

The Gifts of the Spirit

by Art Katz

Art Katz's sermon highlights the urgent necessity of the gifts of the Spirit in the church, contrasting biblical practices with contemporary shortcomings.

Scripture: 2 Chronicles 20:1

Topics: "Dependence On God", "Gifts of the Spirit"

Description

Art Katz emphasizes the critical role of the gifts of the Spirit in the life of the church, using the example of Jehaziel's prophecy in 2 Chronicles 20:1-30 to illustrate how these gifts can lead to life-saving outcomes. He highlights the importance of having known and tested vessels for prophecy, contrasting this with contemporary practices that often lack seriousness and discernment. Katz warns against the man-centeredness prevalent in many church movements, which can dilute the true work of the Spirit and lead to spiritual complacency. He calls for a return to a more intimate, apostolic community where the gifts of the Spirit are treated as urgent matters of life and death. Ultimately, he stresses that true worship and reliance on God must come from a place of brokenness and dependence on His power rather than human initiative.

Transcript

In 2 Chronicles 20:1-30, the prophet Jehaziel is moved by the Spirit to prophesy (v.14-17). In this incisive event in the history of Judah, we catch a glimpse of the utter, life-saving consequences of the gifts of the Spirit. All Judah went forth on the following morning on the strength of this assurance, expressed by a priest, that, "The battle is not yours but God's" (v.15 b). Jehaziel is identified by name, which indicates he was known by the congregation; that they went forth without doubting; that his character was tested and assured and that the word was assuredly the Lord's.

If that were not the Lord's word, three uncircumcised armies on Judah's border guaranteed her destruction. So confident were God's people that they went forth with singing and defeated the enemy by their praise - in advance of the event: "Tomorrow go down against them...for the Lord is with you"! If anything is to be gleaned by the church of the Last Days from this episode, it is that the gifts of God's Spirit are not for trifles; they are urgent life or death issues: "And all Judah was standing before the Lord, with their infants, their wives, and their children" (v.13).

The vessel employed should be known and tested: "The son of Zecharaiah, the son of Benaiah, the son of Jeiel, the son of Mattaniah, a Levite of the sons of Asaph..." (v.14b). He was also "priestly" in the

administration of the gift. "And Jehosaphat bowed his head with his face to the ground, and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem fell down before the Lord, worshipping the Lord" (v.18). All that is recorded here is contrary to our own customary practice of the operation of the gifts of the Spirit.

Rarely is the occasion solemn; rarely is the prophecy weighty; rarely is the one prophesying known. More often than not, the word is trite, and nothing of any consequence is noted or affected by its being spoken. I believe that the context intended by God and appropriate to the operation of the Spirit is apostolic rather than institutional. That is to say, an intimacy is required among its members of a face-to-face kind in an urgency affecting all its members, who are in something very real together.

An environment of that kind can only be brought about by the work of the Cross - to which not many contemporary Christians are disposed. We prefer anonymity in a larger congregation where we are kept from any responsible involvement in a platform-operated service. The practice of the gifts of the Spirit in this context merely give an air of excitement sufficient to enhance the service and yet require nothing on the part of the hearers. That most such prophecies go uncontested is a statement not only to the lack of spiritual discernment on the part of leadership but of the prevailing general man-pleasing mode that operates in such congregations.

The result is that the Spirit of God is denigrated and God Himself demeaned and diminished. The man-centeredness of much of our church life, and especially the Charismatic and allied movements, was demonstrated in the "discipleship/shepherding" phenomenon of the 1970's, both in its origin and its practice. It appears that men recognizing a biblical principle sought to establish it as a system. The result was a petty tyranny spoiling many lives and enriching those financially at the top of the pyramidal pile.

Instead of an organic knit of relationship, the work of the Spirit, a contrived and man-effected "network" was substituted that ended in a final debacle not altogether acknowledged or repented of, in my opinion. Perhaps the mass induction into the baptism of the Holy Spirit by the laying on of hands without an adequate foundation in repentance (or even regeneration) swelled the numbers of the "movement." It brought into question the validity of the movement itself as a humanly promoted enterprise rather than the sovereign work of the Spirit Himself!

Dubious evidences of having "received" and the lack of any correspondence to that of the early church's experience and social consequence (i.e., having "all things common") ought to have been given us some caution. As in the continuing emphasis in revival today of "manifestations" and a desire for an "experience" purporting to be of God in which the source is not seriously considered, the emphasis appears to be on man rather than God, though ostensibly in God's name. In like manner and coming at the same time, Christian Zionism, sought to achieve for God the re-establishment of Israel by furthering the purposes of the State and encouraging numbers of Jews to return - as if we have a blank check to fulfill prophecy at our own initiative!

I have heard words of "prophecy" through the years precisely to this end! And what shall we say to "Jesus 2000" types of appeals that would give to Jesus the nations for His millennial birthday! In all of this is the stink of man and his human presumption. Could it be that God will bring down both the church and Israel in a depth of repentance that alone allows God to be God for both parties - when both entities will be "willing in the day of His power"? That is, "willing" because of His power and not our own self-initiation, when we, like Israel, will be "at the end of our strength" that He alone be glorified.

In that day, the church that has consistently sought its own programs at the expense of seeking God and His righteousness will say with a divinely redeemed Israel, "The Lord our righteousness"! In that day, worship will become the emanation of broken and contrite lives rather than the technique of acoustical manipulation and human musicality. And a "Passion for Jesus" will be replaced by the recognition that it takes the imputing of God to love God rather than any romantic ardor that we can hope to supply.

Ours will be the faith and sanctification proportionate to our rest in the finished work of Christ rather than the impatience of a Saul conducting a pseudo-priestly sacrifice because we cannot wait - no longer implementing out of our own will programs and devices because we presume "to see the pattern"! "Who then can be saved?" needs be asked again. With man it is impossible. For surely, God's requirements will always exceed anything of our own to assure a complete dependence upon and a shutting up to His Life. God is well able to bring into being and perfect what pertains to Him, but our own presumption and conspiratorial devices are His greatest obstruction.

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