven times. And it came to pass at the seventh time, that he said, Behold, there ariseth a little cloud out of the sea, like a man’s hand. And he said, Go up, say unto Ahab, Prepare thy chariot, and get thee down, that the rain stop thee not. And it came to pass in the mean while, that the heaven was black with clouds and wind, and there was a great rain. And Ahab rode, and went to Jezreel. And the hand of the Lord was on Elijah; and he girded up his loins, and ran before Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel.” 1 Kings 18:41-46.

“It was not because of any outward evidence that the showers were about to fall, that Elijah could so confidently bid Ahab prepare for rain. The prophet saw no clouds in the heavens; he heard no thunder. He simply spoke the word that the Spirit of the Lord had moved him to speak in response to his own strong faith.” —*Prophets and Kings*, pp. 155, 156. How could one hear the rain if there was none? Only with the mind and heart of faith in the Lord. God’s prophet heard the rain; that is faith—complete belief in God’s word.

A second interesting part of this is that while the king was eating and drinking, thus satisfying his appetite, the prophet was praying earnestly to the Eternal One. “Each time the servant returned with the word, ‘There is nothing.’ The prophet did not become impatient or lose faith, but continued his earnest pleading. Six times the servant returned with the word that there was no sign of rain in the brassy heavens. Undaunted, Elijah sent him forth once more; and this time the servant returned with the word, ‘Behold, there ariseth a little cloud out of the sea like a man’s hand.’

“This was enough. Elijah did not wait for the heavens to gather blackness. In that small cloud he beheld by faith an abundance of rain; and he acted in harmony with his faith, sending his servant quickly to Ahab with the message,....” —*Prophets and Kings*, p. 156.

What would have happened if Elijah had become discouraged and given up after he sent his servant for the sixth time? His prayer would not have

been answered. But he persevered until he received the answer he was seeking. “Faith such as this is needed in the world today—faith that will lay hold on the promises of God’s word and refuse to let go until Heaven hears. Faith such as this connects us closely with Heaven, and brings us strength for coping with the powers of darkness. Through faith God’s children have ‘subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens.’ Hebrews 11:33, 34. And through faith we today are to reach the heights of God’s purpose for us.” —*Prophets and Kings*, p. 157.

Who believes that everything is possible with God? Mark 9:23. “For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.” 1 John 5:4. God continues to keep His word. He wants His people to triumph despite the rampant unbelief in the world today. We need to be born again in Christ and to make Him our righteousness so that we can come off more than conquerors. He is the Author and Finisher of the faith that liberates and saves.

Dear brothers and sisters, let us meditate and consider the state of our faith today. Has it grown? Have we made experiences during the year that is about to end? Like Elijah, today we may be called to Mount Carmel to give a reason for our faith. Our petitions rise to Heaven to give us more of that precious gift, as the disciples prayed, because the final test is coming, and who will be able to stand? May God keep us and give us the victory. Amen! ■

“In the Bible, God’s will is plainly made known. God expects every man to use his gifts in a way that will give him an increased knowledge of the things of God, and will enable him to make improvement, to become more and more refined, ennobled, and purified.” —*This Day with God*, p. 137.

“... That Thou Mayest Prosper, and Be in Health”

By Morris Lowe, Canada

“But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal.” “... To another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit.” 1 Corinthians 12:7, 9.

When God created man in His own image and after His likeness, man was perfect in health mentally, physically, and spiritually. “And God saw every thing that He had made, and, behold, it *was* very good.” Genesis 1:31. But sin—disobedience to God, which is transgression of His law (1 John 3:4)—brought terrible consequences to the human race: Alienation and separation from the Creator, sickness, disease, pain, and death. Man’s physical existence was placed in permanent jeopardy, threatened by the natural environment and deadly pathogens (disease-causing organisms). As a direct consequence of Adam and Eve’s transgression, our loving, righteous Creator was compelled to pronounce the death sentence upon mankind: “In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground: for out of it wast thou taken: for *dust* thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.” Genesis 3:19. In His great love for His erring children, the Lord provided redemption for them and also the “herb of the field” for their medicinal needs—to prevent illness and disease and to *restore* health when they became ill.

Part of human existence

Sin and Satan made sickness and disease—and eventual death—part of the human experience. Sickness, injury, and disease are direct or indirect consequences of the curse of sin. Through direct genetic transmission from parent to child, unhealthy lifestyle practices and habits, violation of the nat-

ural laws of health and the moral law, environmental dangers (pathogens, pollution, poisonous and carcinogenic chemical substances, natural disasters, accidents, etc.), sickness and disease afflict people. Thousands of such diseases and sicknesses afflict the children of men. No one is exempt.

Through Adam’s disobedience, *all* were made sinners, and all are subject to death. “For as by one man’s disobedience, many were made sinners,...” “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and *death* by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.” Romans 5:19, 12. While it is appointed unto every human being to die once—to experience the *first death*—God wants us to enjoy the benefits and blessings of a healthy life while we spend our brief time here on earth. He desires His children to “prosper and be in good health,” even as our souls prosper. 3 John 1:2.

Christ’s method of gospel work

The Lord did not abandon mankind to suffer the scourge of disease and sickness without hope or help. When He lived among men, He spent much of His ministry healing the sick and those suffering from all kinds of diseases and torments. He healed multitudes who were blind, dumb, deaf, paralyzed, leprous, mentally unstable, and demon-possessed, along with others who suffered from many other kinds of infirmities and diseases.

“And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people. And His fame went throughout all

Syria: and they brought unto Him all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those which were possessed with devils, and those which were lunatick, and those that had the palsy; and *He healed them.*” “And when He had called unto Him His twelve disciples, He gave them power against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease.” Matthew 4:23, 24; 10:1.

Jesus’ method of gospel work combined healing (medical missionary work) with the preaching of the gospel. *This must be our method of work*—combining the *gifts of healing* (medical missionary work) with the preaching of the everlasting gospel. We must show that it is not God who causes sickness, pain, and suffering, but that it is man, through his own ignorance and sin, who has brought sickness and disease upon himself.

Our loving, merciful Creator has provided *healing* for both body and soul; and He has entrusted His church with the ministry of reconciliation and the *ministry of healing*. The gifts of healing are among the gifts the Holy Ghost has entrusted to His church. “To one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the *gifts of healing* by the same Spirit;” “But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as He will.” 1 Corinthians 12:8, 9, 11.

Gifts of healing and medical evangelism

The gifts of healing are very precious gifts of the Holy Spirit, and they are an

indispensable part of the gospel ministry. How so? Our bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit of God, and as such the Lord commands us to keep His temple pure and healthy. No man can serve God acceptably while willfully or carelessly violating the laws of health and defiling his or her body with unhealthful practices and sinful habits. "What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?" "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are." 1 Corinthians 6:19; 3:16, 17.

"True religion and the laws of health go hand in hand. It is impossible to work for the salvation of men and women without presenting to them the need of breaking away from sinful gratifications, which destroy the health, debase the soul, and prevent divine truth from impressing the mind. Men and women must be taught to take a careful review of every habit and every practice, and at once put away those things that cause an unhealthy condition of the body, and thus cast a dark shadow over the mind." —*Counsels on Health*, p. 445.

