

What Should We Know About the Church?

*Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: **the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers.** Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do His work and build up the church, the body of Christ. **This will continue until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ.***
Ephesians 4:11, 12 NLT: (Emphasis added is mine).

This study is one of a five part series of teachings regarding the foundational work of the fivefold ministry as given in the Ephesians reference presented above. It is the work of the five-fold ministry, as executed by the various members of the body of **Jesus**, to build up the other believers into a complete maturity in **Christ**. Each of these ministries is related to a foundational area of study for the disciple. This fifth study will introduce the disciple to some important concepts and ideas that they will find helpful when considering the study of the Church as the portion of the five-fold ministry concerning Apostles and the spiritual authority that will affect the life of the disciple.

In this study we will examine the nature of the 'Church' as it was established in the first century to see the foundation that was laid for the successive generations of believers. To initiate this study, we need to define what we mean by the term 'Church.' The word 'Church' represents the Greek word *ekklesia*, which means an assembly of believers for the purpose of worship. From the Jewish traditions, we have the establishment of the synagogue (house for assembly) for worship within the community. The temple was the center of worship for the nation but the synagogue became the center of civil and religious life for the Jewish people.

During the first century period after the ministry of Jesus, the believers in Jesus would meet in the temple area for worship and study, before fellowshiping in their homes, Acts 2:46, 47 CJB:

Continuing faithfully and with singleness of purpose to meet in the Temple courts daily, and breaking bread in their several homes, they shared their food in joy and simplicity of heart, praising God and having the respect of all the people. And day after day the Lord kept adding to them those who were being saved.

One of the key aspects of the early believers was their desire to be together. They spent time together, they ministered to each other's needs, they corrected each other, and they loved each other. The verses that precede the reference above highlight the level of their interaction and they refute the 'lone ranger' attitude of some believers that believe that they can go it alone, Acts 2:42-45 ESV:

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need.

The reason that the early believers were so effective in their ministry, in fact they were referred to as the ones that turned the world upside down, was their great love for each other. They were willing to sacrifice of themselves for the good of the others. **Jesus** told them that the world would know that they were His disciples by the love that they showed to each other, John 13:34, 35 NLT:

So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are My disciples."

It is important that as we examine our spiritual life that we realize that loving interaction is what draws people to **Jesus**. I remember years ago that I was seeking a place to attend worship in new city and I came to a fellowship that was open about hugging each other and spending time in fellowship. I knew that that was the place that I wanted to serve in. The **Lord** used that kind of loving fellowship to prepare me for the later work that I have been doing. One of the greatest aspects of the fellowship was that they realized that **GOD** was using them to develop people spiritually and then **GOD** was going to take those people and use them elsewhere. They were never selfish about holding on to people, but they were willing to serve **GOD** in this very vital capacity. My writing these words for this website is a testament to their loving service to the **LORD**.

Loving each other and ministering to each other is great but there does need to be some structure to what is being done locally and beyond. We see this pattern developing in the Book of Acts. The **Holy Spirit** anointed leaders from the body to oversee the group of believers in Jerusalem. We see evidence of this leadership with the Council of Jerusalem that was convened to discuss the situation with Gentile believers as detailed in the fifteenth chapter of the Book of Acts.

However, as the Good News spread from Jerusalem outward to the known world, the need was there to have additional leadership for those sites. The apostle Paul addressed this need in several references. In one reference, 1 Corinthians 12:28 NLT:

Here are some of the parts God has appointed for the church: first are apostles, second are prophets, third are teachers, then those who do miracles, those who have the gift of healing, those who can help others, those who have the gift of leadership, those who speak in unknown languages.

It is helpful to note that Paul specifies three positions as head of the giftings to the assemblies. These three positions also are in direct reference to three parts of the five-fold ministry mention in the fourth chapter of the Book of Ephesians. We will explore these three positions before exploring the other two parts of the five-fold ministry – pastors and evangelists.

