



“Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men” (Ephesians 4:8).

Office Gifts

Central Truth: The risen Christ places gifted leaders in His churches.

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Topic: Holy Spirit: Gifts of.

Jesus Christ is the head of His churches. He instituted the church during His personal ministry on earth. He designed it in such a way that each needs human leadership under His direction as its Head. To that end Jesus set four blessed ministries in the church. (We call them “offices” or “office gifts.”) They are apostle, prophet, evangelist, and pastor/teacher. God calls Christians whom He has gifted with the particular spiritual gift each office requires and sets them in their office to lead each church.

Jesus commands those who fill the offices in His churches to *“take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood”* (Acts 20:28). What a solemn charge!

This study is designed to clarify the offices the Lord has given to His churches. The desired result is that those who fill each office may have a better stewardship of their ministries, and that the church may expect those offices and officers to follow more perfectly in the work of God.

Keep thinking of your own church as you pursue the study. Jesus has given your church the leadership He wants her to have.

I. IDENTIFICATION OF THE OFFICE GIFTS

A. Office gifts are distinct from personal gifts. Examine the list of personal spiritual gifts in I Corinthians 12:8-11. It includes the word of wisdom, the word of knowledge, faith, working of miracles, prophecy,

discerning of spirits, different kinds of languages, and interpretation of languages. Examine the list of office gifts in Ephesians 4:11. It includes apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastors and teachers. The difference in the lists is readily evident. We are dealing with two different categories of spiritual gifts.

The office gifts are placed in the church as a body. The personal spiritual gifts are conferred upon Christians as individuals. God places a ministry (office) in the church then provides a spiritually gifted person to fill that office.

Ephesians 4:11 does not say God placed a man with a gift of prophecy in one church and a man with a gift of evangelism in another church. Neither does it say that God placed four men in the same church, one with a gift of apostleship, a second with the gift of prophecy, a third with a gift of evangelism, and a fourth with a gift of pastor/teacher. He placed those ministries (offices) in the churches and provided gifted men to fill them as He chose.

B. Office gifts are clearly identified as apostle, prophet, evangelist, and pastor/teacher.

An apostle is an ambassador, one sent as the personal representative of another. Jesus is *“the Apostle and High Priest of our profession”* (Hebrews 3:1) because He was sent by the Father. The Twelve were apostles because Jesus ordained them *“that they should be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach”* (Mark 3:14). We follow in the apostolic tradition since God *“hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation”* so that *“we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us”* (II Corinthians 5:19, 20). Apostles today are those sent forth as the ambassadors for God.

A prophet is one who speaks forth the message given him from God. He is a person who receives God's message and proclaims it. His ministry is not to foretell but to forthtell. The church was *“built upon the foundation of the, apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone”* (Ephesians 2:20). The prophet today is the preacher who speaks God's message.

An evangelist is the messenger of the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ. Every Christian is to be a witness for Jesus. But God has given a special capacity and ministry to some so that that is the main thrust of their service for God:

A pastor/teacher is one who shepherds a church by leading and teaching. It seems best to interpret that as one office as set out in Ephesians 4:11. The text says Jesus gave *“some, apostles; and some, prophets; and*

some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers.” If it had read, “some pastors and some teachers,” the offices would have been separated. But since it reads, “*some pastors and teachers,*” it seems to designate two phases of the same office. The pastor shepherds and teaches; he shepherds by teaching. These are the persons we recognize as being pastors of churches today.

C. Office gifts have a practical function. From the New Testament it is evident that the four offices have four distinct ministries in New Testament churches.

The apostles establish the church. The prophets correct the church. The evangelists enlarge the church. The pastors/teachers guide and care for the church. Are those offices needed today? Do churches need to be established, corrected, enlarged and shepherded? Of course they do; therefore, the ministries of the office gifts are needed. But take note that those office gifts do not refer to authority in an ecclesiastical hierarchy. Apostles do not control the prophets, the evangelists, or the pastors/teachers. They are equals who have distinct ministries in the work of God.

II. FUNCTION OF THE OFFICE GIFTS

There are two great goals which guide the ministry of the office gifts. Those goals remain the same in all generations, in all churches, and in all places.

A. The office gifts are to equip the saints. The King James Version translates the phrase “*for the perfecting of the saints*” (verse 12). To perfect does not mean to improve one's character or conduct. It means to equip. A man is working on his automobile and says to a friend standing nearby, “This is the wrong wrench.”