The purpose of the gospel is the complete restoration of the moral image of God in man. "And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is He that calleth you, who also will do it." 1 Thessalonians 5:23, 24.

Methods of healing

The apostle Paul wrote the plural form—*gifts* of healing—not the singular—*gift* of healing. Why? The human being is an extremely complex and marvelous creation of God, consisting of many different types of cells, tissues, organs, and systems working harmoniously together to sustain human life. Numerous physiological imbalances (diseases) can affect different cells, tissues, organs, and systems. Therefore, healing remedies must specifically target the area(s) or systems of the body affected by the illness. When a person

becomes ill, it may require one or a combination of several kinds of healing therapies, such as nutritional therapy, physiotherapy, hydrotherapy, herbal medicine, etc., to restore health. No one therapy is the cure for every type of illness, injury, or disease. Different people in the church of God have been given knowledge concerning certain parts of the body and ability to treat and cure various ailments. Every one of the *gifts of healing* is important.

"There are many ways of practicing the healing art, but there is only one way that Heaven approves. God's remedies are the simple agencies of nature that will not tax or debilitate the system through their powerful properties." —*Counsels on Diet and Foods*, p. 302; *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 443.

The compassion of Christ

"Medical missionary work brings to humanity the gospel of release from suffering. It is the pioneer work of the gospel. It is the gospel practiced, the compassion of Christ revealed. Of this work there is great need, and the world is open for it. God grant that the importance of medical missionary work shall be understood, and that new fields may be immediately entered." —*Medical Ministry*, p. 239. The importance and value of the *gifts of healing* (medical missionary work) cannot be overstated. The Spirit of prophecy declares that medical missionary work is *God's method of treating disease* and the right arm of the third angel's message. —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 7, p. 59. It opens doors and prepares the way for the reception of present truth. It breaks down prejudice and gains access to the hearts of the people as nothing else can. —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, p. 211. Health reform is a part of the last great efforts to proclaim the gospel message.

For our own benefit, and for the benefit of our fellowmen, we are to be intelligent in regard to disease and its causes and understand the importance of obedience to the laws of life. "The light God has given on health reform is for our salvation and the salvation of the world. Men and women should be informed in regard to the human habitation, fitted up by our Creator as

His dwelling place, and over which He desires us to be faithful stewards. 'For ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.' 2 Corinthians 6:16." —(*Review and Herald*, November 12, 1901) *Welfare Ministry*, pp. 130, 131.

The good Samaritan work and healing

During this Week of Prayer, I would like to appeal to the people of God worldwide to support the work of the General Conference Good Samaritan Department. As the leader of the General Conference Help Ministry, I have been given the privilege of working closely with the leader of the Good Samaritan Department, Elder Stefano La Corte. I appreciate the great and noble work that the Good Samaritan team of faithful co-workers does. The calls for financial and medical help for those who are suffering as a result of sickness, old age, poverty, natural disasters, or death of loved ones, are numerous and often urgent. Many of our brothers and sisters around the world endure poverty and lack of access to adequate medical care and treatment. Both the Good Samaritan Department and the Health Department need your prayers and financial support in this branch of the gospel work. The Help Ministry carries out the work of healing.

Consider the following counsel from the Scriptures and the Spirit of prophecy: "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world." James 1:27.

"In placing among them the helpless and the poor, to be dependent upon their care, Christ tests His professed followers. By our love and service for His needy children we prove the genuineness of our love for Him. To neglect them is to declare ourselves false disciples, strangers to Christ and His love." *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 205.

"We are all woven together in the great web of humanity, and whatever we can do to benefit and uplift others will reflect in blessing upon ourselves...."

"All may find something to do. 'The poor always ye have with you' (John 12:8), Jesus said, and none need feel that there is no place where they can labor for Him. Millions upon millions of human souls ready to perish, bound in chains of ignorance and sin, have never so much as heard of Christ's love for them. Were our condition and theirs to be reversed, what would we desire them to do for us? All this, so far as lies in our power, we are under the most solemn obligation to do for them. Christ's rule of life, by which every one of us must stand or fall in the judgment, is, 'Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them.' Matthew 7:12." —*Call to Stand Apart*, p. 62.

Call for support and action

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, we need to appreciate and support the labors of those who have labored, and continue to labor, in medical missionary work at the various levels of God's church around the world. As the professed people of God, we need to be more sacrificial and generous in our financial support of the church's medical institutions, sanitariums, clinics, and medical missionary workers who are advancing the work of *healing* the bodies and souls of men, women, and children. As we near the end of another year of mercy, let us realize and appreciate anew the great *privilege* and *responsibility* we have as co-laborers with Christ in the great work of rescuing precious souls from the bondage of sin and disease.

Let the love of God penetrate our hearts, and let us share His love with our fellowmen in unselfish service to the spiritually and physically sick, the poor and needy. Remember, the world will be convinced that we are the remnant people of God not so much by what is preached from our pulpits as by what is *lived* by the church members. May the Lord in His mercy make us channels of healing and Heaven's blessings!

"Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth"! 3 John 1:2. Amen! ■

Reading 4 – Tuesday, December 11, 2018

"These Signs Shall Follow Them That Believe"

By Douglas Francis, Sri Lanka/India/U.S.A.

"But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal." "To another the working of miracles;..." 1 Corinthians 12:7, 10.

"**A**nd 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.

We praise the Lord for this beautiful text that we find in the Bible along with many other scriptural references indicating that the signs from heaven will follow those who believe. The word "sign" comes from the Greek word *sēmeion*.¹ *Thayer's* defines this word as a sign, mark, or token by which a person or a thing is distinguished from others.²

However, the above verses can be fully understood only by reading them in context with the two previous verses: "And He said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." Mark 16:15, 16. Those who hear the witness, believe, and are baptized will be saved.

When Jesus commissioned His disciples to preach the gospel (Matthew 28:20), He assured them that He would accompany them. The signs would be God's signature—Heaven's endorsement of the gospel message carried by these believers. It is in this context that Christ said, "... These signs shall follow them that believe." Their message would be accompanied by signs such as:

- Those who believe will cast out devils in Christ's name.

- They will speak with new tongues or languages.
- They shall take up serpents.
- No deadly, poisonous drink will be able to harm them.
- They will lay hands on the sick, and they will be healed.

Signs vs. the gospel

The apostle Paul wrote: "For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling-block, and unto the Greeks foolishness." "For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God." 1 Corinthians 1:22, 23, 18. In other words, the plan of salvation is the gospel. Therefore, the emphasis will be given to the proclamation of the gospel as the believers' primary mission.

The neediest people on the earth are not necessarily the poor, but the sick, because with time they may become helpless and their minds may grow weak, lessening their ability to lay hold of the gospel and eternal realities. When they reach the end of their lives, their probation may be over, and their opportunity for salvation may be lost forever. Therefore, our primary mission today is to find the neediest, yet without neglecting the rest. "They shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover." Miracles and signs complement the gospel ministry.