The apostolic portion of the five-fold ministry deals with the area of spiritual authority. Someone in the assemblies needs to exercise authority over the body and that authority is exercised through apostles, elders, and deacons. We will explore the role of apostles now and later detail the role of elders and deacons.

The term apostle means to be called to do a task. That task may involve exercising *halahic* authority in decision making – such at the reference we mention in the fifteenth chapter of Acts. These are decisions that affect the body of believers in general and they would resemble the type of decisions that the sages of Israel would have made. The authority for these decisions is mentioned in the following references, Matthew 16:19, 18:19 NLT, emphasis added is mine:

And I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven. Whatever you forbid (bind) on earth will be forbidden in heaven, and whatever you permit (loose) on earth will be permitted in heaven. I also tell you this: If two of you agree here on earth concerning anything you ask, My Father in heaven will do it for you.

The terms of ‘permit’ or ‘bind’ refer to the *halahic* authority passed from the **Father** to the **Son**, and then to the apostles of the assemblies. This authority is to be exercised in restraint and not to be handled in a dictatorial fashion. The Apostle Paul was very sensitive to this authority and you will find him making statements to the effect of – I could demand this or I could order this – but rather he exercises his apostolic authority by making requests (see the letter to Philemon). The basic qualification of apostleship is to not use their authority abusively. This quality demands great spiritual authority.

Beyond the role of *halahic* authority, the apostolic calling could refer to a host of special projects that one may be called to do. One calling may be to start a fellowship. One calling may be to start a ministry for a particular need. One calling may be called to start an internet ministry that could reach people all over the world or it could be to start a ministry to feed people in the neighborhood. This type of apostolic calling is project specific and it refers to the initiator of the project. Those that would come in later to administrate the project would be considered deacons or ministry leaders.

The second type of office or position would be that of the prophet. We see the role of prophets in the Old Testament or Tanakh. They were individuals that **GOD** called to give vital instructions to His people. The same is true today where the prophet is like the guidance system of the assemblies. They speak the heart and mind of **GOD** regarding the affairs and conduct of the assemblies. They can tell us when we get it right and they are to warn us when we get it wrong. The assemblies can easily get off track if the office of the prophet is ignored.

We need to keep in mind the difference between the office of prophet and the more common ministry of prophesy. While anyone can have a word of prophesy, in other words they can speak a word that represents the heart and mind of **GOD**, the office of the prophet is reserved for an individual that has been called to the office, that is spiritually mature, and that has a record of actually speaking forth the heart and mind of **GOD**. I continually refer to the words spoken from the prophet as the heart and mind of **GOD** to differentiate this manner of communication from the foretelling of the future. Many believers have the mistaken impression that a prophet's major role is to foretell the future. While **GOD** may have given the prophet some understanding of the future, as part of His heart and mind on a subject, however the telling of the future is not to be primary reason for a prophetic message. The **Father** is far more concerned with our conduct right now than in dispensing information regarding the future. He will however, relate some future information as it relates to our spiritual growth.

The role of the teacher or more properly called disciple instructor is to raise the level of spiritual maturity in the body of believers. We grow into spiritual maturity as we see it modeled by our spiritual mentors. It might start at a very basic level where a new believer is introduced to spiritual growth by the example of their small group leader. But as the call of **GOD** increases in a life, the need for more mature discipleship increases requiring the role of the teacher or disciple instructor. **Jesus** followed the pattern from His Jewish heritage in the manner that He disciplined His students. They lived together so that they could experience a full range of teaching situations.

Our modern style of discipleship is to send people to classes where they learn theory but they lack the life experiences that demonstrate the theory they are learning. Remember that the early assemblies of believers were a part of each other's life on a daily basis, so the opportunity for personal discipleship was much greater than our current models of instruction. It is not a matter of going to seminary exclusively, but rather it is more important to sit under the tutelage of the **Holy Spirit** and the people that are submitted to His instruction. We need to seek those people that are allowing the **Holy Spirit** to change their life and then to submit our lives to follow their examples. We will witness real spiritual growth in our life, as we allow the **Holy Spirit** and the wisdom of spiritual mature people to direct our spiritual growth.