His friend hands him another and asks, “How is this one?”

The man replies, “Perfect.” What does he mean? He means it is what is needed to answer his need. It is suited for the purpose he has.

When a saint is “perfected,” he is equipped to do the work God has assigned him. Various translators suggest the wording, “to fully equip for work,” “to get His people ready to serve,” “to fit the saints to the work of serving.” That is the idea. The office gifts in your church are designed to equip you that you might serve God.

B. The office gifts are to enable service. Some might understand Ephesians 4:11 to say that the office gifts are to do three things: (1) to perfect the saints, (2) to do the work of the ministry, and (3) to edify the body of Christ. Not so! There is one goal with two results. The goal is to equip the saints. The result is that the saints will work in serving (ministry),

with the consequence being that the body of Christ will be built up. Pastors are to equip the saints so they can serve God. That is their God assigned ministry.

III. GOALS OF THE OFFICE GIFTS

A. Christian unity grows from the function of the office gifts: *“till we all come in the unity of the faith”* (verse 13). The goal for every church is that she follows the example of the first church. *“They continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and prayers”* (Acts 2:42). The church is a body. Jesus desires that each member function in relation to other members in perfect harmony so that the war of the body can be done. As the leaders lead the church, training and teaching so as to equip each member to serve, unity is promoted. As the members submit to their God-given leaders, receiving training and teaching in how to serve and giving themselves increasingly to service, unity is promoted. Thus the will of God is done in that church.

B. Increasing knowledge of Jesus follows from the function of the office gifts: *“till we all come in . . . the knowledge of the Son of God”* (verse 13). God expects us to *“grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ”* (II Peter 3:18). It is not enough to know facts concerning Him. We must know Him by personal experience. Thank God for Christians whose determined purpose is to know Jesus more personally and intimately. The office gifts of the church will be a great help to them.

C. Spiritual maturity develops from the function of the office gifts: *“that we henceforth be no more children”* (verse 14). God calls each of His children to leave the first principles of the faith (repentance, faith, baptism) and move on to maturity (Hebrews 6:1). As a child leaves reciting the alphabet and goes on to learn to read, so the Christian moves from the foundations of faith to greater things in Christ. He gives diligence to add to his faith the qualities of virtue, knowledge, temperance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and charity. If those things are in you in abundance, they guarantee that you will be fruitful in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ (II Peter 1:5-8). So *“as newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby”* (I Peter 2:2).

D. Sound doctrine results from the function of the office gifts: *“no more . . . tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine”* (verse 14). Doctrine is to our faith what bones are to our bodies. It gives form and strength. All our belief and behavior must be according to the

doctrines of our faith (Philippians 1:27). Even if an angel from heaven tries to teach some other doctrine, it must be rejected (Galatians 1:8). Those who depart from the doctrines of Christ must be avoided (Romans 16:17). Christians should know the doctrines so as to be able to counsel and convince those who are in error (Titus 1:9). That is the outcome of the function of office gifts as Jesus designed them in the church.

E. Growth of the body is the goal of the function of the office gifts (verse 16). That verse is difficult to follow unless one observes very carefully the punctuation. It develops several significant truths.

(1) The body is dependent on Jesus. (2) The whole body receives its power to grow from Him. (3) The body is joined and knitted together so that every member is vitally involved in the growth (or lack of growth) of the body. (4) The body grows in proportion to the vigor of each individual member. (5) The body is built up in the spirit of love as each member contributes its assigned function.

“Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular” (I Corinthians 12:27). God has placed the office gifts (ministries) in the church to equip you to serve. As you are equipped and involved in service, the body will grow. If you are not equipped and involved, the body will languish. What a challenge!

Respect the office and the office holder in your church. It is God who works through your leaders, through you, and through your fellow members in the church. Receive their ministry to you. Contribute your ministry to them. And watch your church grow for the glory of God.

Questions

1. What do we mean by saying that Christ is the head of the church?
2. In what sense is the pastor the human head of the church?
3. How do office gifts differ from personal spiritual gifts?
4. Who is an apostle today? Who is a prophet?
5. Who is an evangelist today? Who is a pastor/teacher?
6. Why is the work of pastor and teacher joined in the same office?
7. Why are office gifts to equip the saints to serve?
8. How do the office gifts contribute to the unity and maturity of the church?
9. What does Ephesians 4:16 mean to you?
10. How can you put this study into practice in your life?