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Edited by
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baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I . . . he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire” (Matt. 3:11).

The gift of the Holy Ghost is formally bestowed upon an individual only once, but the spiritual benefits associated with this gift can and should be continuous during a lifetime. Latter-day Saints are taught to strive to live so as to have the Holy Ghost as a “constant companion” to strengthen them and help them choose the right (D&C 121:46). The granting of the gift alone, however, does not insure these inspirations. The actual reception of the Holy Ghost is conditional upon the humility, faith, and worthiness of the individual who has had the gift bestowed on him or her. President Joseph F. SMITH taught that the gift of the Holy Ghost confers upon worthy and desirous members “the right to receive . . . the power and light of truth of the Holy Ghost, although [they] may often be left to [their] own spirit and judgment” (GD, pp. 60–61).

The gift of the Holy Ghost is referred to by the Prophet Joseph SMITH as one of the basic principles and ordinances of the gospel, being integrally linked to faith in Jesus Christ, repentance, and baptism by immersion for the REMISSION OF SINS (see FIRST PRINCIPLES OF THE GOSPEL; A of F 4). Together these four constitute the “first principles” of the gospel of Jesus Christ (see GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST; 3 Ne. 27:19–21) and the only means whereby men and women can be cleansed of all sin—to become pure and spotless and worthy to enter the presence of God.

The Holy Ghost continues to aid in the process of spiritual purification through “the baptism by fire,” which has been described in these words: “By the power of the Holy Ghost—who is the Sanctifier (3 Ne. 27:19–21)—dross, iniquity, carnality, sensuality, and every evil thing is burned out of the repentant soul as if by fire; the cleansed person becomes literally a new creature of the Holy Ghost. . . . He is born again” (MD, p. 73). The Savior referred to this spiritual rebirth when he told Nicodemus, “Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God” (John 3:5).

A single experience of being “born again” does not alone insure salvation. It is also necessary for a person to “endure to the end,” an essential element of the gospel of Christ (2 Ne. 31:20; 3 Ne. 27:16–17). The prophet Nephi₁ taught that

ENDURING TO THE END requires that one “feast upon the words of Christ,” following the guidance of the Holy Ghost in “all things what ye should do” (2 Ne. 32:3–5). The gift of the Holy Ghost thus ensures that divine guidance and spiritual renewal take place throughout one’s life, provided that the requisite repentance and humility are manifested.

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GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT

The seventh Article of Faith of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints reads: “We believe in the gift of tongues, prophecy, revelation, visions, healing, interpretation of tongues, and so forth.” All such heavenly endowments come as gifts of the Spirit—that is, through the grace of God and the operation and power of the HOLY GHOST. As prerequisites to obtaining such gifts, a person must receive the ordinances of baptism and the bestowal of the GIFT OF THE HOLY GHOST from an authorized priesthood holder, must earnestly seek to obtain the gift or gifts, and must make sincere efforts to keep the Lord’s COMMANDMENTS.

Clearly the Spirit can grant any gift that would fill a particular need; hence, no exhaustive list is possible, but many gifts have been promised the Church. Through the New Testament, readers are familiar with the six specified above: the two related to the gifts of tongues and their interpretation, or the power to speak in a language not previously learned and the ability to interpret such speech; the gift of prophecy, exhibited sometimes in the predictive sense but more often in the sense that “the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy” (Rev. 19:10); revelation, or the heaven-inspired receipt of knowledge, wisdom, or direction; visions, or visual spiritual manifestations such as PROPHETS have received in all ages and as Joel predicted for many others in the latter days (Joel 2:28–29); healing, or the power to “lay hands on the sick” that they may recover (Mark 16:18).

