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Series: People in Step with the Spirit
Message: Spiritual Gifts – Are They All For Today?

Transcribed Message
February 17, 2019
Ephesians 2:20

One thing I love about Covenant Community Church is how diverse we are in terms of, for lack of a better word, our religious backgrounds. I think it is fair to say that the desire of those who began Covenant Community Church and who wanted it truly to be a gathering of a community of people from all of these various backgrounds, I believe that we can say that dream, that goal has been realized. On the screen I have put some of the backgrounds of different places that we have come from in our spiritual journey and if I left you off of that list I apologize. But in all of these different backgrounds, in all of these different ways, we have come to understand the various works of God and the things of God. We've all come together with the idea of we want to love God. We want to love each other. We want to grow in our walk with God. So whatever your background is, whatever your previous religious experience has been, God is desiring, I believe, for the church to come together and be united as one.

Someone might look at that and question: What does this mean for your church to have this kind of diversity of religious background? Number one, it means you can have some really interesting small group discussion time, right? As you have all of these differing perspectives and as God brings us to understand His Word, we get to share that with each other. As someone else who has a church similar to ours said, it means that we were predestined to speak in tongues at a church potluck. We might have some work to do in that area. But diversity can be healthy. In fact, diversity is healthy if we remember three things. If we remember first of all that in essentials we are to have unity. In nonessentials there is liberty. In all of those things, whether essential or not essential, there has to be the demonstration of love.

This morning we're going to look at the gifts of the Spirit. Without the fruit of the Spirit, really you have nothing. That's what we just read in 1 Corinthians 13. Have all of the gifts that you want, but if you don't utilize them in the context of love, then Paul says

they really bring no real value to the body of Christ. So we have to first and foremost love each other.

A little bit of a quick review of spiritual gifts. We said a couple of weeks ago a spiritual gift is a God-given ability that allows us to minister and serve within the body of Christ with ease, with effectiveness and with enjoyment. I would suggest three things that we have seen over the weeks together. One – everybody has at least one gift. I have a feeling that most people have multiple gifts. God just uses these grace gifts in our lives to do what? Secondly, to remind us that nobody has them all, and so we do truly need each other. If it were possible for one person to have all the gifts then I guess they wouldn't need the rest of the body, but that's not the way God has designed it. So the body needs each other and we have the gifts but we don't have all of them. Thirdly, I supposed we could say use it or lose it. We don't really have from Scripture that understanding of what might happen to a spiritual gift if we don't use it, but it certainly goes dormant. If we don't lose it, it certainly goes dormant. But if we don't use it then we lose out as the body of Christ. By the very design of God, the spiritual gifts, all of us in this room who call Covenant our home have been gifted by God to do something in the life of our church that's going to build up and equip and bring the glory that God alone wants to bring to this place. So we have to use those gifts or as a body we lose out.

The question before us this morning is simply this in regard to the duration of the gifts. Are they temporary or are they in fact permanent? To be clear, this issue has been debated for about 2000 years. If you have come this morning hoping that I have found the one verse that nobody else has ever found in the Bible, then you're going to be very disappointed because I did not find that verse. As hard as we might look, whichever view we take on this, that verse has not yet been found. It has been an ongoing debate, sometimes an unkind debate. The church has unnecessarily divided over this issue oftentimes. So here we are, looking at hundreds of years of church history in which there have been differing ideas as to how to answer this question. I guess the best that we should put ourselves to is let's pursue the truth. Let's walk in love as we do that.

Let's begin by looking at what is sometimes called the sign gifts. Obviously sometimes they're called charismatic gifts, but we've already said we're all charismatics because the *charismata* are given to all of us. It isn't a select group of gifts that are

called the charismatic gifts but they're all called the *charismata*. In that sense, we probably just would do better to say these are gifts that are sometimes called sign gifts. I've put six of them on your outline this morning. We're going to look at them briefly, define them and then we'll make some comments.

The first one is the gift of apostleship. The gift of an apostle. Here's one of these words that are used in a couple of different ways in the New Testament. An apostle is, in the most general broad usage of this word, sometimes meant to simply speak of someone who is sent out. I suppose in a sense the Corleys and the Jordans are going to be apostles with a little "a" and with the broadest definition of that word. We're sending them to India and they're going out with the gospel. They're going out with the good news. They are going out with the Word of God. But that's not what we're looking at here specific to our study. We're looking at a much more defined view of the apostle. In that sense, we're looking at the 12 and a few others that the Scriptures talk about. The apostles of Jesus Christ and in another place we have apostles of the church. It is this select group. The apostles, the 12, we know were most important to the beginning of the church. We're going to see why a little bit later on. The apostles, that gifted group of men, were essential to the beginning of the church and they were vital to the laying of that foundation followed by prophets and teachers. Those three Paul will mention as being critical to the beginning of the church.

