

## Saturday Session 17: St. Paul: Gifts of the Spirit, session 3

### Healing & Miracles

Paul refers to these as the lesser gifts, 1 Cor 13:8-10; 1 Cor 14:1-3. Nonetheless, they are important, and we rejoice to see more of healing miracles these days. Paul insists that love is the main gift, from Love Himself. But these lesser gifts apply love personally, especially for people who meet Christ through healing. Miracles clearly proclaim God's power and love. These gifts open new hearts to Christ. An example: Paul's cure of Publius set off the conversion of Malta, Acts 28:7-10. Many other examples, from Isaac's birth to Abraham and Sarah on up to now, reveal God.

As Paul and Barnabas showed in Ephesus, when people tried to treat them like gods, man is merely an instrument, Acts 14:13. All healing is from God by His Spirit. If we take credit for healing, we break contact with God. When we consider gifts, let's be totally clear Who gives them. Paul certainly was. That's why he used the dramatic gesture of ripping his garment to repudiate the Ephesian priest's attempt to worship him. Instead, Paul emphasizes service.

At his conversion, Paul learned that the Church is Christ's body, Acts 9:1-6. Paul's overwhelming experience of Christ identified Christians as intimate elements of Christ's body, each of us a precious cell in this Mystical Body. ***For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.*** Romans 12:4-5. [All quotes are from the American Standard Version.] In this Divine light, we understand that healing miracles are for Christ's members, us.

In fact, the Spirit is the soul of the Mystical Body, like your individual soul animates your distinct body. Naturally, the Spirit does more than any single human soul does, but the analogy enlightens us. Spirit-gifts flow directly from the Spirit animating Christ's Body. Therefore, we should expect them to abound. Most healing will be spiritual, since healing from sin is the main reason Jesus came, but physical and psychological healing follow naturally. Many miracles of healing occur each day. Most of them are not recorded. Only a few, like those at Lourdes, become widely known. The Spirit works miracles to show that someone like John Paul the Great is holy. Church authorities thoroughly test these miracles to be sure that they are authentic. Only then can beatification and canonization proceed.

#### Discernment

***For God is my witness, how I long for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ; having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.*** Philippians 1:8-11. Paul always works from Christ's love, the heart of Christianity. He's enflamed by the love Jesus came to ignite on earth, Luke 12:49. At first, Jesus alone burned with this Divine Fire. But as He contacted men who accepted Him, they caught fire also. Finally the entire Mystical Body burns with Christ-love. When Paul uses the words *Christ Jesus* he means the Mystical Body. In Paul's understanding, this is total love, spread from Jesus throughout all His followers. The Spirit tends His flame, blowing where He will, John 3:8, to spread fire throughout the entire community. God's flame envelops the Mystical Body.

The breath of the Spirit is more than our prayer, but it certainly is our prayer. So Paul immediately prays that the flame of Love abound in his beloved Philippians. But many distractions competed for their attention. So they needed discernment to approve excellent things. We do too. If we discern excellent things, and reject non-excellent things, then we are sincere. We take sincere from the Latin pair of words: *sine cere*, meaning without wax. This sign, on honey, meant that the container held pure honey, without wax hidden beneath a half inch of honey in a six inch deep bowl. Another way to say it, less poetical, is that the sincere person is integral, all together. Discernment enables us to tell the excellent from the impure. If we choose the excellent more and more, we become more excellent. We become more unified, more one in Christ. There is no better way to be. In Christ by free choice, we become increasingly blameless. Thus we prepare for the day of Christ, when He comes to take us to Himself. Individually, that's the day we die. Collectively, for those in earth on that day, it's His second coming in the flesh. *Jesus Christ*, meaning the individual by that name, provides righteousness for us. If we partake, if we willingly accept, then each of us glorifies God. Our cooperation with God's saving plan praises God. When we accept His redemption, we offer glory and praise. Paul insists that this acceptance is the best we can do. More acceptance gives more glory and praise, and we live Christ-life more fully.

Though the Spirit provides discernment, He doesn't make us follow it. We can reject it. Rejecting discernment misses the mark of excellence. Missing this mark is what we mean by sin. We make the effort to find options, select one, choose it, and act it out. But our rejecting act falls short of excellence, short of what we really want. This lack of the good that should be there is evil, or sin. Paul often reminds his beloved converts that they have left this counterproductive sinful life behind. In his own case, Paul calls his sinful self his "old man", or "old self" in the new translation, Romans 6:6. The sinful man is redeemed by Christ, ransomed by His death on the cross. Paul is more poetic and emphatic: ***For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin.*** Rom 5-7.

