

THE ASSEMBLY MESSENGER

Proclaiming the Timeless Truths of the Church to a New Generation of Believers
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Dear Reader

Since certain religious positions today are just *assumed* to be correct due their universality, and this assumption affects the church position of millions of Christians, it was necessary to examine those positions in the light of Scripture in the past few newsletters. Those positions are not even questioned by most. In the last issue we looked at the modern clergy-laity system and hopefully made it plain that God never intended ministers and Christian ministry to be given through such a system. If there are no clergymen in Scripture, then how *do* we get ministers and Christian ministry according to the Bible? In this issue we will seek to present the answer to that question.

The term *servants* (bond-slaves) can be used instead of *ministers*, for those who minister the Word are servants of both Christ and the brethren, not lords over the brethren. In fact the word *servant* better translates the Greek words most often translated *minister* in the KJV and some other translations. We *all* are servants (Rev.1:1, etc.) to do the Lord's work as He directs. It is a mistake to think of only those called of God to preach full time as servants of the Lord. That would tend towards a clergy.

Romans 12 -- Spiritual Gifts

God has given each of us at least one spiritual gift which varies both in degree and type. After telling us that we, being many, are one body in Christ and individually members of one another, Romans 12:6-8 goes on to say, "having then gifts differing according to the grace [undeserved favor] that is given to us, let us use them; if *prophecy*, let us prophesy *in proportion to our faith*; or *ministry*, let us use it in our ministering; he who *teaches*, in teaching; he who *exhorts*, in exhortation; he who *gives*, with liberality; he who *leads*, with diligence; he who *shows mercy*, with cheerfulness."

As the Lord sees fit, He gives all us believers one or more special, *undeserved favors* that we didn't have by natural means. This is the *type* of spiritual gift. There is also a *proportion* given: not all have the same degree of gift. One might be very helpful in small discussion-groups, but inept in large groups or from the platform. Sometimes we speak of teachers' teachers -- a few with a most remarkable grasp of most every aspect of Scripture and who are able to teach "the deep things of God" in almost any circumstance. This is what we mean by *degree* of a gift. Both the type and degree of gift or gifts are "according to his own ability" (Mt.25:15). God gives in a *natural* sense certain abilities and overrules to see that such abilities are cultivated and then gives one or more *spiritual* gifts that complement the natural ability. For example, the Lord probably wouldn't give a teacher's gift to one who couldn't organize his thoughts, or an evangelist's gift to one who had difficulty meeting and speaking to people. Of course, we don't want to limit what God can do: we are simply basing the above examples on Matthew 25:15.

These verses in Romans show that having the gift is God's authorization to *use* it but not *abuse* it. We are "not to think of [ourselves] more highly than [we] ought to think, but to think soberly, *as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith*" (Rom.12:3). Much harm has been done by people wasting the time of the saints by speaking in the flesh to no spiritual profit, disrupting the theme of the meeting or hindering the progress of the ministry by constantly going back or off in some other direction. Preaching is not an ego trip, but the solemn and awesome responsibility of *speaking for God* as led by the *Holy Spirit*. Is He leading when we speak?

Finally, let's look at what things are called *gifts* here in Romans. Prophecy, ministry (service), teaching, exhortation, giving, leading, showing mercy! A New Testament prophet is not one who *fore*-tells the future, but one who *forth*-tells the mind of God at a particular moment for a particular audience. According to 1 Corinthians 14:31, *all* may prophesy in proper order, but that is different than one being a specially gifted prophet who always can bring just the right word at the right time. In fact, we are to *desire* to prophesy, for it

edifies (builds up, strengthens) the believers, it *exhorts* the saints to increased godliness, and it *comforts* the saints -- makes them feel comfortable in the assembly and in the truths of God (1 Cor.14:1,3). Prophecy *builds up, stirs up and binds up*. The three great principles that regulate the use of gifts in 1 Corinthians 14 are *love* (v.1), *edification* (vv.2-25) and *divine order* (vv.26-40). Are there prophets today? We are not told there are not, but many believe that Ephesians 2:20 indicates that prophets, like apostles, laid the spiritual foundation for the Church and then passed off the scene. For us, that is a moot question since, as we saw from 1 Corinthians 14, God will give the right prophetic message to potentially all believers, at different times and in different localities, to present to the gathered saints if we allow Him to do so! The assembly is the place of true edification: do we have the divinely-given meetings for that to happen?