Improper actions lead to presumption

Unbalanced people frequently misinterpret Mark 16:17, 18. For example, there are snake-handling services in

some of the Southern churches in the United States. A news report on CNN, February 18, 2014, was headlined, "Reality show snake-handling preacher dies of snakebite." The report went on to say that "A Kentucky pastor who starred in a reality show about snake-handling in church has died—of a snakebite. Pastor Jamie Coats died Saturday evening after refusing to be treated, Middlesboro police said."³ Such incidents are not few.

This promise was fulfilled when the apostle Paul who was bitten by a serpent on Malta while tending a fire after a shipwreck; he simply shook off the snake into the fire and was not harmed, according to Acts 28:1-6. However, he did not devote church services to handling deadly snakes as a reality show. Jesus rejected such an application of Scripture.

After Jesus fasted in the desert for 40 days, Satan tempted Him to prove that He was God's Son by throwing Himself down from the pinnacle of the temple. The adversary quoted the text, "He shall give His angels charge over thee, to keep thee: And in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone." Luke 4:9-12; Psalm 91:12. Jesus set an example for us never to act presumptuously, as if God desired His children to do foolish things to "test" Him.

Many who came to Jesus wanted Him to show them a sign. However, Jesus did not grant such requests. "Then certain of the scribes and of the Pharisees answered, saying, Master, we would see a sign from Thee." Matthew 12:38. It is interesting to note that the scribes and Pharisees asked to see a sign so they could believe in Jesus. But He refused to do this, because, even if He had given them a sign, they would not believe in Him. They would continue to give excuses and criticism.

According to the Scriptures, Jesus Himself is the sign. There was no need for the people to look for another. Matthew 12:38-41. Likewise, sometimes people expect God to think and act as human beings do. Our prayers may contain many requests, including petitions for signs. Are we looking for some new sign?

There is a beautiful statement made by Ahaz, found in the book of Isaiah:

"... If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established. Moreover, the Lord spake again unto Ahaz, saying, Ask thee a sign of the Lord thy God; ask it either in the depth, or in the height above. But Ahaz said, I will not ask, neither will I tempt the Lord. And he said, Hear ye now, O house of David; Is it a small thing for you to weary men, but will ye weary my God also? Therefore the Lord Himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call His name Immanuel." Isaiah 7:9-14. Jesus Christ Himself being reflected in His children's lives is a sign of His divinity.

The ultimate sign is genuine personal conversion

"In My name shall they cast out devils." A true believer would be able to apply this statement to his own life. "The Saviour was pointing forward to the time when the Holy Spirit should come to do a mighty work as His representative. The evil that had been accumulating for centuries was to be resisted by the divine power of the Holy Spirit." —*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 47, 48. The gospel that believers receive sets them free from the devil's spiritual captivity. God uses them as vessels to accomplish His marvelous work of salvation.

"They shall speak with new tongues." Today the Bible is available in many languages, not just in the original Hebrew, Greek, or Aramaic. "New tongues" are a gift from God. The miracle of speaking in tongues does not mean that the Christians should speak babbling—some language that is unknown on earth. On the day of Pentecost, the disciples either spoke in their own language and the listeners heard it in their languages, or the disciples spoke in languages that were new to them and the listeners understood. This was a wonderful miracle and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

The great commission that Christ gave to His followers was to go into all the world and proclaim the gospel. If we believe in Him, we may be given the gift of speaking new languages. Then the gospel that we proclaim will no longer stay foreign to the listeners. A good example of this was the apostle

Thomas, who traveled to and worked in India. He received the gift of tongues to give the gospel to the Gentiles.

"Thomas Christians, also called St. Thomas Christians or Malabar Christians, [are] indigenous Indian Christian groups who have traditionally lived in Kerala, a state on the Malabar Coast, in southwestern India. Claiming to have been evangelized by St. Thomas the Apostle, Thomas Christians ecclesiastically, liturgically, and linguistically represent one of the oldest Christian traditions in the world, particularly in Christianity outside the West."⁴

Many Western and Eastern missionaries travelled to the ends of the world, having hope in this miracle. They succeeded in their missions because, with the help of the Holy Spirit, they learned the native language in very little time and even translated the Bible into local languages. This miracle still exists in the church and will be present until the very end. We are so thankful to the Lord for this special gift!

"Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you." Luke 10:19. The Lord has given all power to the believers to handle whatever dangers they face in their ministries. The power of the Lord is not limited simply to the literal meaning of this verse. It extends to a far deeper meaning. Evil men and demons are compared to serpents and scorpions in the Scriptures. Furthermore, the apostle James compared the tongue, when misused, to a promoter of evil and a source of spiritual poison. "But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison." James 3:8. None of these evils can harm the gospel ministries when the power of the Lord is present. The enemy will seek to destroy the lives and ministry of His people at every level, but God's merciful hand will miraculously save them.

"Those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus will feel the ire of the dragon and his hosts. Satan numbers the world as his subjects, he has gained control of the apostate churches; but here is a little company that are resisting his supremacy. If he could blot them from the earth, his

triumph would be complete. As he influenced the heathen nations to destroy Israel, so in the near future he will stir up the wicked powers of earth to destroy the people of God.... Their only hope is in the mercy of God; their only defense will be prayer.

"The trying experiences that came to God's people in the days of Esther were not peculiar to that age alone. The revelator, looking down the ages to the close of time, has declared, 'The dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keeps the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.' Revelation 12:17. Some who today are living on the earth will see these words fulfilled." –*Maranatha*, p. 32.

The ultimate signs that follow, after one accepts and believes the gospel of Jesus Christ, are conviction and conversion. To have our evil hearts changed so that kindness and the love of Christ always dwell in us is the supreme miracle and the ultimate sign.

Now we are left with two important unanswered questions. First, are the miracles and signs that are seen today in the Christian world from the Lord? Are they sanctioned by Him? And, second, what miracles and signs will be performed by God's remnant people?

"Persons will arise pretending to be Christ Himself, and claiming the title and worship which belong to the world's Redeemer. They will perform wonderful miracles of healing and will profess to have revelations from heaven contradicting the testimony of the Scriptures...." –*Last Day Events*, p. 157. Thus, many miracles and signs broadcast in the Christian world are not sanctioned by God.

Signs and miracles in God's remnant church

Miracles, including healing, will take place in God's remnant church, not in competition with health education but in support of it. Reports come from all over the world about miraculous healing. The Lord does remarkable things in many different ministries and in the most dangerous places. This will continue and will be especially prominent during the later rain.

"'They shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.' Mark 16:18. This world is a vast lazar house, but Christ came to heal the sick, to proclaim deliverance to the captives of Satan." –*The Desire of Ages*, p. 823.

"It is with an earnest longing that I look forward to the time when the events of the Day of Pentecost shall be repeated with even greater power than on that occasion. John says, 'I saw another angel come down from heaven, having great power; and the earth was lightened with his glory.' Revelation 18:1. Then, as at the Pentecostal season, the people will hear the truth spoken to them, every man in his own tongue." –*Last Day Events*, p. 202.

"In visions of the night, representations passed before me of a great reformatory movement among God's people. Many were praising God. The sick were healed, and other miracles were wrought. A spirit of intercession was seen, even as was manifested before the great Day of Pentecost." –*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9 (1909), p. 126.