Secondly, there's the gift of prophecy. The gift of prophecy. Again, you have a word that could be used in a general way or a more specific way as we're looking at it. In a general sense, someone who is doing a work of prophecy some would suggest that I'm doing that this morning by proclaiming the Word of God. They put that in the broadest sense of the word "prophecy". But again, we're looking at it in a narrower way and to have this gift is to receive direct revelation from God. It is to receive direct revelation from God that is infallible. At times, it looks to the future. At times, it looks at the present. Very often, when we hear the word "prophet" or when we think of the gift of prophecy, we are taken to the future. But it doesn't have to be just about the future because the one with the gift of prophecy was receiving a direct revelation from God. That was an infallible word from God sometimes very often about the present and the way God wanted His people to live.

Thirdly, there is the working of miracles. Paul identifies this gift with that of being an apostle. So in that sense, the apostles had both the gift of apostleship and some of them no doubt had the gift of miracle working because in 2 Corinthians chapter 12 verse 12, Paul says the signs, indicators, authentication of a true apostle, these were performed among you with utmost patience with signs and wonders and mighty works. So it was an identifying gift of one who had the gift of apostleship. The ability, the capacity to do miraculous things. Others did miracles as well beyond the apostle but the apostles did that as well. When I think of a miracle I'm thinking of something that is out of the ordinary something that God does in an extraordinary way. In Acts chapter 19 and verse 11 Luke writes this: "And God was doing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul so that even handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched his skin were carried away to the sick and their diseases left them and the evil spirits came out of them."

Now sadly we know there are people who prey on the naïve today who sell hankies and pieces of cloth that are supposed to bring healing and miracles in to people's lives. They base that obviously on this statement here in Acts 19 where Paul as an apostle had the gift of miracle working. This is clearly an extraordinary thing that God did in the life of the early church. Paul, remember in Acts 13:8, looked at Elymas. Elymas was a sorcerer and Paul looked at him and judged him with temporary blindness. That is an extraordinary power. That is a miraculous work that goes beyond what ordinarily people would see happen. Certainly we see other examples of that. Paul raised Urticus from the dead. Paul had the gift of preaching long-winded sermons. Some people say I have that gift at times. If you are in the balcony like Euticus was, he fell out of the balcony but Paul also had the gift of miracles and he was able to raise him from the dead. I don't have that capacity. I don't have that ability. Paul had the gift of miracles. We know that Peter did the same with Dorcas. We also know that Peter in an act of miraculous power in bringing church discipline against Ananias and Sapphira when they lied to the Holy Spirit fell dead in an act of divine discipline. So clearly the apostles had extraordinary powers.

The other gift, number four, is the gift of healing. If you think of the gift of miracles as kind of a larger umbrella, then the gift of healing would be under that. All miraculous works and miraculous displays of power. They weren't all healings. We just saw that.

But all healings are of course a miracle. We have in Acts again numerous examples of people who were healed. We have again as the New Testament unfolds something of the reality that we have to deal with. As you read through the rest of the epistles, it does seem that there is less and less indications of the work of miracles and healings until you finally get to the last book that Paul wrote in 2 Timothy chapter 4. He makes a comment I'm leaving Trophimus at Miletus and he is sick, near unto death. For whatever reason, Paul chose not to bring healing into Trophimus's life at that point.

Then the fifth of the sixth of these gifts are tongues and interpreting tongues. Now there's no question as you read the book of Acts that the gift of tongues was speaking a known language. The word *glossa* of Acts speaks of a vocalized known language. We know that because Luke lists all of them out. He said all of these different people and all of these different groups from these different countries literally heard the gospel in their own language. Peter and the other apostles were given that gift of speaking in a language that they had not previously learned. The question as we come to the matter of tongues and interpreting of tongues is what's happening in Acts, the same thing is what's happening in 1 Corinthians. The only other book of the New Testament that mentions tongues is 1 Corinthians. Chapters 12, 13 and 14 we have that instruction to the church at Corinth about this matter of speaking in tongues. If we say it's the same gift in Acts and it's the same gift in 1 Corinthians, then we have to come to some explanation of what's happening today because most people don't claim when they speak in tongues to be speaking a known vocalized language that they didn't learn. If we say no, it's not the same as what we have in Acts. What we have in Acts, *glossa*, is a known language and when we get to 1 Corinthians, Paul switches the meaning of the word *glossa* because it's the same word and Paul uses the word *glossa* in a different way. He doesn't tell us that's what he's going to do, but that's what the reader and the student of Scripture has to grapple with in that regard.