Ministry has the thought of *service*, not necessarily preaching. There are hundreds of ways we can serve each other, and some are gifted in this ability. Their work may be very much behind the scenes, as we say, but nevertheless the work is of God. Such spiritual gift is just as important to the Lord as the more public gifts.

Teaching is the *logical* presentation of truth so we grow in the knowledge of the Lord and His things. The teacher keeps things in order and connects together the doctrines of Scripture so they weave one marvelous tapestry of truth, keeping in proper perspective the three great divisions of Scripture -- the Jew, the Gentile (Greek) and the Church of God (1 Cor.10:32). Not everyone who knows a little of Scripture is a God-gifted teacher, so we need to soberly consider our gift before God if we seek or take any type of public teaching place. While Scripture plainly indicates there should not be one-man ministry, there equally is not any-man ministry.

Exhortation is not bawling someone out as if the person doing the exhorting was a spiritual superior. Rather, a gifted exhorter has the ability to both gently correct and lead on (encourage) to greater heights of appreciation of our Lord and service for Him. *Giving*, although the responsibility of all, appears to be a gift to some whom the Lord enables to have and cheerfully use comparatively large sums for Him. God raises up spiritual leaders who *lead* (not boss, order or force) the Lord's people in the right direction. *Mercy* has the idea of meeting a need. Some are gifted in the ability to meet the many physical, emotional and spiritual needs of the saints when many others might intentionally or unintentionally turn a blind eye to the hurting saint.

1 Corinthians 12 -- Spiritual Manifestations

This chapter's theme is "spiritual gifts" (v.1) or "spiritual *manifestations*" (JND) -- that which is produced as a result of the gift. It is a spiritual ability which the Holy Spirit gives to whomsoever He wills. There are "diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit" (v.4). These *charisma* (gifts involving grace) are used as directed by the Holy Spirit. "There are differences of ministries (services) but the same Lord" (v.5). The *Lord* gives direction and controls the service of each believer's spiritual manifestation to fulfill His ultimate purpose. "And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all" (v.6). To meet the many needs, many "activities" are needed as directed by God. God is in charge of what we do: He exercises us. So the entire Trinity is involved in the spiritual operations of the members of the Church of God.

The "manifestation of the Spirit is given *to each one* (not to a few select clergymen) for the profit of all" (v.7). The Holy Spirit sovereignly operates in the life of every Christian so the power He gives can be used to the profit of those who are touched by the person's service. The Holy Spirit doesn't look upon the outward appearance or the eloquence of the natural man, but on the gift or manifestation He gives -- an ability that makes each of us a potential powerhouse in serving our Lord. I say potential because we may fail to use what He has given us; in fact, the clergy-laity system *discourages* the use by the laity of at least the more public gifts.

Some have a divinely-given "word of wisdom" (v.8). They have a unique ability to use knowledge aright. They, if walking close to the Lord, are uniquely balanced in what they say and do. Therefore, they can be a real spiritual help to those who may be confused or are apt to act rashly -- either too slowly or too rapidly. Others have "a word of knowledge through the same Spirit" (v.8). Such have a unique, divinely-given

knowledge of what Scripture says and are able to express it in a most helpful way as needed. Others have faith to step out and act for God when perhaps most are too timid, too afraid of the unknown.