"The great work of the gospel is not to close with less manifestation of the power of God than marked its opening. The prophecies which were fulfilled in the outpouring of the former rain at the opening of the gospel, are again to be fulfilled in the latter rain at its close....

"Servants of God, with their faces lighted up and shining with holy consecration, will hasten from place to place to proclaim the message from heaven. By thousands of voices, all over the earth, the warning will be giv-

en. Miracles will be wrought, the sick will be healed, and signs and wonders will follow the believers." –*The Great Controversy* (1911), pp. 611, 612.

Conclusion

The signs and wonders performed by the early church were the key to the proclamation of the gospel (Acts 3 and 4), indicated the divine Power's presence and approval (Acts 19:17-19), confirmed the work of the Holy Spirit (Romans 15:18-20), presented the kingdom of God to humanity (Acts 4:29-31; 7:35-37; 14:2-4), granted freedom from spiritual bondage (Acts 16:16-18), and led the people to have faith in God. Acts 9:40-42; 13:6-12.

Dear brothers, sisters, youth, and children, God desires every one of us to have and reveal the sign of a converted heart—to follow Jesus because we believe in Him. "Every character will be fully developed; and all will show whether they have chosen the side of loyalty or that of rebellion.

"Then the end will come." –*The Desire of Ages*, p. 763. "Even so, come, Lord Jesus. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen." Revelation 22:20, 21. Amen! ■

¹ *Strong's Concordance*, No. 4592.

² *Thayer's Greek Lexicon*, Electronic Database (Strong's No. 4592), copyright © 2002, 2003, 2006, 2011, BibleSoft, Inc.

³ CNN News Report, February 18, 2014.

⁴ *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Electronic Version, "Thomas Christians," article by Professor Robert Eric Frykenberg (<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Thomas-Christians>).

"After enumerating the privileges of those who work on the plan of addition, constantly adding Christian attributes to the character, the apostle Peter declares that God will work on the plan of multiplication: 'Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord, according as His divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him that hath called us to glory and virtue: whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.... Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure; for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.' 2 Peter 1:2-11. Here is our life insurance policy. Shall we not work on God's plan to secure it?" –*The Upward Look*, p. 45.

“... Believe His Prophets, So Shall Ye Prosper”

By Jose Vicente Giner, Spain/Switzerland

What is the gift of prophecy?

The people of God in all times have lived in harmony with the divine will. And the true worshipers at the time of the end are defined in the Bible as follows: “Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus.” Revelation 14:12. To “keep the commandments of God” is to obey His holy law, the Decalogue, given in Exodus 20:1-17. This is clear without discussion. “The law is the great standard of righteousness. It represents the character of God, and is the test of our loyalty to His government. And it is revealed to us, in all its beauty and excellence, in the life of Christ.” –*Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students*, p. 62. The question is: What does “the faith of Jesus” or “faith in Jesus” mean?

The observance of the commandments and the faith of Jesus are closely linked. While God’s law is a reflection of His character and therefore the standard that He desires every human being to reach, faith in Jesus is the way to achieve it, for in our sinful nature we cannot by ourselves meet the divine requirements. Romans 8:7. Only through the power of Christ is it possible for a human being to obey God’s law. One who exercises faith in Jesus as his personal Saviour receives the power of the Holy Spirit to obey God’s commandments, the basis of His divine government. In fact, Jesus stated that obedience characterizes those who love Him: “If ye love Me, keep My commandments.” John 14:15.

In The Revelation, the same emphasis is placed on God’s remnant people keeping the Ten Commandments as the sign that distinguishes the true wor-

shippers from those who are unfaithful. “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.” Revelation 12:17. The inspired word is very clear in teaching that there has always been and there will always be a remnant that keeps the commandments of God as proof of their loyalty to Him. We have also seen that by the grace of Christ every Christian is able to do this, for, as the Bible text states, the remnant people of God have the “testimony of Jesus Christ.” What does this mean? The phrase is in Revelation 19:10: “And I fell at his feet to worship him. And he said unto me, See thou do it not: I am thy fellow-servant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus: worship God: for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.”

The Spirit of prophecy includes all the messages that Jesus gave His people through the prophets. Throughout Biblical history, God raised up prophets to transmit His divine messages to the people. In very difficult and dangerous moments, a prophet arose in the power of God to proclaim, transmit, and declare the heavenly messages. “The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto Him ye shall hearken.” Deuteronomy 18:15. The words were not those of the prophet but of God (Deuteronomy 18:18), who revealed them to His instruments through dreams and visions. Joel 2:28; Ezekiel 1:1; Numbers 12:6.

These visions were accompanied by special physical phenomena, including the loss of strength (Daniel 10:8, 17); not breathing (Daniel 10:17);

unconsciousness (Daniel 10:9), etc. It was revealed that certain qualities distinguished the true prophet: He spoke according to the law and testimony; he did not present strange doctrines contradicting those previously revealed (Isaiah 8:20); everything he prophesied came true (Jeremiah 28:9); he did not exalt himself but gave all glory to God (Daniel 2:28; Jeremiah 14:14); he did not speak words to please the hearers but those that God gave him, clearly reproving sin (Jeremiah 23:22); and his messages lifted the people’s minds to a higher spiritual level, never tempting them to disobey or go into apostasy. Deuteronomy 13:1-3.

The term “prophet” in Hebrew, *nābî*, means “to proclaim,” “to shout”; that is, the prophet is one who receives divine messages that he then proclaims. The prophet is therefore God’s spokesperson, because he expresses His will. Such messages can be advice, warning, instruction, exhortation, prophecy, and others. In the most critical moments for God’s people, such as when Israel was to be freed from Egyptian bondage, God chose His prophets to carry out His work. Deuteronomy 34:10. In the important times for His people, the prophets played essential, transformative roles as God’s instruments to enlighten, speak to, guide, and admonish His people.

There were prophets—both men and women—who mediated between God and His people in Judah and also in Israel. The words of the prophets were not always well accepted; there were times when their lives were at stake if the messages were not flattering to the people and rulers. That prophets had a great relevance we can see in the Biblical record; they were raised up and en-

couraged by God. True prophets never put themselves forward as such; they were chosen specifically by God. Jeremiah 1:7. Their responsibilities were very great, and often they had severe internal struggles, for their purpose was not to please the people but to convey the divine messages, no matter whether they were positive or negative for the receivers.

It is also true that not everything in the prophets' messages was a condemnation or admonition; there was also the voice of hope from God. When the people were ready to become discouraged or despair because of immediate danger or a very difficult situation, the voice of the seer comforted, guided, and strengthened them.

The messianic prophecies of the Old Testament prophets were the anchor of faith for millions of believers throughout history. Having the security and conviction that one day the Messiah would come to earth in the flesh to dwell with man was a powerful truth to encourage the people in the very worst situations, especially when they were oppressed by foreign nations.

Many prophecies were proclaimed regarding the character and work of the promised Messiah when He would come to this earth. And the most amazing thing is that all of the prophecies of His first coming were fulfilled perfectly! Is this not something wonderful? Is this not enough reason to cause people to believe Him?

In the times of the New Testament, there were also prophets (1 Corinthians 12:28) whose messages were fulfilled, while others will still be fulfilled in the future. Having a clear view of what is going to happen in the future is a great encouragement to the believer, who can see that he is standing on the platform of truth and can discern falsehood coming from people who do not know God. In short, prophecy encourages him to prepare for the coming trials and grow in faith. 2 Peter 1:18.

