

THE ASSEMBLY MESSENGER

Proclaiming the Timeless Truth of the Church to a New Generation of Believers

Volume 01-50

Dear Younger Reader

We begin where we left off with *Spiritual Manifestations*. Please go back and read the couple of preceding paragraphs of this section from the last issue. Read on ...

Some have a divinely-given “word of wisdom” (v.8) — the pastor’s gift. They have ability to use knowledge aright. Others have “a *word of knowledge* through the same Spirit” (v.8). Such have a divinely-given knowledge of what Scripture says and what is going on around them, and are able to express it in a most helpful way as needed — the teacher’s gift. Others have *faith* to step out and act for God when perhaps most are too timid, too afraid of the unknown, preferring the status-quo.

Then in verses 9-10 we have a number of the manifestations of the Spirit which were for the early Church to authenticate the Word of God and those who carried the message (Heb.2:3-4). We believe those gifts have run their course. 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* work miracles today. With an incomplete Bible, satanic-lead people could mislead those early 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, but “Tongues shall *cease*” (Greek *pauo* = come to an end)(1 Cor.13:8). 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. But such gifts are gone!

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, in almost any circumstance. 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!

“God has set the members, *each one of them*, in the body (the Church) just as He pleased” (1 Cor.12:18). 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 and of each other’s gift, whether our gift is big or small.

“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 (Heb.2:3-4). *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. Broken things get fixed. The elderly widow is helped. 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. Verses 29-30 show that these gifts are given only to *some* individuals. Only 12-14 people were apostles.

Ephesians 4:7-17 — Gifted People and their Ministry

In Ephesians 4, the emphasis is on spiritually gifted *people* as opposed to the *gift* the people have! “To *each one of us* grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift” (v.7). We *all* have a gift which is measured out as the Lord sees fit. But when the Lord arose He gave gifts to *people* (Gk: *anthropos* — men and women)(v.8), although, as we will note later, God places divine restrictions on when and where women can use their gifts. He gave *some* — such as Peter and Paul — to be *apostles*. Being a *public* gift, all were men. *Some* were given to be *prophets* (Acts 13:1). *Some*, like Philip (Acts 21:8), were given to be evangelists — messengers of good news. 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. “The evangelist has a power which he did not possess before to act upon the souls of others” (WK). So, if you have an evangelist’s gift, *then go and evangelize!* The *assembly* doesn’t evangelize: *individuals* do, although the assembly may supply the platform, encouragement and financial backing to help the evangelist do his work! 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, as the term is almost universally wrongly used today. Office is local; gift is universal. Here, the *person* is the gift! A person with a pastor’s gift has the power to wisely care for the saints, ensuring their spiritual comfort. He heals hurts without being overcome or ensnared by the problems of others.

So the evangelist blasts the “living stones” out of the quarry; the pastor gently knocks off the rough edges, and the teacher cements the stones 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. Wisdom uses knowledge wisely!

The object of these gifts, these gifted persons, 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.

QUESTION 33: PUT INTO THE MINISTRY; FULFILL YOUR MINISTRY; USE YOUR GIFT

In answering this question we will look at a few more verses than just 1 Peter 4:10-11 because *who* “ministers” is an important subject. Paul stated in 1 Timothy 1:12 that he was *put* into the ministry and he “was not disobedient to the heavenly vision” (Acts 26:19; Rom.1:1). 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 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 spiritual 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 local assembly does not vote to hire or fire God’s preachers (although the assembly is 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 or to listen to him, if he were teaching or practicing unscriptural things (Tit.1:10-11; 3:10-11).

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.”

It’s hard to *disprove* what isn’t found in Scripture. But we simply do not find the modern-day pastor of a church or a *reverend* — a clergyman — in Scripture. Timothy, as an example, certainly had a gift for ministry and was full time in the Lord’s work, but it was for *the entire Church* — at least all who would listen to him. There is no thought of him confining his ministry to one local assembly, nor is there any thought of only one person hired to be the minister of a local assembly. Each brother with ministering gifts takes part in the ministry of the assembly as the Holy Spirit directs. So we again tell you (and we expect you to search it out for yourself) that the clergy-laity system of today is *totally out of place in Christianity*. It’s a throw-back to Judaism with

its select priesthood with most others being the laity — the common people.