Scripturally, gifts of the Spirit are among the signs that “follow them that believe” (Mark 16:17). Eager to receive such promised gifts but lacking in understanding, some of the early converts to the Church (1831–32) became caught up in “spiritual” excesses that were common to revivalist campground meetings, with which they were familiar. In early days in KIRTLAND, OHIO, the Prophet Joseph SMITH observed, “many false spirits were introduced . . . many ridiculous things were entered into . . . [that would] cause the Spirit of God to be withdrawn” (*TPJS*, pp. 213–14). In congregations around Kirtland, Parley P. PRATT specifically noted “disgusting” spiritual operations, “unseemly gestures,” people falling “into ecstasies, and . . . drawn into contortions . . . fits” (Pratt, p. 61). Joseph Smith condemned such practices as unnatural and without useful purpose, since they communicated no intelligence (*TPJS*, pp. 204, 214). Thus dissociating the Church from the spiritual extravagances of frontier Christianity, the authorities moved swiftly against such erroneous practices, reclaiming those members whom they could and excommunicating those who persisted in their error.

In the doctrinal unfolding of the infant Church, Joseph Smith received revelations relating to spiritual gifts, notably that of March 8, 1831 (now D&C 46). Having first warned against deception by false spirits, the revelation set out the gifts much as PAUL and MORONI₂ did for the first-century and the Nephite churches, respectively (see 1 Cor. 12; Moroni 10). Mentioned besides the six above were knowledge; wisdom; faith to be healed; the working of MIRACLES; knowledge of the ways in which gifts may be administered; and the DISCERNMENT of spirits, whether they are of God or of the devil. Listed too was the gift of the Spirit’s witness of Jesus Christ and his atonement for the sins of the world, and, for some, the gift of believing the words of one who declares that witness (D&C 46:14).

The revelation promises at least one gift to every faithful Latter-day Saint. Bishops and other presiding officers, by virtue of their CALLINGS to watch over the Church, may receive multiple gifts, including the special gift of discernment to detect false from true spirits. On the latter point, Joseph Smith cautioned about “the common error of considering all supernatural manifestations to be of God,” warning that evil spirits as well as heavenly ones can, for example, speak in tongues and inter-

pret them; and that in their deception they may even give recognition to the Savior and his authorized servants (*TPJS*, pp. 206–13, 229; also Luke 4:33–35; Acts 16:16–18).

Many early LDS journals recount experiences with spiritual gifts: In 1830 Newel Knight saw a vision of heaven apparently similar to what the martyr Stephen described (“Newel Knight’s Journal,” pp. 52–53). In Kirtland in 1831, Chloe Smith, who had been languishing near death, was instantly restored to health under Joseph Smith’s ministrations (Pratt, pp. 66–67). At a meeting in Ontario, Canada, in 1833, Lydia Bailey (later Knight) spoke in tongues (*Journal History*, Oct. 19, 1833). Following Heber C. Kimball’s prophetic promise in 1836 that a son would be born to Parley and Thankful Pratt, childless after ten years of marriage, a son was born a year later (Pratt, pp. 130–31, 165). Then as now, both leaders and the general membership were blessed with such gifts.

Gifts of the Spirit are to be sought for their beneficial effect rather than for their remarkable character (see 1 Cor. 14). In fact, as Joseph Smith observed, only one or two of the gifts are visible when in operation. In its commonly understood sense, the gift of tongues is one such, but President Joseph F. SMITH stressed its more practical aspect: “I needed the gift of tongues once, and the Lord gave it to me. I was in a foreign land, sent to preach the gospel to a people whose language I could not understand. Then I sought earnestly for the gift of tongues, and by this gift and by study, in a hundred days after landing upon those islands I could talk to the people in their language as I now talk to you in my native tongue. This was a gift that was worthy of the gospel. There was a purpose in it” (Smith, p. 201). In this way, the gift is frequently enjoyed by LDS missionaries today.

Throughout the world, Latter-day Saints report a variety of spiritual gifts in the normal course of their lives. Faithful members commonly receive through the Spirit the gift of the testimony of Jesus Christ and his restored gospel—and those individual testimonies constitute the strength of the Church; the gift of knowledge of spiritual things is enjoyed widely; daily, PRIESTHOOD bearers lay hands on the heads of sick family members or friends, as requested (see James 5:14–15), and bring them heaven’s healing powers, frequently with instant effect; men, women, and young persons receive revelation as needed for the benefit of themselves, their families, or those whom they

serve in Church callings. Virtually all of these activities and others of comparable spiritual significance go on in the privacy of home and heart without any public awareness of them.