In the constantly changing, unpredictable world in which we live, there is nothing more disconcerting for human beings than not to know what is coming. Soothsayers, mediums, and fortune tellers have always been and still are successful, because people want to know what will happen in the

future. God absolutely forbade His people to have anything to do with such people (Deuteronomy 18:10, 11), for His prophets gave His message; all others were and are satanic deceivers.

The prophetic gift among the remnant

As stated above, in the most important moments for God's people, there were always prophets at hand to guide and encourage them; and this was part of the divine plan. Amos 3:7. In His great love and mercy, the Lord also made provision for the prophetic gift in His end-time church: "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." Revelation 12:17.

As explained above, the "testimony of Jesus Christ" is the "Spirit of prophecy" (Revelation 19:10), showing that this gift would be manifested in the remnant church. This happened when Sister Ellen G. White, a simple, God-fearing young woman, was called by God to be a spokesperson for Him. Under divine inspiration, she wrote thousands of pages for books, articles, letters, and manuscripts that have been published for the great benefit and inspiration of God's remnant people in Adventism. She demonstrated the Biblical characteristics of a true prophet. We accept the messages in her writings as coming from God to guide His people of the end times to the heavenly Canaan.

Sister White was entrusted with the prophetic gift, as were other women in the Bible, including Moses' sister Miriam (Exodus 15:20), Deborah (Judges 4:4), Ana (Luke 2:36), and others. The Scriptures state that women also receive this gift. Joel 2:28. The Spirit of prophecy is the Holy Spirit who inspires the prophets. We should not say that the Spirit of prophecy is what Sister White wrote but that she was inspired by the Spirit of prophecy.

She never called herself a "prophet" or "prophetess" but in humility and love performed the work of a true prophet. Her writings were not intended to take the place of the Bible but to direct the people's attention to God's

word. "Little heed is given to the Bible, and the Lord has given a lesser light to lead men and women to the greater light." —*Colporteur Evangelist*, p. 37. "A lesser light" does not mean that her writings should not be accepted as inspired but that light comes from the throne of God. If that light was given to His people, it is because the Eternal has been pleased to do this for their good and for their edification.

The Bible is the revelation of God to His people. "In His word, God has committed to men the knowledge necessary for salvation. The Holy Scriptures are to be accepted as an authoritative, infallible revelation of His will. They are the standard of character, the revealer of doctrines, and the test of experience." —*The Great Controversy*, p. vii.

God's holy word is man's guide, and the writings of Sister White inspire us to love, respect, obey, and proclaim that word. She did not write anything that would separate one from the precious revelation, but rather the opposite. When you read the *Testimonies*, you realize how deep they are and the fruit that they produce in your life. They elevate, inspire, encourage, admonish, and guide. The light that has been given on health reform has been a great blessing to millions of people all over the world, and the spiritual books have been translated into many languages and spread all over the earth. *Steps to Christ*, a practical description of the principles of the Christian life first published in 1892, has been translated into more than 170 languages, with 10 million copies printed and distributed. I have met Protestant pastors who praise this book for its great spiritual value. Its pages are full of loving advice and teachings that help the reader grow in his Christian walk.

Sister White wrote more than fifty books, and she penned thousands of pages containing counsel for individuals and the church. Books that she wrote include *The Desire of Ages*, *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, *The Great Controversy*, *The Ministry of Healing*, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, *Prophets and Kings*, *Early Writings*, *Messages to Young People*, *Christ's Object Lessons*, *Counsels on Diet and Foods*, and many more.

“... Try the Spirits”

By Danilo Lopez Monterroso, Guatemala

Keeping in mind that we are on the threshold of eternity, we should be very grateful to God for giving His people the light of the Spirit of prophecy. “We are living in the time of the end. The fast-fulfilling signs of the times declare that the coming of Christ is near at hand. The days in which we live are solemn and important. The Spirit of God is gradually but surely being withdrawn from the earth. Plagues and judgments are already falling upon the despisers of the grace of God. The calamities by land and sea, the unsettled state of society, the alarms of war, are portentous. They forecast approaching events of the greatest magnitude.” – *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, p. 11.

The enemy will try to destroy the influence of the *Testimonies* so the people are left in darkness. “The very last deception of Satan will be to make of none effect the testimony of the Spirit of God. ‘Where there is no vision, the people perish.’ Proverbs 29:18.” – *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 48.

Now is the time, more than ever before, dear brothers and sisters, to appreciate the Spirit of prophecy (1 Thessalonians 5:20) and to follow it carefully. 2 Peter 1:19. “Besides the instruction in His Word, the Lord has given special testimonies to His people, not as a new revelation, but that He may set before us the plain lessons of His Word, that errors may be corrected, that the right way may be pointed out, that every soul may be without excuse.” – Letter 63, 1893 (“The Primacy of the Word”); *Selected Messages*, book 3, p. 31.

Dear brothers and sisters, I encourage you to dedicate more time and effort to studying God’s instructions contained in the *Testimonies* that He gave to His people for their blessing. The Spirit of prophecy supplied the key to understanding the Bible in this very time in which we are living. God bless you. Amen. ■

“All men do not receive the same gifts, but to every servant of the Master some gift of the Spirit is promised.” – *The Faith I Live By*, p. 292.

“But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal.” “To another discerning of spirits;...” 1 Corinthians 12:7, 10.

There are differences in the spiritual gifts, but there is only one Spirit. Every person is granted a manifestation of the Holy Spirit that is especially for him, although all of the gifts are for the purpose of edifying. Thus, in the church are different gifts and functions given by the Holy Spirit to perfect His beloved church. In 1 Corinthians 12:31, we see how God works in each believer who permits the Holy Spirit to use him. “The perfection of the church depends not on each member being fashioned exactly alike. God calls for each one to take his proper place, to stand in his lot to do his appointed work according to the ability which has been given him.” – (Letter 19, 1901) *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1090.

No one is everything in the church. “For the body is not one member, but many.” 1 Corinthians 12:14. One part of a body does not fulfill all of its necessary functions but constantly depends on the other parts. In the same way, in the church, no brother, sister, or minister is the whole body. We read: “No one man, whether a teacher, a physician, or a minister, can ever hope to be a complete whole. God has given to every man certain gifts and has ordained that men be associated in His service in order that the varied talents of many minds may be blended. The contact of mind with mind tends to quicken thought and increase the capabilities. The deficiencies of one laborer are often made up by the special gifts of another;...” – *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students*, p. 521.

Discernment of spirits. Among the spiritual gifts that the Holy Spirit imparts to the church is the gift of being able to discern what spirit a person

has in him, as 1 Corinthians 12:10 says: “Discerning of spirits.” The thoughts expressed in writing or in preaching can bring favorable consequences or be destructive for the church. This is a constant danger that the believers face, for we live in a very solemn, difficult time in which we must be guided into the correct path. There is no time to lose; and many times on the path we travel we hear strange voices urging us to do the opposite of God’s original plan.