It would now be proper to explore two very important parts of the spiritual authority for the assemblies. The first part has to do with the role of eldership. If you will recall from a previous teaching, the example that I gave of the lead sheep, for this is the model for eldership. **GOD** knew that each local assembly would need the lead sheep to assist in the spiritual growth of the local assembly of believers. Paul voiced this concern when he instructed Titus to appoint elders in the various communities of believers, **Titus 1:5**. Then Paul goes on to give instruct regarding the character of the elders, Titus 1:6-9 NLT:

An elder must live a blameless life. He must be faithful to his wife, and his children must be believers who don't have a reputation for being wild or rebellious. For an elder must live a blameless life. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered; he must not be a heavy drinker, violent, or dishonest with money. Rather, he must enjoy having guests in his home, and he must love what is good. He must live wisely and be just. He must live a devout and disciplined life. He must have a strong belief in the trustworthy message he was taught; then he will be able to encourage others with wholesome teaching and show those who oppose it where they are wrong.

It is helpful to point out some of the special characteristics of the elder that would signify their spiritual maturity. The manner of their lifestyle was a prime consideration. They had to be of a good reputation in the community and have mastered the art of family life. The children were another consideration. Since the local assembly was comprised of homes, it was necessary to have leaders that could help others to learn the art of family life. Remembering our section on discipleship, we can see the benefit of a good family man in a leadership role, modeling for the other men the role they need to take with their families. The local assembly will be only as healthy as the individual families that are in them.

Other considerations were the type of temperament of the leader. Paul warned against quick tempered people that could abuse the 'sheep' but rather they were to seek gentle leaders that could encourage the flock. They had to be disciplined enough to be able to properly handle the resources of the assembly. They had to have developed a reputation for handling money wisely in their day to day affairs. They were to be given to hospitality and welcoming of strangers. We do not see the leaders exercising exclusivity as to who should be a member. Rather, we see them able to gently correct the errors of others and to encourage people into doing what is good in the eyes of the **Father**. We see a man that was knowledgeable of the Word of **GOD**. In other words we see a man that was spiritually mature and that modeled the nature of **Jesus** to his community.

The selection of deacons was of a similar nature. Paul describes their qualifications, 1Timothy 3:10-12 NLT:

Before they are appointed as deacons, let them be closely examined. If they pass the test, then let them serve as deacons. In the same way, their wives must be respected and must not slander others. They must exercise self-control and be faithful in everything they do. A deacon must be faithful to his wife, and he must manage his children and household well.

The role of deacons was to head the various ministries of the assemblies. We read of one such situation regarding deacons being appointed to take care of some widows in the Jerusalem assembly, Acts, 6:1-6. Women were also allowed to serve as ministry leaders and they were an important part of the assemblies. Of particular note was the office of a widow. She was an elderly woman of spiritual maturity that devoted her life in prayer and other service to the assemblies. Paul spoke of this role in 1 Timothy 5:9, 10 CJB:

Let a widow be enrolled on the list of widows only if she is more than sixty years old, was faithful to her husband, and is known for her good deeds — as one who has reared her children well, showed hospitality, washed the feet of God's people, helped those in trouble, and engaged in all kinds of good work.

We have covered the three authority areas of the five-fold ministry and now it is time to focus our attention on the two more nurture oriented portions of the five-fold ministry. I have included the ministries of pastors and evangelists as companion ministries for they work together in the development of spiritual maturity.

The evangelical portion of the five-fold ministry is often thought of as a Billy Graham type ministry that fills stadiums or lecture halls with people. This is an accurate depiction in some cases but more often the role of evangelism is carried out by someone that looks a lot like you or me, who spends some time with another person, sharing the truth about **GOD's** word with them. In the final analysis, I believe that that the personal evangelistic is closer to the heart of **GOD**. There were those times when **Jesus** spoke to vast crowds, but some of the more significant times were more personal situations. We therefore need to view ourselves in that capacity.