All spiritual gifts are needed in the Church (1 Cor. 12), but that some are more to be desired than others is evident from Paul's writings: One is to seek the best gifts. Of special significance for all who desire "a more excellent way" (1 Cor. 12:31) is to receive and develop the gift of CHARITY. This "pure love of Christ" is a fundamental mark of true DISCIPLESHIP, a prerequisite to ETERNAL LIFE, and a quality one is therefore to pray and work for with all energy of heart (Moroni 7:47–48; 10:21; Ether 12:34). Paul's masterful exposition on charity (1 Cor. 13) further defines this attribute and confirms love as the great commandment and the Christian's crucial need. Disciples are to manifest this gift and also desire others (1 Cor. 14:1), working by the power of God and by the gifts of the Spirit (Moro. 10:25).

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GOD

Latter-day Saints declare, "We believe in God, the Eternal Father, and in His Son, Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Ghost" (A of F 1). Joseph SMITH offered the following clarification: "The Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man's; the Son also; but the Holy Ghost has not a body of flesh and bones, but is a personage of Spirit" (D&C 130:22; *see* GOD THE FATHER; HOLY GHOST; JESUS CHRIST).

The Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are three separate and distinct beings who constitute one GODHEAD. Generally speaking, the Father is the Creator, the Son is the Redeemer, and the Holy Ghost is the Comforter and Testifier (cf. *MFP* 5:26–34; *TPJS*, p. 190). Many scriptural passages illustrate the distinct character of the members of the Godhead. For example, at the baptism of Jesus, while he was in the water, the Father's voice was heard from heaven, and the Holy Ghost descended

"like a dove" and rested upon the Son (Matt. 3:13–17; *see* JESUS CHRIST: BAPTISM). All three persons were manifested separately and simultaneously. Also, Jesus said, "My Father is greater than I" (John 14:28), and in another place declared, "The Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son" (John 5:22). Further, Jesus pointed to the Father and himself as two separate witnesses of the divinity of his work (John 5:32–37; 8:12–18). On the MOUNT OF TRANSFIGURATION the heavenly Father identified the mortal Jesus to Peter, James, and John as "my beloved Son" (Matt. 17:5). Moreover, the Son often prayed to his Father. In Gethsemane he prayed to the Father while in deep anguish (Mark 14:32–39; cf. Luke 22:40–46; D&C 19:16–19), and on the cross he cried out to the Father, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46; Mark 15:34; cf. Ps. 22:1). All of these passages clearly show that the Father is a being distinct from the Son. Although they are one in mind and purpose, they are two separate individuals and bear testimony of one another (cf. 3 Ne. 11:7–11).

The way in which the Godhead is one is illustrated by Jesus' prayer that his disciples would be one, even as he and the Father are one (John 17:21–22; cf. 3 Ne. 11:27, 32–36; 28:10–11). Here he was praying for his disciples' unity of mind, purpose, and testimony, not for the merger of their identities into a single being. He prayed that they would be one in desire, purpose, and objective, exactly as he and his Father are (*TPJS*, p. 372; *see* UNITY).

The Father, as God, is omnipotent, omniscient, and, through his spirit, omnipresent (*see* LIGHT OF CHRIST). He is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, abundant in goodness. His course is one eternal round. He is a God of truth and no respecter of persons. He personifies love.

Though Latter-day Saints extensively use the scriptures to learn about God, their fundamental knowledge concerning him is based upon the Prophet Joseph Smith's FIRST VISION, the Prophet's subsequent revelatory experiences, and individual personal REVELATION. While mankind may reason or speculate concerning the existence of God, and his nature, the principal way by which they can know about God is dependent upon his revealing himself to them (*see* TESTIMONY OF JESUS CHRIST).

Before A.D. 325, the date of the first Christian ecumenical council at Nicaea, the nature of God was debated by philosophers and people of faith.