The apostle Paul, directing his eyes on and inspired by the Holy Spirit, wrote in 1 Timothy 4:1: “Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils.” This is a warning that we must pay close attention to, for the time of grace is rapidly ending. We are going to see more defections from the faith, and we must be on guard and discern the dangers that we will face.

“... Try the spirits whether they are of God.” We are living in times when the deceptive power of Satan is becoming stronger and stronger, so we must ask God for the spiritual discernment to recognize when error is mixed with the truth. Extraordinary events will occur that confound human reasoning and test our faith. If we dig deeply into the Scriptures, we will be protected, for through the Bible we can counteract and unmask the error. In 1 John 4:1 we read: “Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.”

Thus, false prophets or preachers may seem to have a true message; but when it is mixed with error, it is the most powerful trap that the enemy uses. Let’s read a statement in *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 122: “We have

far more to fear from within than from without. The hindrances to strength and success are far greater from the church itself than from the world.... But how often have the professed advocates of the truth proved the greatest obstacle to its advancement! The unbelief indulged, the doubts expressed, the darkness cherished, encourage the presence of evil angels, and open the way for the accomplishment of Satan's devices." And in Acts 20:29, 30, the apostle Paul warned the believers: "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."

Lying spirits. Satan is trying to destroy the faith of God's people in relation to sound doctrine and will use leaders in positions of great responsibility, because he knows that their influence is vital to cause confusion. The Holy Scriptures and the Spirit of prophecy warn us about this: "The princes of Judah were like those that remove the bound: therefore I will pour out My wrath upon them like water." Hosea 5:10.

"In the future, deception of every kind is to arise, and we want solid ground for our feet. We want solid pillars for the building. Not one pin is to be removed from that which the Lord has established." –*Maranatha*, p. 192.

As we have seen, God's people need to be able to recognize the spirits of deceivers. Every individual has to be very clear about the message, for the purpose of such attacks is to destroy the truth. There are four important points of Biblical doctrine that are especially under attack.

1. The Sanctuary. "The enemy will bring in false theories, such as the doctrine that there is no sanctuary. This is one of the points on which there will be a departing from the faith." –*Maranatha*, p. 192.

Many people today do not believe the doctrine of the sanctuary, and as reformers we must know that the sanctuary is at the very center of Christ's work for man. The correct understanding of the ministry of the heavenly sanctuary is the foundation of our faith; through the different compartments of the sanc-

tuary and its utensils, Christ is teaching sound doctrine.

2. Divinity. "Before the last developments of the work of apostasy there will be a confusion of faith. There will not be clear and definite ideas concerning the mystery of God. One truth after another will be corrupted." –*Maranatha*, p. 192.

Another disturbing issue is the attack on God, as stated in the previous paragraph. Many do not understand the divine unity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. There are people who question that which is divine and have concepts very different from what the Bible and the Spirit of prophecy teach in relation to Divinity, and this can only create confusion. Some say that the Holy Spirit is not part of the Godhead; others argue that Christ is a whole, the Father, and the Holy Spirit all at the same time. But when we read the Bible and the Testimonies, we see that the Godhead is the perfect unity of the three heavenly Persons. Let us consider some statements concerning this. "But you, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life." Jude 1:20, 21.

"When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth. But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God." Acts 7:54, 55. These Bible texts each show the three Persons of the Godhead.

"The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit receive the believing soul into covenant relation with God." –*Manuscript Releases*, vol. 6, p. 163.

These statements identify the Infinite Powers as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. "The Godhead was stirred with pity for the race, and the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit gave Themselves to the working out of the plan of redemption." –*Counsels on Health*, p. 223. Who formed the plan of redemption? Inspiration is very clear about this: It was the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

"There are three living Persons of the heavenly trio; in the name of these

three great powers—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—those who receive Christ by living faith are baptized, and these powers will cooperate with the obedient subjects of heaven in their efforts to live the new life in Christ." –*Special Testimonies*, Series B, No. 7 (1905), pp. 62, 63; *Evangelism*, p. 615. It is inspiring to see the statement that we are baptized in the Name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

3. The Human Nature of Christ. We read in 1 John 4:2, 3: "Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God:..." And 2 John 1:7 states: "For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist." The Bible and the Spirit of prophecy confirm that Christ took human nature upon Himself.

"He permitted Him to meet life's peril in common with every human soul, to fight the battle as every child of humanity must fight it, at the risk of failure and eternal loss." –*The Desire of Ages*, p. 49.

"If He did not have man's nature, He could not be our example. If He was not a partaker of our nature, He could not have been tempted as man has been." –*Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 408.

"In our conclusions, we make many mistakes because of our erroneous views of the human nature of our Lord. When we give to His human nature a power that it is not possible for man to have in his conflicts with Satan, we destroy the fullness of His humanity." –*Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 929.

"In His humanity, He laid hold of the divinity of God; and this every member of the human family has the privilege of doing. Christ did nothing that human nature may not do if it partakes of the divine nature." –*Signs of the Times*, June 17, 1897.

This is a topic that the enemy uses to deceive many people, so we must be very careful. The one who teaches contrary to what is written in the sacred Scriptures and the *Testimonies* is identified in the Bible as deceitful and having the spirit of antichrist. Let us ask God

for the Holy Spirit to discern this subtle deception.

4. The Sabbath and God's law. "And he shall speak great words against the most High, and shall wear out the saints of the most High, and think to change times and laws: and they shall be given into his hand until a time and times and the dividing of time." Daniel 7:25.

This prophecy will be repeated. The severe persecution that God's people suffered for 1,260 years will soon take place. God's holy day of rest, the seventh-day Sabbath, will be a stumbling block for many. We must be very careful to guard the edges of the Sabbath, for it will soon be the line of separation between the obedient and the disobedient. God's approval will be upon those who are obedient by faith to the fourth commandment despite persecution by the religious and political powers at the end of time.

Our only security

"Only those who have been diligent students of the Scriptures, and who have received the love of the truth, will be shielded from the powerful delusion that takes the world captive." —*The Great Controversy* (1888), p. 625.

"If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; He is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness; from such withdraw thyself." 1 Timothy 6:3-5.

"Many know so little about their Bibles that they are unsettled in the faith. They remove the old landmarks, and fallacies and winds of doctrine blow them hither and thither. Science, falsely so-called, is wearing away the foundation of Christian principle; and those who once were in the faith drift away from the Bible landmarks, and divorce themselves from God, while still claiming to be His children." —(*Review and Herald*, December 29, 1896) *Evangelism*, p. 362.

We will soon close another year, and the big question we must ask ourselves

is, How will we be able to discern the dangers and deceptions of these end times? The apostle Paul wrote: "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobrates?" 2 Corinthians 13:5. And he also wrote to Timothy: "Take heed unto

thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee." 1 Timothy 4:16.

May God bless His people greatly with the anointing of the power of the Holy Spirit so they will discern the dangers of the last days! This is my sincere wish and prayer. Amen! ■

"Different gifts are imparted to different ones, that the workers may feel their need of one another. God bestows these gifts, and they are employed in His service, not to glorify the possessor, not to uplift man, but to uplift the world's Redeemer. They are to be used for the good of all mankind, by representing the truth, not testifying to a falsehood.