As usual, Paul cascades forth meaning and value. A theologian could write an entire book about Paul's meaning in this short sentence. We unite with Jesus in the likeness of His death by baptism. Pouring water on a baby's head is our

tame imitation of emersion, which more expressly shows our entry into another medium, water, meaning death. As air and water are very different, life and death are much more different. We must leave one to enter the other. Just as water washes off dirt, Christ's redemptive death cleans away our sins, only more so. His death cleanses more completely than water ever could. Jesus reaches into the depths of our beings to not only wash sin away, but to correct our bad decisions. Correcting sin makes us innocent again, freed from sin-slavery. Once free from sin, our evil no longer separates us from God. Once united with God, we achieve our purpose. Everything that God created us to be, we are. Eventually we will be like Jesus in His resurrection. Resurrected, in renewed flesh, like sinless Adam and Eve, we shall be quite different from our former sinful selves. These old selves, crucified with Him, die completely. Sin is done away. We're no longer slaves to sin. Christ has redeemed us from slavery. Oh happy day. No wonder we celebrate Easter so enthusiastically.

### **Tongues**

1 Corinthians 13:1 is the famous phrase: *If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.* Tongues attract attention, as we noted earlier with Pentecostal experience in Jerusalem. By tongues, people unfamiliar with Christ come to know of Him. But Paul insists that: *brethren, if I come to you speaking in tongues, what will I profit you unless I speak to you either by way of revelation or of knowledge or of prophecy or of teaching? Yet even lifeless things, either flute or harp, in producing a sound, if they do not produce a distinction in the tones, how will it be known what is played on the flute or on the harp? For if the bugle produces an indistinct sound, who will prepare himself for battle? So also you, unless you utter by the tongue speech that is clear, how will it be known what is spoken? For you will be speaking into the air. There are, perhaps, a great many kinds of languages in the world, and no kind is without meaning. If then I do not know the meaning of the language, I will be to the one who speaks a barbarian, and the one who speaks will be a barbarian to me. So also you, since you are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek to abound for the edification of the church. Therefore let one who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret. For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful. What is the outcome then? I will pray with the spirit and I will pray with the mind also; I will sing with the spirit and I will sing with the mind also. Otherwise if you bless in the spirit only, how will the one who fills the place of the ungifted say the "Amen" at your giving of thanks, since he does not know what you are saying? For you are giving thanks well enough, but the other person is not edified. I thank God, I speak in tongues more than you all; however, in the church I desire to speak five words with my mind so that I may instruct others also, rather than ten thousand words in a tongue.* 1 Cor 14-6-19. Thus Paul provides perspective for Corinthians who overemphasized tongue-speaking.

### **Administration**

Administration, for Paul, is rather different from our notion. *He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth. In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory. In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory.* Ephesians 1:10-14. Paul's *administration* sums up all things in Christ. All things means the entire universe. Everything created will be our inheritance by His will. His counsel, His concept, and His intention will permeate all creation when He administers all things perfectly. We join in His administration if we accept the Spirit-gift of administering our little things according to His will. He includes us to properly order all things, because we are His image and likeness. Our imitation of Christ praises His glory. If we accept being sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit, we administer along with Him. The more we imitate him, the more we inherit His orderly kingdom. The more we act as He acts, the more we join Him in praising and glorifying God. Everything unifies in Christ. God's intended order unfolds for His children, us. We order our little things as He orders the universe.

In Latin, *ministrare* means to serve, and *ad* means towards. So administration means service toward others. Focusing on the Spirit, we see that He serves us, and teaches us to serve those around us. Spirit-service to all, in all, and through all, is Paul's meaning of administration. Now we see why the Spirit must gift us with administration that praises and glorifies God. All attempts to administer fail without this Spirit-service-gift. With it, success flows, as Paul shows by his very own example. *To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things; so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places. This was in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and confident access through faith in Him.* Eph 3:8-12. So we implore the Spirit to gift us with administration of this redemptive, salvific, mystery.