So we step back again and we ask: are these gifts that we just mentioned here temporary or are they permanent? You can look at this chart and see that on the one hand we have those who would say they are charismatic and they are what we call continuationist. Continuationist. This just means what it says. All of the gifts of the Spirit continue right up to this present day. On the other side of that chart you have those

people who would call themselves noncharismatic and they would be referenced as cessationists. Cessationists is just what it says. They believe that there are gifts that have ceased, that are no longer functioning in the gifts of the church today. Then right there in the middle is where I am. Maybe you are somewhere else on that chart. Open but cautious, I suppose, is how I would describe my perspective of the Scriptures. Believing that there has to be some explanation for the things that God may choose to do. After all Jesus said in John 3 that the Spirit of God is like the wind. The Spirit of God will do as He sovereignly determines to do. Perhaps as God moves the gospel into areas of the world, or as God wants to do something in a particular setting, He may give someone that capacity or that ability. I would define my position as being in that middle one. As being open but cautious about what it is that we see happening.

Let's look at this together. We've got two different positions that have literally been argued back and forth in a kind way (I'm using that word) for a couple of thousand years. So what would a continuationist put forward? Maybe I'm not totally fair this morning because I'm not a continuationist, but I'm going to give you my best shot of what I've read and what I hear as I talked to my continuationist friends. Here are a number of things that they would want us to consider. First of all, they would say without a clear word contrary to these gifts we should expect all the gifts are in effect. They might very well ask me to show them a verse that says these gifts have stopped. Wouldn't it be wonderful in this debate if we could turn to a verse and say right here it is. This is the verse that says this is my position and that would solve it.

If you don't have a verse that says they're no longer operational does that end the argument? Well, no it really doesn't, because we don't have a verse that we can turn to that says the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit make up the Trinity and are all in one God. We don't have a verse like that in the Bible. How did we come to the doctrine of the Trinity? Every Orthodox Christian believes in the Trinity, so how did we come to that doctrine? We didn't come to the doctrine because we have a singular verse or passage that we can turn to that states that. We have come to that doctrine, that understanding because there are a multitude of passages that teach that truth to us. I would argue in some sense that is the case with this position as well.

Secondly, there is the fact of contemporary experience. What explanation as a cessationist, for that matter even an open but cautious person, do you offer for reports about prophecies and miracles and healings and tongues? What are you going to say about the 350 million Christians worldwide who call themselves charismatics? 350 million Christians around the world would call themselves charismatic. Are they wrong? Are they misguided? Are they right? Or is there another possible explanation as well?

The third one, and for this when I'm turning to 1 Corinthians 13 again. In this third one Paul says the perfect will come and will result in the cessation for instance of prophecy. The perfect is almost certainly the return of Jesus. It's almost certainly Jesus's return that is in view. So when Paul says in verse 9: "For we know in part and we prophesy in part but when the perfect comes the partial will pass away." He tells us that there's going to be a time, and most Bible teachers today agree that it is the coming of Christ that is in view. That's the perfection. That's the perfect one and when he comes back, then these gifts will cease. They will no longer be needed because we will not see in a mirror dimly or in a mirror darkly but then we'll see face-to-face. We will not need those gifts any longer.

The last point is really a question, and the question is this: Do we risk quenching the Spirit if we're not open to all of the gifts? Do we risk quenching the Spirit if we're not open to all of the gifts? The answer to that question has to be yes if it is God's intent and purpose to have all of these gifts be operational. If it is God's will and purpose and plan that all of these gifts be in operation, and I as an open but cautious person say I'm not sure all of the gifts are operational, then I'm quenching the Spirit if I take that position. But we have yet to prove, at least in my mind, that that is the intent and purpose of God in all of these gifts. I don't think it's fair and I don't think our continuationist friends necessarily want to put that label on everybody and say you're quenching the Spirit. Obviously, if their position is the right one, then we would be quenching the Spirit, wouldn't we? So we better move quickly to the next view then.