Timothy, a comparatively young preacher, was told to “*instruct* the brethren in these things” (1 Tim.4:6) and to “*command and teach*” those things (1 Tim.4:11). When God gives a plain word, we are not to make it sound like a *suggestion*. The things that Paul wrote were “the *commandments* of the Lord” (1 Cor.14:37). It was not simply the culture of that day! It applies equally for all times! 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 those with a pastor’s gift (not a church-position) should be shepherding! Only the Word has power to change lives!

When we hear or read ministry we also have a responsibility. 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)(1 Cor.14:29) and that principle certainly applies to what people *write* as well as say. *Everything* we are told spiritually should be checked out. There are to be no passive believers, for there are no perfect human teachers/preachers. Yet this is sadly neglected by most, and as a result, Christians will believe almost anything and will fellowship in clearly unscriptural positions!

So in 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 people* whom He gives to the Church and equips them to evangelize or preach the Word as the Holy Spirit leads. Having the gift is God’s ordination to use it in scriptural order: man’s sanction is not needed and in fact, is an intrusion on God’s ministry. Such gifted people are *servants* of both God and men, not spiritual superiors or

rulers. We are to imitate them to the degree they imitate Christ (1 Cor.11:1). God’s arrangement makes *every person* personally responsible to get involved as the Holy Spirit leads, *according to God’s order*.

QUESTION 31: GATHERING UNTO CHRIST OUTSIDE THE CAMP (Heb.13:13)

This verse is a reference to Exodus 32 and 33. Where Israel gathered together and set up their tents was the *camp of Israel*. But Israel sinned in that camp. Moses took his tent and set it up outside the camp of Israel, and all who sought the Lord came to Moses there (33:7-23). Likewise, there is great departure from the truth in professed Christianity. So we need to go outside of that profession *in spirit* (we can’t leave the earth) and gather unto Christ, *to His name alone*. Will we?

QUESTION 5: LEADERSHIP IN THE ASSEMBLY

Now that we’ve looked at basic principles of God’s Church, we need to look at some of its operations. One of your first questions was about Acts 14:23 and similar verses. These verses speak of *leadership* in the local assembly. Those whom God raises up to be leaders in each assembly are called *elders*, a term familiar to Jewish believers. See for example Exodus 3:16; 12:21; Acts 4:5. Jewish elders were aged men of wisdom in every city or in the camp of Israel, whom the children of Israel could rely on for wise counsel. *Their work commended them*; they seemingly were neither chosen by God nor by Israel. The Bible indicates other nations also had elders (Gen.50:7; Num.22:7). In government we call them *statesmen*.

So it is not surprising that God used the same term to describe those whom *He chooses to lead in His assemblies*. Elders are first mentioned in this relationship in Acts 11:30, about 15 years after the Church began. They were already functioning in the assembly at Jerusalem, as they also were a few years later as seen in Acts 15:2-23 at the Jerusalem council or conference. But we aren’t given details in those verses of how their office or position as elders came about.

But we are given details elsewhere in Acts. God sent Paul and Barnabas on a long missionary journey (Acts 13-14) and many assemblies were formed as they traveled. When an assembly was formed, Paul and Barnabas “appointed elders” and “commended them to the Lord” (Acts 14:23). A note in the usually reliable “New Scofield Reference Bible” says, “Literally, chose,

i.e., by raising of hands,” implying a vote. The Greek word *cheirotoneo* has the thought of “stretching forth the hand” (Vine) and was often used to describe voting. But *Paul and Barnabas* stretched forth *their* hands, not the brethren of the newly-formed assemblies! Paul and Barnabas didn’t *vote*, but *pointed out* those whom *God* had appointed to be the elders of each assembly. In Acts 20:17 we see Paul calling the elders of the assembly at Ephesus. See what he tells them in verse 28. “Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, *among which* the *Holy Spirit* has made you overseers, to *shepherd* the Church of God.” Note the gems of truth we learn in this one verse! Each assembly (such as Ephesus) is a flock that needs shepherding. From among that flock — not someone from the outside — *God the Holy Spirit* raises up and appoints overseers or elders. An *overseer* has his eyes open to see what are the needs of the assembly and then to care for the flock and lead them safely through all the evil round about. Note the *Holy Spirit*, not man, makes them overseers! One whom *God* chooses might not be the one I would choose, so I need to be sure I’m not opposing God’s choice! This verse gives no authority for an assembly to *ever* choose its elders! Finally, the term *elder* is always in the plural when the elders are functioning. There is never seen *an* elder of *an* assembly. This brings in divine checks and balances.