"It may seem to some that the contrast between their gifts and the gifts of a fellow laborer is too great to allow them to unite in harmonious effort; but when they remember that there are varied minds to be reached, and that some will reject the truth as it is presented by one laborer, only to open their hearts to the same truth as presented in a different manner by another, they will hopefully endeavor to labor together in unity. Their talents, however diverse, may all be under the control of the same Spirit. In every word and act, kindness and love will be revealed; and as each worker fills his appointed place faithfully, the prayer of Christ for the unity of His followers will be answered, and the world will know that these are His disciples.

"The outpouring of the Spirit in the days of the apostles was the 'former rain;' and glorious was the result. But the 'latter rain' will be still more abundant. What is the promise to those living in these last days? 'Turn you to the stronghold, ye prisoners of hope; even today do I declare that I will render double unto thee.' 'Ask ye of the Lord rain in the time of the latter rain; so the Lord shall make bright clouds, and give them showers of rain, to every one grass in the field.'

"Christ declares that the divine influence of the Spirit was to be with His followers unto the end. But by some this promise is not appreciated as it should be; its fulfillment is not realized as it might be. Learning, talents, eloquence, every natural or acquired endowment, may be possessed; but without the presence of the Spirit of God, no heart will be touched, no sinner won to Christ. When His disciples are connected with Christ, when the gifts of the Spirit are theirs, even the poorest and most ignorant of them will have a power that will tell upon hearts. God makes them the channel for the outworking of the highest influence in the universe.

"As the divine endowment—the power of the Holy Spirit—was given to the disciples, so it will today be given to all who seek aright. This power alone is able to make us wise unto salvation, and to fit us for the courts above. Christ wants to give us a blessing that will make us holy. 'These things have I spoken unto you,' He says, 'that My joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full.' Joy in the Holy Spirit is health-giving, life-giving. In giving us His Spirit, God gives us Himself—a fountain of divine influences, to give health and life to the world." —*Signs of the Times*, March 15, 1910.

“... Began to Speak with Other Tongues, As the Spirit Gave Them Utterance”

By Tzvetan Petkov, Bulgaria/Sweden/U.S.A.

“Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another’s speech. So the Lord scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city.” Genesis 11:7, 8.

The events that transpired at the tower of Babel led to the development of today’s 6,909 living languages (ethnologue.com). It was the builders’ incorrect use of communication and grievous sins that caused God to confuse the languages. However, in the plan of salvation, the Lord commanded that the good news be preached to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. Revelation 14:6. The Lord’s command requires an enormous communications effort. For this purpose, He gave His disciples the gift of tongues. This gift was immediately put to use at Pentecost. “Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language. And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galileans?” Acts 2:6, 7.

The dissemination of the word is of vital importance so people may gain a correct understanding of God and His character, as well as for building up the faith and the holy understanding of the truth. The divine report in John 1:1 says that God created everything by the Word and by the power of His Spirit. This is how God presents Himself today. Therefore, through the gifts of the Spirit, God’s purpose is to overcome the obstacles created by sin, confusion, and disgrace.

In Jerusalem, “Every known tongue was represented by those assembled.

This diversity of languages would have been a great hindrance to the proclamation of the gospel; God therefore in a miraculous manner supplied the deficiency of the apostles. The Holy Spirit did for them that which they could not have accomplished for themselves in a lifetime. They could now proclaim the truths of the gospel abroad, speaking with accuracy the languages of those for whom they were laboring. This miraculous gift was a strong evidence to the world that their commission bore the signet of Heaven. From this time forth the language of the disciples was pure, simple, and accurate, whether they spoke in their native tongue or in a foreign language.” –*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 39, 40. The result of this gift was immediate success, with 5,000 souls accepting Christ and joining the church of God. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the early rain made this miracle possible. Will not the latter rain present an even stronger testimony of divine grace and power?

The importance of words

Language is a major part of every culture and identity. It is the foundation of human civilization. In a unique way, we identify and express portions of reality through abstract sounds or graphics. We express ourselves intellectually and emotionally, and we communicate thoughts and ideas. Our words radiate our true selves—our characters. Remember that Peter was identified as a follower of Christ by the way he spoke.

Words have great significance in the plan of salvation. “For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.”

Matthew 12:37. Words and language are very important not only for communication among human beings but also in our communication with God. Considering the importance of the moment, the thief who was crucified next to Jesus used his last opportunity to express his pain, hope, and faith in one sentence: “Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom.” Luke 23:42. He immediately received the Lord’s answer: “Verily I say unto thee” today, thou shalt “be with Me in paradise.” Luke 23:43.

On the other side of Jesus, the second thief did not grasp the golden opportunity. He used words to mock the Saviour and to challenge His divine capabilities. By so doing, he condemned himself.

What must we do to make the right choice and obtain the gift of speaking the right words at the right time?

The Lord spoke to the multitude through the apostle Peter: “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.” Acts 2:38, 39. The gift of the Spirit was not reserved to the apostles alone. It is available today, as it was in the time of Pentecost. It will be given to every converted soul in the form of the early and latter rains. You and I are included in this promise. “The outpouring of the Spirit in the days of the apostles was the beginning of the early, or former, rain, and glorious was the result. To the end of time the presence of the Spirit is to abide with the true church.” –*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 54, 55.

Exercising the gift

Every converted soul has been given spiritual gifts. Do we exercise ours? The first thing we need to understand is that the gifts of the Spirit are entrusted to God's people for the benefit of the church and their fellow men, not for personal glory. "But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal." 1 Corinthians 12:7. If we wish to receive the gifts of the Spirit, we need first to decide to dedicate ourselves to the gospel work and then to place our time, means, ambitions, and dreams for the future in the hands of the Lord Jesus Christ. We need to begin to practice preaching and sharing the gospel with the means that we have, with the knowledge that we have, without paying attention to obstacles or difficulties that the enemy may put in the way.

I remember an experience in Ethiopia when, after a seminar conducted for a large group of interested souls, someone knocked at the door of my hotel room. My fellow pastors and all the translators had left, and I had only a few hours before I needed to leave for the airport. I opened the door and recognized a man who had attended the seminar. He pointed to himself and said, "I ... member." I did not speak that brother's language, and he did not speak English. What was I going to do? I invited him in and prayed earnestly to God. Since the man had been a practicing Adventist for years, we took our Bibles, and I pointed him to Bible verse after Bible verse, asking him yes or no questions. In this way, we covered all the principles of faith of our denomination, and he was accepted as the first member in Ethiopia. Today there are around 2,000 members in the country, and this brother is a faithful member and pioneer in God's cause.

Sometimes a little knowledge with the Lord's blessing may bring impressive results. To receive the gifts of the Spirit, we need to pray and work earnestly for the salvation of souls. Let us take the first step of faith and put our feet in the Jordan River, and God will do the rest.

The apostle Paul explained that the gifts of the Spirit should be practiced and developed. He advised his student Timothy: "Wherefore I put thee in re-

membrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands." 2 Timothy 1:6. Sister White wrote: "The power of speech is a talent that should be diligently cultivated. Of all the gifts we have received from God, none is capable of being a greater blessing than this. With the voice we convince and persuade, with it we offer prayer and praise to God, and with it we tell others of the Redeemer's love. How important, then, that it be so trained as to be most effective for good." *—Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 335.