Then in verses 9-10 we have a number of gifts or manifestations of the Spirit which were for the early Church to authenticate the Word of God and those who carried the message. We believe those gifts have run their course (13:8). “Tongues shall cease” (Greek *pauo* = come to an end). God does divinely heal when it is His will, but there are no longer people with the spiritual gift (charisma) of healing -- only satanic imitations of that gift by self-serving people. Note that even the Apostle Paul could no longer heal near the end of his life: he left a dear friend sick at Miletus (2 Tim.4:20). Neither are there people with the *gift* of miracles, although again, God can and does work miracles today. We have already discussed *prophecy*. With an incomplete Bible, satanic-lead people could mislead the believers. So, God gave some the gift of *discerning the spirits* -- if they were of God or of Satan. Others had the gift of *tongues*; others could translate tongues. In Scripture *tongues* are *always* a foreign language, nothing less, nothing more. If I had the gift of tongues, without any pre-study of the language I could go to China and preach “the wonderful works of God” (Acts 2:11) to the Chinese people in their language. Paul did it all the time in his travels (1 Cor.14:18). If I had the gift of interpretation, if a Russian believer came to the local assembly where I express fellowship and wanted to speak, I could interpret for him, although I have never learned Russian.

No believer is free to use his or her gift in just any manner. “But one and the same Spirit *works all these things*, distributing to each one individually *as He wills*” (v.12). Like a master pianist, the Holy Spirit manipulates the keys to bring a beautiful melody of spiritual growth and harmony. Further, He distributes His gifts to each of us as He wills. I greatly admire those evangelists who seem never at a loss for words when meeting total strangers. But that’s not me, although I’m pleased I can do the *work* of an evangelist (2 Tim.4:5). Instead of stewing over what we *don’t* have, we should rejoice and be content with how we have been divinely gifted and earnestly use what we have for God, under the Spirit’s direction. Remember, the *Holy Spirit never* leads anyone, for any reason, contrary to the Word of God! He may use us in spite of our disobedience, for “the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable” (Rom.11:29). But apparent success is not necessarily a proof of God’s approval. Think of Noah, *a preacher of righteousness* (2 Pet.2:5) for 120 years, who was responsible for saving none but his family. People would rate him a failure, but God’s estimate is much different (Heb.11:7).

“God has set the members, *each one of them*, in the body just as He pleased” (v.18). Just as many of the human body’s essential parts are hidden, likewise in the body of Christ, but all are necessary! “God composed the body” (v.24). We all have need of each other.

“God has appointed these in the Church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healing, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues” (v.28). We have seen that the Church was built on the foundation of the apostles and New Testament prophets (Eph.2:20; also Acts 13:1-2; 15:32) who brought the Word of God while the Bible was still incomplete. But now that the Bible is complete we constantly need gifted teachers to make the Word understandable and living in our hearts, minds and consciences. As we’ve said, the so-called “sign gifts” authenticated the ministry of the early apostles and disciples. We will cover the sign gifts more thoroughly in a future newsletter. *Helps!* Everyone needs help. So often there is no one to do the thousand and one practical things that need to be done. Yet here comes one who is always ready to pitch in and help in whatever is needed. God has gifted and led that one! *Administrations* are people who have a unique ability to administer, to make a complicated set of circumstances come together for the blessing of all.

Note that verses 29-30 show that these gifts are given only to some individuals. Only 12-14 people were apostles. Comparatively few believers had the gift of healing or of tongues. As we’ve seen, Paul had the gift of tongues because he traveled extensively where there were many strange languages and dialects, so he spoke in foreign languages more than the other Corinthian brethren (1 Cor.14:18), but in the local assembly, why would one want to speak in a foreign language to the normal language of that assembly, using the gift of tongues (14:19)?