A case for cessation or a more open but cautious. Let's do that. I'm going to give you four reasons that I would offer as an open but cautious person to this understanding. The first one is that the gift of apostle has ceased so others may have as well. It's here that I think many of my continuationist friends are really practical

cessationists, because for most people, not all, there are traditions who have apostles within their church and they refer to them as apostles. I would suggest that that's not the majority of the evangelical church. The majority of the evangelical churches as they read their Bibles are happy to say and to agree with the idea that the gift of apostleship as we understand it with Peter and Paul and James and the others did come to an end. That gift at least is no longer operational. Paul says in Ephesians chapter 2 and verse 19: "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens but are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets." Built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets. When James the apostle died, they did not call a Council and replace James. The cessation of this gift was already even in the 1st century being realized. When Judas died, they did come together and they appointed Matthias to take that spot. But when James died, his position remained unfilled because I don't believe there is such a thing as apostolic succession. I don't believe the gift of apostleship is operational today in the way that it was in the 1st century. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15:8 he looked at himself as being the last of the apostles. he said that. I am the last of the apostles. 1 Corinthians 15:8.

The second thing I would add with that is that the gift of prophecy is also said to be foundational. So we look again at that first in Ephesians 2. When Paul said in that statement that this household of God is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself is the cornerstone. How many times in a building project do you lay the foundation? You dig. You put in your walls. You pour the floor. Your footings are there. Your stem wall is in. The floor is poured, and that's it. The foundation crew goes home. You don't keep adding a foundation. You don't continue doing foundational work. It's once and done. I think that's the imagery that Paul gives us here. He says that about the apostles specific and about the prophets. Once that foundation is laid and everything else is built on that.

It is at this point, the definition of how we understand this matter of prophecy is absolutely crucial. What are we talking about when we talk about somebody who has the gift of prophecy? In the Old Testament, everybody agrees that the Old Testament gift of a prophet was someone who spoke an infallible word from God. If you spoke less than an infallible word from God, you were not considered to be a true prophet. In fact,

your very life was in jeopardy because a prophet of God receiving a revelation from God received an infallible revelation. They were giving a statement that says thus saith the Lord. So the early church comes along and the church begins. They have no 66 books in a leather-bound Bible to guide them in all of the things that are facing them as a church. Clearly the gift of apostleship and the gift of the prophet were crucial. They were foundational in the 1st century. They were giving people the very revelation of God that was being collected as time went on into the Word of God. As the authoritative Word was written down and collected, I believe the role of the prophet and that of the apostle is no longer necessary.

So what we have today is those who believe the gift of prophecy is still functioning today they, generally speaking, have to come up with another definition of prophet. The Old Testament prophet, nobody disagrees, spoke a word from God that did not fail. That's why they started off a lot of their messages with thus saith the Lord. So we come to the New Testament. The need is we've got to change the wording and the definition of a prophet because no prophet today who claims to have the gift of prophecy as I've ever heard claims to speak the infallible word of God every time they speak. In fact, they say very often just the opposite of that. This must be tested. It must be examined to see if it is from God. So again, we're faced with one of those definitions. It's true that the Old Testament prophet gave an infallible word. Is it the same to be true in the New Testament? Are they as well to give an infallible word? Even though this point is argued, I stand by this. There is no example in the New Testament of a prophet speaking anything other than an infallible word. So the prophets in the New Testament as I read it gave just as an exact prophecy as those did in the Old Testament. Today we have those who speak a word from God who speak flawed prophecies. There is an issue that has to be resolved at that point.

There is a pastor who if I gave his name many of you would recognize it. He was giving his church instruction about this very point. he takes a different view than I do about the gift of prophecy. He was encouraging his church to explore to see whether they had the gift of prophecy. As he encouraged them to do this, he used personal example from his own life to encourage them in this regard. He said he wanted to bring a personal word of encouragement to a friend. So he was praying about that and he

wanted a word from God for his friend. What came into his mind was a pirate ship being chased by sharks. He told this in a very funny and entertaining way. I love this guy, by the way. He is a great teacher of the Word. He said no, God, that's not the prophecy I want to share with my friend. A pirate ship being chased by sharks is not what I had in mind. But he felt compelled that this was a word from God for his friend. And so he took this word that he believed was from God as a prophetic word and he shared with his friend. He said I don't know what this means to you but I pictured you and I saw a pirate ship being chased by sharks. Now I don't know what his friend said.