An evangelist can be described as one who brings the Good News and this is a description that can fit any of us. All of us are equipped to share what we know with other people, but we don't because of fear. We need to allow the **Holy Spirit** to build up our confidence so we can be bold in our profession of the Good News. Another reason that we hesitate is that we have unrealistic expectations of our performance. We somehow feel that the responsibility for the person that we are talking rests on us. It doesn't, for it rests on the **Father**. We are only responsible to open our mouth and share what **GOD** has done in our life, that's all; **God** will do the rest. We are to witness of His work in our life, not give eloquent theological arguments.

We can all share what **God** has done for us and thus bring the light of **GOD's** word to them. Sometimes it is helpful to do practical things for people like feed them, clothe them, visit them, comfort them when they are alone, etc... These simple acts of kindness can open many doors. Sometimes just a smile or a simple word of encourage change a person's life. We don't know the results sometimes, but **GOD** knows.

Similarly, the ministry of the pastor (shepherd like ministry) is to be performed by the entire body of believers. Every parent is a pastor of their home. Every ministry leader is a pastor of the people that serve with them. Every boss is a pastor of the people that serve under them. I think you get the picture. It is not just some person with a clergy collar that gets involved in the ministry activities of the pastor. We are all involved in it. Remember the local assembly is only as strong as the individual families that comprise it.

We need to be actively involved in encouraging one another as a part of the pastoral ministry. The following references highlight this point:

- 🕯 **Ephesians 4:29 NLT:** Don't use foul or abusive language. Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them.
- 🕯 **1Thessalonians 4:1 NLT:** Finally, dear brothers and sisters, we urge you in the name of the Lord Jesus to live in a way that pleases God, as we have taught you. You live this way already, and we encourage you to do so even more.

- 🕯️ **1Thessalonians 5:11 NLT:** So encourage each other and build each other up, just as you are already doing.
- 🕯️ **Titus 2:6 NLT:** In the same way, encourage the young men to live wisely.
- 🕯️ **Hebrews 10:25 NLT:** And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of His return is drawing near.

These are examples of what the pastoral ministry is all about. Sometimes it involves counseling, where one can be trained to administer therapy and resolve conflicts. Sometimes it simply means holding someone's hand or giving them a hug when they are suffering. The pastoral ministry could involve mentoring younger people in the ways of the **LORD** or sharing your past experiences with people going through the same type of problems. I am being purposely vague here because I don't want to limit what **GOD** can do in this area. Actually anything that you can think of to help another person grow in their faith can be considered a part of the pastoral ministry.

This is the reason that Paul list only three offices before listing individual gifts that could be used in either bringing the Good News or in helping people that know the Good News to grow in their faith. It might be helpful at this point to list the various gifts again to get the bigger picture, [1 Corinthians 12:5-11](#):

There are different kinds of service, but we serve the same Lord. God works in different ways, but it is the same God who does the work in all of us. A spiritual gift is given to each of us so we can help each other. To one person the Spirit gives the ability to give wise advice; to another the same Spirit gives a message of special knowledge. The same Spirit gives great faith to another, and to someone else the one Spirit gives the gift of healing. He gives one person the power to perform miracles, and another the ability to prophesy. He gives someone else the ability to discern whether a message is from the Spirit of God or from another spirit. Still another person is given the ability to speak in unknown languages, while another is given the ability to interpret what is being said. It is the one and only Spirit who distributes all these gifts. He alone decides which gift each person should have.

The first concept that we need to realize regarding spiritual gifts is that they are given by the **Holy Spirit** to assist us in doing what **GOD** wants us to do. **God** has a plan for each individual person and the spiritual gifts help us to do the mission that **GOD** has called us to do. This is by no means a complete list of gifts but Paul was trying to give us some idea of some of ways that the **Holy Spirit** is helping us in our mission.