Ephesians 4:7-17 -- Gifted Men and their Ministry

In Ephesians 4, while it is true that we have *gifts* such as in verse 7, the emphasis here is on spiritually gifted *men*! “To *each one of us* grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift” (v.7). Again, it is emphasized that we *all* have a gift which is measured out as the Lord sees fit. But when the Lord arose He gave gifts to men (v.8). He gave *some* men -- such as Peter and Paul -- to be *apostles*. *Some* were given the gift of a *prophet*. *Some* were given the gift of an *evangelist* -- a messenger of good news (Acts 21:8). Note the Holy Spirit doesn’t give the evangelist a supreme place. Yet if there are going to be people for the pastors to pastor and the teachers to teach, the evangelist must work to the saving of precious people. Next comes the *pastor* -- the shepherd. Let’s be clear that this is the spiritual *gift* certain individuals have, not an office in a local church. They *are* the gift! A person with a pastor’s gift cares for the saints, ensuring their spiritual comfort in the body of Christ. He heals hurts.

So the evangelist blasts the “living stones” out of the quarry; the pastor gently knocks off the rough edges, and the teacher cements the stone in a practical sense in the house of God. Note that in verse 11, the Greek links the pastor and teacher closely together. The gifts are separate, but likely reside in the same person in differing degrees. For example, a teacher without a pastor’s heart could be as cold as ice and therefore “turn off” the saints. Tychicus, rather, was “a beloved brother *and* faithful minister” (Eph.6:21). By these gifted men, the people are instructed as to the wonderful doctrines of Scripture and as to proper conduct pleasing to the Lord over His house.

The object of these gifts, these gifted men, given to the whole Church (for gift is universal), is to “equip the saints for *the work of the ministry*, for the edifying [building up] of the body of Christ (v.12) and to bring each believer to “the knowledge of the Son of God” (v.13), that we “should no longer be children tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine ... but ... [that we] may grow up in all things into Him who is the Head -- Christ” (vv.14-15). Each person supplies what is needed to knit the body together and to build up itself in love (vv.16-17). Just as we all can do “the *work of the evangelist*” (2 Tim.4:5), we all can do “the *work of the ministry*” so all may be stable and mature in the truth of God. This can’t happen in the clergy-laity system!

Put into the Ministry; Fulfill your Ministry

Paul stated in 1 Timothy 1:12 that he was *put* into the ministry. For Paul, his salvation and call to preach were *very* dramatic (Acts 26:9-24, etc.), and he “was not disobedient to the heavenly vision” (Acts 26:19; Rom.1:1). But the *principle* is that God calls and appoints (1 Tim.2:7; 2 Tim.1:11; Eph.3:7-8) certain ones whom He has equipped to preach His Word full time, and it would be disobedience to refuse that call. Archippus, a fellow-soldier of Paul (Philem.2) was told to “take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, *that you may fulfill it*” (Col.4:17). As seen in Romans 12 and Ephesians 4, having those gifts is God’s ordination to use them: no human ordination is necessary; in fact, *human ordination is human intrusion into the Holy Spirit’s work!* The gifted and sent one is for the *Church*, not for any local assembly; neither does the local assembly vote to hire or fire him (although all are expected to discern the correctness of the ministry given -- Acts 17:11; 1 Cor.14:29) and no one is free from the discipline of the assembly which might include the refusal to have the brother speak if he were teaching or practicing unscriptural things.

Timothy was in a sad state of discouragement and confusion at the time Paul wrote 2 Timothy to him; he had essentially stopped preaching (2 Tim.1:4,6-7): his gift had to be *rekindled* (JND). Some of the last words given by Paul was to tell Timothy to “fulfill your ministry” -- even if there are discouragements everywhere, even if the opposition is great, even if there is huge pressure to compromise the truth. Bob Costen has often said that those in the front lines will be shot at. That’s why we need the whole armor of God (Eph.6). That’s why God has given us the spirit of power, love and wise discretion, not of fear (2 Tim.1:7, JND). Note the features of service that came out from the perfect Servant of Jehovah in Mark’s gospel, against all kinds of opposition!

Lest anyone thinks that only those who serve full-time are told to fulfill one’s ministry, see 1 Peter 4:10-11. It says, “As *each one* has received a gift, *minister it* to one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of

God. If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles (divine utterances; God speaking through the speaker) of God. If anyone ministers (serves), let him do it as with *the ability which God supplies*, that in all things God may be glorified.”