Here's my observation about that. Who wouldn't want to speak an encouraging word into the life of a friend? I want to do that, don't you? Wouldn't it be more valuable if I were wanting to do that to be reading perhaps God's Word and to be asking God to give me a word for a friend from His Word. I am sorry. I'm not suggesting that that's the level of all prophecy by any means. But here's a guy faithful to the Word and he is trying to encourage his church to explore prophecy. We're hearing more of this teaching today in churches very similar to ours and their doctrinal positions. They're encouraging their people to explore this area of prophecy. Another well-known pastor told his people to get in there and try it. Yeah, you're going to mess up. You're going to give prophecies that are probably not relevant or true but you've got to get in there and try. I'm open but cautious for a reason.

Thirdly, there is an analogy of history with regard to this matter of gifts. Here's what I mean by that. I believe that the continuationist position would oftentimes have us think that the Bible is just page after page after page of miracles. Every time you read something there's another miracle. There are a lot of miracles in the Bible. But I would suggest to you that from the analogy of history that when God was doing a redemptive work, when God was doing something new and fresh and different, it was then that we often see this clustering of the miraculous, of the supernatural gifts coming to the surface. Clearly, in the book of Exodus God raises up Moses to be the deliverer of His people and he is going to bring Israel out of the land of Egypt. You can't read that account without seeing the miraculous exploding off the pages of Scripture. When they go into the Promised Land God is doing a new thing. He is confirming His people as the people of God. He is showing them His greatness and power and glory. We have this

explosion of miraculous things. Then you read for hundreds of years until you come to Elijah and Elisha when the nation is in spiritual bankruptcy. God breaks into their world again and He says here's Elijah and Elisha. He empowered them and gifted them to do many miraculous things. I read the rest of the Old Testament and I could list out a long group of prophets of the 16 prophets that are recorded for us in Scripture and have written Scripture. Many of them never did one miraculous thing that is ever recorded in Scripture. When Jesus comes on the scene, obviously God is doing something new again. It is to say the kingdom is at hand and repent. Jesus said, as I mentioned a couple of weeks ago, the greatest of the prophets was John the Baptist. But you know what it says about John? That he did not do one miraculous thing.

As you see the Scriptures unfold, it looks a lot more to me like there is within the redemptive program of God times within the history of His people and His church like in the book of Acts. What's God doing? He's doing the unthinkable! He is bringing together Jews and Gentiles. He authenticates that this is His work by gifting man as apostles and prophets to do miraculous things. That's exactly what we read in Acts chapter 15 verse 12. In that passage as the people came together at the Jerusalem Council we read this: "And all the assembly fell silent and they listened to Barnabas and Paul as they related what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles. After they finished speaking James replied, 'Brothers, listen to me, Simon has related how God first visited the Gentiles to take them a people for His name.'" They were amazed. They fell silent when they realized God was doing a new and amazing work among them.

Then lastly, there seems to be a vast difference between the gifts of the New Testament and the gifts of those today. Again, I don't think that any one of these points necessarily is the end all with regard to this issue. But there is a difference. As I read the New Testament between the gifts that are operating in the New Testament, in the Gospels and the book of Acts. The Spirit's intervention was effective. It was immediate. It was dramatic. It was unexplainable apart from the work of God. People were raised from the dead. Congenital childhood illnesses were cured instantly. There wasn't any process. There wasn't any waiting. There wasn't any falling short of a person being made whole and complete with a touch, with a word, with the miraculous power of God being on display.

Again, I share this illustration not to be harsh in this regard but as I was reading again over the last couple weeks I came across a name of someone in a book by someone I greatly appreciate. I have read often his books and have benefited from them. He is a continuationist and he lifted up the name of the person who he said in the end in their own definition is probably at the top of the miraculous gifts and healings in our day. I had not heard of this person so I looked this name up. Interestingly, they had had an extended ministry in a country where I have some friends who are missionaries. I just thought I would love to believe that these things that have been reported are true. I'm not saying they're not true, but I would love to hear from somebody that could say yes. So I fired off an email and a few days later I got an email back. My friends were incredibly gracious about the whole matter. They put forward that they don't know everything either. But this person who had had this ministry right within their country within an hour of where they live, and in the book this person is said to have actually raised somebody from the dead right there in a village not too far away from my missionary friend. They had never heard that. They had heard different accounts of things that supposedly had happened. But then they even shared within that context some rather troubling things that again they wanted to be very gracious about but just were a warning to them about what exactly was happening and what was reported. I would suggest to you that if someone had been raised from the dead in Tulsa, Oklahoma, we would've heard of it. We would know about it. We would be celebrating that if that was a reality and had happened. That happened in the New Testament with not regularity but it happened frequently as the apostles and prophets, gifted men, exercised the laying of the foundation of the church to do the work of God.