In Titus 1:5 Paul sent Titus to “set in order things lacking” in those assemblies and to “appoint” or “establish” elders. Here a different Greek word is used than in Acts 14:23. Under the direction of an apostle, Titus was to ensure that the elders the *Holy Spirit* had ordained were recognized and functioning as they ought. God then gave stiff requirements for an elder. An elder, even though appointed by the Holy Spirit, may disqualify himself by failing to satisfy these requirements. You can read these requirements in Titus 1:6-9 and 1 Timothy 3:1-7. And it clearly is a *masculine role*, for he is to be a *husband*. He is also to have *children*, for he is required to learn how to manage a family before overseeing an assembly (vv.4-5). He is not to be a *novice* — one new at Christianity or new in the truths of Scripture. He needs to have *proven himself* on the path for some time. Dear young brother: ponder carefully these requirements. God cannot use you in the future if you are not serious and careful in His things now! Leadership today may be lacking because there have not been enough dedicated young men coming up to fill the ranks. Unqualified, uncalled people may then seek to fill the gaps, and disaster results.

1 Peter 5:1-4 is the Apostle Peter’s exhortation to elders, himself being one (being married — Mt.8:14). Elders

Although it is in common practice today, there is no thought anywhere in Scripture of elders being chosen by the vote of the congregation or of a board of directors. Such voting is another modern-day perversion of God’s order.

were to *actively* “shepherd the flock of God which is among you.” A *shepherd* leads the flock to the best food; goes after strays; cares for the wounds and needs of the sheep; protects the sheep from harm; and loves the sheep. Read Ezekiel 34 for a scathing attack on the spiritual shepherds of Israel for their carelessness in this regard. Again, it’s those “among you” — those of the local assembly. *Gift* (such as the teacher) is universal, for *all* assemblies, but *office* (such as the elder) is always local. Elders are to serve as overseers in the local assembly where they normally express fellowship because they *want to* serve God and their brethren — not because they *have to* because it’s their appointed or hired job. And elders are not to attempt to take advantage of the situations they encounter for earthly gain of any kind! But *nothing* (correctly translated) in Scripture indicates that elders have any *authority* beyond the moral authority of the Word, so they aren’t to attempt to “lord” it over their brethren. Rather, they are to be *examples, leaders*, to show the assembly the right way to go. The Chief Shepherd, the Lord Jesus, will note and reward in the coming millennial day those elders who have served well.

Properly-functioning elders have an honorable position. “Let the elders who *take the lead* among the saints well be esteemed worthy of double honor, especially those laboring in word and teaching” (1 Tim.5:17, JND). The KJV/NKJV “who rule well” should be translated, “who take the lead.” See Vine’s Dictionary. So the brethren are to honor those whom God has raised up and given the awesome responsibility to care for the spiritual well-being of the assembly. But an elder may also be gifted and spend much of his time laboring “in word and teaching.” Especially in such cases the brethren were responsible to consider and share in his daily needs. “The laborer is worthy of his wages” (v.18). Then, having to deal with problems and problem-people, elders would likely be accused of many things by those who are out of order, acting in the flesh. So the brothers and sisters are directed to “not *receive* an accusation against an elder” — *refuse to even listen to it* — “except from two or three witnesses” (v.19). But if a charge is established to be true, then the sinning elder is to be “*rebuked before all*” (v.20), for sin in an elder is a most serious matter because of his public position of trust.

1 Thessalonians 5:12-13 is full of instruction as to elders. “We beg you, brethren, to *know* [recognize] those who labor among you, and *take the lead* among you in the Lord, and admonish you, and to regard them exceedingly in love *on account of their work*. Be at peace among yourselves.” Again, the KJV/NKJV “over you in the Lord” should be “take the lead among you.” The NASB/NIV also translate this wrong. We are to *know*, be aware of, perceive, recognize [Gk. *eidō*, #1492 Strongs] those who are elders. We today don’t have apostles or the delegates of apostles to *point out* our elders, but we have the scriptural qualifications and we can *recognize* those who both meet those qualifications and are doing the work. Elders *labor* — work hard — to lead the assembly rightly and admonish or warn. The assembly is to esteem them very highly for such work, and do so in love. Thus the assembly is to be at peace, something not possible if there are quarrels over leadership, or if the leading is wrongly rejected and factions develop. Again we have run out of space before finishing our subject, so we will pick it up, the Lord willing, next month.

Trust you like our new two-column format. A number of people have asked for it.

RPD