The Responsibilities of Those who Serve

Timothy, a comparatively young preacher, was given many instructions from the apostle Paul, and Paul said for Timothy to “*instruct* the brethren in these things” (1 Tim.4:6) and to “command and *teach*” those things (1 Tim.4:11). Please also read the verses in between. Nehemiah 8:8 helps us understand the word *teach*. Certain of the leaders among the children of Israel “read *distinctly* from the book in the Law of God; and they *gave the sense* and helped them to *understand* the reading.” There is great pressure today to soften the message, to stay away from many doctrines where there might be those who would refuse or be upset over the preaching. So the trumpet often gives an indistinct sound. When God gives a plain word, we are not to make it sound like it is a *suggestion*. The things that Paul wrote were “the *commandments* of the Lord” (1 Cor.14:37).

Further, Timothy was to “be an *example* to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity. Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. Do not neglect the gift that is in you ... Meditate on [think about, consider] these things; give yourself *entirely* to them that your progress may be evident to all. Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them” (1 Tim.4:12-16). Being the Lord’s servant was a full-time job of personally walking a squeaky-clean life and faithfully preaching the Word. One of Paul’s last charges to Timothy was to “preach the Word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching” (2 Tim.4:2). Teachers should be teaching as much as possible; evangelists likewise should be evangelizing and pastors should be shepherding! Only the Word has power to change! But none of this suggests in the slightest that these bond-slaves should be exerting any authority, other than the Word as preached, over the saints. Such preachers are not a clergy. They are as much under the discipline of the assembly as any other brother. They are responsible to teach and act in a godly manner.

The “household of Stephanas ... devoted themselves to the ministry of the saints” (1 Cor.16:15). This was not necessarily by preaching, but in various services that helped the believers. Paul said they worked and labored with the apostles (v.16). The Lord was the perfect example of such service. He “did not come to be served, but to serve” (Mt.20:28). Too often today, the preacher *expects* to be served by the brothers and sisters.

As we began our study we said that those full time in the Lord’s work are not bosses but are “your bondservants for Jesus’ sake” (2 Cor.4:5; 1 Cor.3:5). Self exaltation has no place in Christian ministry. Epaphras was “a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf” (Col.1:7). He served the saints in bringing the Word to them. But first and foremost they were “*God’s* fellow-workers” (1 Cor.3:9), for He had gifted them and sent them.

“The servant *of the Lord* must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God will perhaps grant them repentance so that they may know the truth and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil” (2 Tim.2:24-26). Even to those in error, who insist upon their error, the servant of the Lord is to be gentle and not quarrel. He simply, but without compromise, brings the Word to bear on the problem. That is the erring person’s only hope of being maintained on right ground. With increasing error on every side, often promoted by clever and persuasive people, this thin line between insistence on the truth but not quarreling is very important to maintain in the Lord’s strength.

Responsibilities and Attitudes of Others Towards the Lord’s Servants

To the degree that the Lord’s servants follow Christ, they should be our role models (1 Cor.11:1-2; 1 Thes.1:6-7). We are told in Hebrews 13:7 to “remember your *leaders* who have spoken to you the Word of God, *and considering the issue of their [manner of life]*, imitate their faith” (JND). Note that the KJV and NKJV speak of remembering “those who have the *rule over you*.” We saw in the last issue that God raises up people in

each local assembly to lead by example, but never to “rule.” We should never blindly follow any “leader.” We need to be assured *by the Word* that their manner of life, their conduct, is according to God’s mind. If we are led astray, it’s our fault!