Another important aspect of these gifts is that they are from the **Holy Spirit**. The **Holy Spirit** is **GOD** and **GOD** is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow. Therefore the gifts that Paul is listing here are available to us today, just like they were available to the believers in his day. Some groups of believers try to do away with some of the gifts by saying that they were for the first century and not for today. I am not going to join that argument but I will offer my opinion that each and every gift that Paul is listing is available for the work of the assemblies of believers. You may choose to believe differently and that is alright with me.

Looking at the gifts individually will give us a better perspective regarding their mutual benefit to the body of believers. They are as follows:

- 🕯 **Faith:** Some people have the gift of faith that is needed when others lack it. I remember that a church that I was attending was experiencing some financial problems. **GOD** gave me the faith to believe that a large donation was coming for the church. Other people did not have the faith to believe for it but I did. This is an example where the gifts operate independently but they benefit the whole body. **GOD** may grant you the gift to believe for a healing or some other miracle that your family may need. Don't reject the gift but embrace it for the need you have. On another occasion **GOD** may choose another person to have the faith.
- 🕯 **Healing:** **GOD** will at times use different people to have this gift. I remember a woman in our small group that was upset that her eyes were deteriorating rapidly and she was going to need a new prescription. She could eventually go blind. We prayed and **GOD** ministered the gift of healing to her. When she went back to the doctor, she found out that she needed a new prescription but not because her eyes were getting worse but because they had gotten so much better. Now **GOD** may not answer every prayer this way or grant the gift of healing but be open to it happening. Who knows, it might you that gets the gift.
- 🕯 **Miracles:** Miracles are events that surpass normal understanding. We think of **Jesus** calming the storm or feeding the five thousand, as typical miracles but maybe we need to lower our scope a little bit. Perhaps someone has a financial need and through a string of improbable circumstances that need gets met. Perhaps another person is facing a daunting decision and through the right set of circumstances, a person arrives with just the right thing to say. Perhaps a child has been deprived of nurturing in their life and **GOD** will bring someone in their life to nurture them. Are these not miracles? Are these things that perhaps you could do?

🕊️ **Prophecy:** Have you ever been in a situation where your family or a friend's family is going through something that just doesn't make any sense, and suddenly someone speaks the word that brings everything into perspective? Or perhaps something has been troubling you and you think about it during a service, suddenly you hear words coming from the speaker that address the very thing you are troubled about. These are examples of someone speaking the heart and mind of **GOD** to address these situations. Prophecy doesn't have to change the course of history but it might be helpful to change a life.

These are just a few of the ways that the **Holy Spirit** of **GOD** can use people like you and me to meet special situations. We have heard of situations in the natural when ordinary people can do supernatural things in an emergency. Well, the **Holy Spirit** can do the same thing but with greater results in the spiritual realm. We just have to be open to receive it.

I hope that these five fundamental teachings have been helpful for you to see the plan that **GOD** has for your life and for you to realize some very important ways that **GOD** may use you to fulfill those plans. These ways may be different than what we thought they would be, but the important thing is to never put **GOD** in a box or to expect that He will do things in a certain way. **GOD** loves to do the unexpected to shake us from our routines and to open us up to new ways of thinking and living.

Did Noah expect **GOD** would do what He did? Did Abraham expect Isaac to come in the manner that he did? Did Joseph expect that he would one day be second in position to the Pharaoh? Did Moses expect one day that he would lead millions of Israelites from Egypt to the Promised Land? Did Peter ever think about becoming the powerful man of **GOD** that he became? We never know what **GOD** may do with a person such as you and me. We may not know, but we can prepare.

It is my hope that these topics have been helpful for you see a side of **GOD** that is simple yet powerful; profound yet understandable; awe inspiring yet motivating. I get excited when I think that the **Almighty King of the Universe** wants to use people like you and me, to bring His precious words of truth to other people, like you and me. These acts of love make any little sacrifice that we might have to make seem tiny by comparison to the glory that we can bring to His name by our obedience. May our **Father** continue to bless you with all heavenly blessings and may you experience the richness of His shalom in your life.