What do we take away from this, my friends? I can't just give you one thing. We've got to have a couple for this morning. The first one in my mind is the issue is never a matter of what God can or cannot do. It's a matter of what He has purposed to do and how He will do it. Do I believe that God heals today? Absolutely, I believe God heals today. Do I believe that there are miracles that take place and God breaks into the laws of nature in our world today? Absolutely, I believe He does that. Probably far more than I see. Probably far more than I realize. The miraculous is often all around us. Obviously somebody coming to faith in Christ is the greatest miracle that could ever

happen. So God is a miracle-working God. God is healing people today. I am cautious but open to the idea that there is somebody that has the specific gift of miracles or the gift of healing. Do I pray for healing? Do the elders pray for healing? James 5 puts that responsibility right there before us. If anyone is sick, let them call the elders who will come and pray for that person. In every small group I've ever been in, in any community group I've ever been in, there is a consistent lifting up of people among us who need the healing touch of God. We pray for those things. We ask God to do those things. Can God do that? Of course He can. Does God do that? often times it seems that He has another purpose in mind. Sometimes I know that He does. My failing may often be my lack of faith or my lack of expectancy, but I know without a shadow of a doubt that God is fully capable and fully able to heal and do miraculous things today. I also know that God chooses oftentimes to not heal and He's working another purpose out in that person's life as well.

Secondly, the denial of divine experience is not the issue. It is the interpretation of it. This is where I feel like there's a lot more common ground than we might realize between the two views. When we're asked: how do you explain this? Or how do you explain that? I have no desire to explain something away, but I believe at times there is a different interpretation that is needed for what has happened or taken place. If someone has a prophetic word, is that a matter of direct revelation that is infallibly given by God? Or is it possible that if someone has a prophetic word, it's a work of the Holy Spirit in illumination bringing to mind something that He has already given to us in His Word. Something that that person has read and God brings it to mind may be unrelated to what they're reading or studying even at that point. Absolutely I believe that oftentimes things that are reported as prophetic words may very well be illumination. I think when you think of healing. Is it as a result of the gift of healing or the response of a sovereign God to the prayers of his people? I believe that God is ready and able and willing in any of those circumstances to do whatever will bring Him the greatest glory. Sometimes I think it's a matter of interpretation.

Then finally friends, we hold in our hands the plain, sufficient, inerrant, infallible, completed Word of God. What an incredible blessing that is! Listen to this closing statement out of Hebrews 1: "Long ago, at many times and in many ways." Look at what

the writer of Hebrews is doing there. It takes us back and he is recording and rehearsing all of the different things that God has done. "God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son, whom He appointed the heir of all things, through whom also He created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature, and He upholds the universe by the word of His power. After making purification for sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name He has inherited is more excellent than theirs." I say to you this morning we can have any of the gifts of the Spirit that are listed in the Scripture, but if we don't have the fruit of the Spirit and we don't have the love of the Spirit for each other, then it really is nothing.

Here we have the more excellent way. Here we have Jesus who is better than anything else. That's what the writer of Hebrews is saying. He's better than anything else. This is who it is that we desire more than anything. I sometimes wonder, my friends, if as God hears us as His people saying I wish God would speak to me, I wonder if God sometimes doesn't think in His own mind I wish My people would listen to Me. I wish My people would listen to Me.

Let's pray. Father God, thank You for the diversity of the body of Christ. Lord, thank You that within this fellowship we have a variety of backgrounds and a variety of experiences and a variety of understanding about this challenging issue of which we looked at this morning. Thank You that as Your people we can truly love each other. We can testify to the fact that Jesus is better than anything else. Lord, we thank You for the work of Christ on the cross for us. We thank You that He has invited us to be a part of Your family as we put our faith and trust in Him alone for our salvation. He has promised to be our teacher and our guide through all of life. We thank you for that. In Jesus's name, amen.