When we see someone leading us correctly, we submit to that leading (1 Cor.16:16-17). The same thought is expressed in Hebrews 13:17, “Obey your leaders and be submissive, for they watch over your souls as those who shall give account” (JND). The Greek word used here for “obey” is *peitho* which has the thought of *persuading* or *winning over* (Vine). It is not obeying the leaders because of who they are or because they hold some superior office, but because they have *persuaded us* that what they have told us is according to God’s Word. Note again that the KJV and NKJV wrongly use the words “rule over you” in this verse. Further, we should note those who walk as Paul walked, personally and collectively, *and walk with them* (Phil.3:16-17; 4:9). Today, there are many who don’t walk as Paul walked. Yet we are responsible to find those who do, and walk with them (2 Tim.2:22).

Acts 17:11 states, with apostolic approval, that the Bereans first of all *received* everything that Paul told them with an open mind. But *then* they searched the Scriptures to be assured that what they had been told was right. Let us do likewise! “Test all things; hold fast [securely] what is good” (1 Thes.5:21). When the prophets are speaking in the assembly, the others are to judge (Greek *diakrino* = discern). Everything we are told spiritually should be checked out. There are to be no passive believers, for there are no perfect human teachers.

1 Timothy 5:17 speaks primarily of elders, which we will take up in a future newsletter, the Lord willing, but the *principle* given in the verse is that there is a certain amount of honor to be given to those brothers who “*labor* in the Word and doctrine.” This does not mean to hold them up on a pedestal as if superior to others, but to recognize that “labor” means long hours of *hard work*, both in the study and organization, and in the presentation of the balanced Word even at times to partially hostile audiences (2 Tim.4:2-4).

There also is a financial responsibility. “Let him who is *taught* the Word share in all good things with him who *teaches*” (Gal.6:6). This verse is not to be taken separate from the responsibilities seen above: *the brother should be teaching and walking as Paul walked*. But when the teacher’s walk and what he teaches overall is right, then there is to be a payback for that “labor” in the Lord’s things. It might not be money, but could be giving of time, ability, energy, etc. to help meet the teacher’s needs. Is this important? See what the Lord says. “God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows that he will also reap” (Gal.6:7-8). This financial responsibility also would be true of the godly and called evangelist and shepherd (pastor), for “the laborer is worthy of his wages” (1 Tim.5:18).

Where Does the Above Leave the Denominational Minister?

There is no doubt that many of the “pastors” (etc.) of some denominational “churches” are God-called, gifted men who *should* be in the ministry. But they are working through two sinful systems -- clerisy and denominationalism. From what we have seen in the last few newsletters, their only option to be found fully pleasing to the Lord is to leave the wrong systems and simply go forth to preach the Word as the Holy Spirit leads, in fellowship with those who are gathered on God’s true ground. That’s the step Edward Dennett took as seen in His book, *The Step I Have Taken*, previously referenced as suggested reading. Those not divinely called and gifted, who have other motives for being “in the ministry,” would do better for all concerned to find other employment.

Will the God-called men be used by God if they stay in a denomination as clergymen? Yes! “The gifts and the calling of God are *irrevocable*” (Rom.11:29). God will and obviously does use His servants to preach His Word everywhere, regardless of the circumstances, but there is still the *personal reckoning with God* at the Judgment Seat of Christ (Rom.14:10; 1 Cor.3:11-15; 2 Cor.5:10) regarding rewards. *We take that Judgment Seat altogether too lightly!* See the previously-referenced book, *From Rapture to Reigning* (R.P. Daniel) for a study of the Judgment Seat and rewards determined there.

Summary

God gives all of us one or more spiritual gifts, in various degrees, to be used for Him as directed by the Holy Spirit. The Lord also raises up *gifted men* whom He gives *to the Church* (not to a local assembly; not to a denominational “church”) and equips them to preach the Word as the Holy Spirit leads. They are never seen as “pastors” of a local church. Having the gift is God’s ordination to use it: man’s sanction is not needed and in fact, is an intrusion on God’s ministry. Such men are servants of both God and men, not spiritual superiors or rulers. We are to imitate them to the degree they imitate Christ. We are responsible to God to share of our living with them as they labor for the Lord when their ministry and manner of life and walk are discerned to be of God.

RPD