In addition, today it is easier than ever before to learn a foreign language. There are distance learning courses, multimedia DVDs, books, and audio-visual tools dedicated to that very purpose. If we dedicate a little bit of time every day to practice, we can develop the gift of languages and use it for God.

Misunderstanding the divine gift

The years passed by, and the apostles' work was blessed by the Lord and advanced for His glory. However, in the church of Corinth, the apostle Paul noticed that the gift of tongues was not being used in the right way. Church members were speaking in tongues that could not be understood by others. "For he that speaketh in an unknown tongue speaketh not unto men, but unto God: for no man understandeth him; howbeit in the spirit he speaketh mysteries." 1 Corinthians 14:2.

The most common interpretation of this verse's context is that the church had an international representation of participants who spoke or prayed in their own languages that were foreign to the rest of the church. Jews, Greeks, Romans, and hundreds of different tribes and languages were under the Roman Empire. "Therefore if I know not the meaning of the voice, I shall be unto him that speaketh a barbarian, and he that speaketh shall be a barbarian unto me." 1 Corinthians 14:11. The counsel given by the apostle was for believers to speak in a foreign language only if a translator was present who could communicate the message or prayer to the church. "In all our religious services we should seek to conduct ourselves in a way that will edify others, working as much as lies in our

power for the perfection of the church. 'Wherefore let him that speaketh in an unknown tongue pray that he may interpret.... Else when thou shalt bless with the spirit, how shall he that occupieth the room of the unlearned say Amen at thy giving of thanks, seeing he understandeth not what thou sayest? For thou verily givest thanks well, but the other is not edified.'" *—Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students*, p. 244.

In addition, the apostle Paul mentioned that some believers were praying in emotional ecstasy, using sounds but not clear words. "For if I pray in an unknown tongue, my spirit prayeth, but my understanding is unfruitful." 1 Corinthians 14:14. This kind of prayer is still very common today in religions in which the repetition of words or sounds takes place until the person falls into a trance and loses the awareness of presence and reality. The Lord through the apostle Paul condemned this, and Jesus declared it to be unfruitful. "But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking." Matthew 6:7.

The divine purpose for the gift of tongues is that it benefit the hearer, either personally or as a group. The apostle Paul used many examples and comparisons in his second epistle to the Corinthians to convince the church of the proper use of the gift, condemning the use of unknown tongues, for he wrote: "Yet in the church I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that by my voice I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue." "But if there be no interpreter, let him keep silence in the church;..." 1 Corinthians 14:19, 28.

The gift of interpretation

Not everyone has the gift of tongues. But unbelievers need the gospel and the word of God preached to them in their own language. For that purpose, He gave the gift of interpretation. In 1 Corinthians 12:10, the apostle Paul listed the interpretation of tongues among the gifts of the Spirit. Because of this important gift, the Bible has been translated into 670 languages; and the New Testament alone, into 1521 languages. *—Wycliffe Global Alliance*, October

2017. The gift of translation makes it possible for millions of letters, experiences, and missionary materials to be translated and shared among different nations, tongues, and people. Proper translation of God's word and its messages gives a clear tone to the trumpet. 1 Corinthians 14:8. It makes the precious content accessible to the mind and soul of the listener.

Without the gift of interpretation, this article's message would not be available to you. We need this gift in God's church. Every country, field, and local church should have an interpreter who is gifted to translate and communicate with brothers and sisters in other countries and especially with the union, division, and the General Conference. Also, more books need to be translated to support the canvassing work, along with pamphlets, magazines, websites, and multimedia materials to share with as many people as possible. There is a great hunger and need for materials presenting the present truth enlightened by the Holy Spirit. "The Lord must guide our future. We see a terrible lack of men here to prepare publications for translation in the different languages, but the Lord knows all about it, and we trust the matter with Him." –Letter 16, 1887.

Strive for this gift! Plead for it, and offer your services in the cause of God.

Tongues of fire

On October 8, 1871, at 8:30 in the evening, a cow reportedly started a small fire by kicking over an oil lantern in the barn of a certain Mrs. O'Leary in Chicago. From that small beginning, the fire spread and ultimately destroyed 17,500 buildings. More than 100,000 people were made homeless, more than 300 died, and the cost was estimated to be billions of dollars in today's money.

The apostle James wrote that "Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell." James 3:5, 6.

The harm our tongues may cause by spreading wrong messages, giv-

ing false testimony, or criticizing and gossiping is immeasurable. The apostle compared this with fire. The news spreads from person to person, from mouth to mouth, and becomes irreversible, causing unimaginable hurt.

What good are many foreign languages if we cannot control our tongues and if the words that we use are neither purified by the Lord nor edifying to others? The gift of tongues is a gift of the Spirit that purifies speech. It also includes the ability to control one's tongue and use it exclusively to bless and edify others. Such ability to communicate the truth holistically and powerfully will produce fruit for eternity.

The language of personal example

The gifts of tongues and interpretation of tongues are important tools for the communication of the gospel to hungry souls all around the world. However, we need to remember that communication is more than just words. How can we understand the phenomenon that there are many people who speak the same language but do not understand one another? At the same time, children from different cultures and nationalities can play together, make friends, and understand each other without speaking.

Research by Albert Mehrabian, Professor Emeritus of Psychology at the University of California, Los Angeles, found that spoken words constitute only 7 percent of our communication, while 38 percent is transmitted by voice inflection, and the remaining 55 percent is understood from facial expressions or body language (psych.ucla.edu).

This means that to communicate the good news successfully to others, we first need to live by the word of God, be convinced of it, and be converted to truth. Otherwise, our words may communicate the truth while our voice and body language give a completely different message.

The best way to communicate the truth is through personal example. This was the daily sermon of our Lord Jesus Christ and His followers. "Paul's patience and cheerfulness during his long and unjust imprisonment, his courage and faith, were a continual

sermon. His spirit, so unlike the spirit of the world, bore witness that a power higher than that of earth was abiding with him. And by his example, Christians were impelled to greater energy as advocates of the cause from the public labors of which Paul had been withdrawn. In these ways were the apostle's bonds influential, so that when his power and usefulness seemed cut off, and to all appearance he could do the least, then it was that he gathered sheaves for Christ in fields from which he seemed wholly excluded." –*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 464.

The gift of love

The gifts of wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, discerning of spirits, and tongues are all given as a "manifestation of the Spirit." This is true unity in diversity. By exercising the gifts that are imparted to us, we will grow and become like Christ.

The presence of divine love in His people is God in them, for God is love. "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal." 1 Corinthians 13:1. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are many, and all of them are important for the edification of the church. However, love is part of and superior to them all. Love and unity testify of conversion and divine action in the lives of God's people. Furthermore, the apostle Paul declared that love is part of the sealed character of the true believers. "Charity 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." 1 Corinthians 13:8. And the apostle John wrote that "No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and His love is perfected in us." 1 John 4:12.

Let us leave behind everything that is childish and strive for spiritual maturity. "And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity." 1 Corinthians 13:13.

"Grace be with you, mercy, and peace, from God the Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love." 2 John 1:3. Amen! ■