

To Be Filled With The Holy Spirit

(Part 11)

“⁸ Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. ⁹ (Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? ¹⁰ He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.) ¹¹ And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers.” (Ephesians 4:11)

While the Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12 passages offers stability and strength to the body of Christ, this passage has more to do with leadership in the body of Christ. Paul speaks here of Christ’s ascending and descending and of His “giving gifts to men” (Ephesians 4:8-11). Verse 11 says that it is Christ who gives “some to be apostles . . . prophets . . . evangelists . . . pastors . . . and teachers”—the fivefold gifts of ministry within the church. He does so *“to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until . . . all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4: 13)*. These gifts serve primarily the ministry and spiritual nature of the church, preparing God’s people to do works of service, to mature and grow in Christ. When that occurs, the body will not be swept about by every wind of doctrine. These fivefold ministry gifts for leadership are thus vitally important.

APOSTLES: There seems to be some confusion and misunderstanding relative to this first gift of leadership in the church world today. Both in Scripture and in the history of the church that follows, apostles are referred to on two levels. On one level, for example, are those one might reference with a capital “A.” These are those individuals who were part of the Twelve or part of the inner circle of Christ, along with Paul who describes himself as an apostle born out of due season. The capital-A apostles are those of that small group who heard Jesus, saw Jesus, and witnessed or wrote Scripture of Him from personal experience. The early church suggested that if a written document that claimed to be Scripture was going to be truly received into the canon of the New Testament, then it would need to have been written by an apostle with a capital A or someone who was a companion of an apostle, such as John Mark. There also seems to be what one might call a group of people in the New Testament who were apostles in the sense of a lower case “a.” These were not those who wrote Scripture, nor those who were part of Christ’s inner circle—it may even be that they do not fit precisely into the hallowed grouping of those of the capital A— but, indeed, they were truly

apostles in terms of their ministry. For example, Paul writes, *“Salute Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen, and my fellow prisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me” (Romans 16:7)*. Not only does Paul call these two—a man and a woman, most likely a man wife team—apostles, but he points out that they are well known among the apostles. In addition, Paul mentions that Jesus was seen raised from the dead by the Twelve and then later on by many of the apostles, *“⁵ And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: ⁶ After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. ⁷ After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles. ⁸ And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time. ⁹ For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.” (1 Corinthians 15:5-9)*. He referred not only to the Twelve in particular, but also to other groups. The difficulty with this, however, is that there is not a clear definition or description in the New Testament as to what these people did. One knows about Paul. One knows some of the others. But when one tries to piece together some of the evidence, it is not nearly so neatly defined or simple as some people like to suggest. Some people today, for example, suggest that revival will return to the church when the church replaces the fivefold ministry of leadership in the body of Christ—in other words, when the church gives apostles and prophets their rightful recognition. The matter is not that simple, because it is not easy to define precisely what an apostle is. Is an apostle like a bishop as he came to be defined in the second century, someone in supervision over a certain geographical region? Or is an apostle simply a missionary, someone carrying the gospel to new areas? It is not easy to say. As a preliminary definition, one can define the *apostle* as “one with the gift or the ability to begin new works for God through ministry of the Word.” Paul mentions the church, the saints, as *being “built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone” (Ephesians 2:20)*. Quite frequently, one finds these two terms teamed together. Surely this is because the ministry of the Word and the miraculous gift of discernment or speaking forth God’s Word team together very nicely in order to plant or create new churches. Most references to apostles seem to be made within this missionary, pioneering spirit, connected with church planting for the kingdom of God. If, however, one begins to place on apostles this immense authority that appears to have accompanied those within the formerly mentioned capital-A category, then one becomes concerned as to how this might fit in with 21st-century Christianity. Surely, though, the spiritual gift for planting new churches and opening up new areas of ministry through the gospel is still at work in today’s world.

PROPHETS: One might best describe this gift as the ability to proclaim God’s Word for a particular person or people. The office of prophet seems to describe a rather permanent position, similar to that of Agabus (Acts 21:10). There seems to be very few individuals functioning in this capacity and in the spirit of Agabus today—people able to speak for individuals or for a group of people at large on behalf of God—but the office of prophet is a genuine gift and it should be more prominent and recognized within the body of Christ. Properly, this gift must be exercised with great caution and care. Some have been misled on a whim solely because a professed prophet gave them a far-out idea which was supposed to have come from God. The body of Christ needs to guard its sheep with love and be more careful than that. On the other hand, the church need not assume that God is silent toward His people today. There surely must be some Word that God is wanting to share in a manner similar to the Old Testament prophets. Caution and optimism must be balanced, and seasoned with much prayer. This places on leadership an overwhelming responsibility to determine when and how to hear and respond to the voice of God in the midst of His church.

EVANGELISTS: This gift is best defined as “the ability to present Jesus Christ in such a way that hearers are pressed to respond in faith to the gospel.” This definition or approach does not require one to be a full-time preacher of revivals, necessarily, but focuses on those with the ability to share God’s Word forcefully and powerfully either to small or large groups of people. God’s Holy Spirit gifts and blesses certain individuals in this manner. It would seem equally true that there are people in local congregations who, though not having a license or clergy credentials as an evangelist, yet have a gift for evangelism. Some such individuals respond with an incredible desire just to go downtown and spend time witnessing to people in the city square. They reach out to people, because of a heart warmed by the Holy Spirit and overwhelmed with concern for the lost. Such people are key to spearheading evangelistic efforts into other neighborhoods and areas of town.

PASTORS: This gift is the ability to shepherd or nurture others in truth and to care for the spiritual needs of others. Gifted pastors do this through teaching, preaching, and modeling exemplary Christian behavior. Those so gifted have patience, a tender and kind touch when it comes to relationships with others, and they inspire confidence within the body of Christ.

TEACHERS: This gift is the ability to proclaim the truth of the Word in a manner that builds up the body of Christ through clarity of presentation.

It appears that these five gifts are offered to the church as functions. These seem to be gifts carved into the body of Christ for the benefit of all. To put it

another way, God enables some to be these five gifts. One must conclude from this the importance of all these leadership gifts together. One must not focus on any one to the exclusion of the other, and it is quite obvious in many cases that a single individual may be gifted both to teach and to preach, or to pastor and to evangelize. The congregation focused entirely on evangelism cannot long maintain health without some follow-up efforts to teach. These gifts are meant to work together, in cooperation with one another, because the body of Christ needs this plurality of leadership in a community. In certain situations, it is probably true that the church has done a disservice to pastors by insisting they become everything for everyone. Pastors will burn out attempting this impossible task. They must have personal time and time with their families. The church needs others, properly gifted, to carry some of the load. Developing a proper theology of the church can be helpful with this task. While one may not find apostles, prophets, evangelists, other pastors, and teachers popping up in every small congregation, it still remains true that the people of God—the body of Christ—are to do works of service within the fellowship. It is the pastor’s primary responsibility—the administrative team or the leadership team, however that might be composed— to prepare or equip the saints for the work of ministry. It is an amazing thing when church leadership senses the call of God upon a young life and then proceeds to train and mentor that individual into service. On occasion, this may be for an actual preaching ministry, or for teaching, or for any of the other ministry gifts. This approach to ministry can literally transform one’s opinion of the church and what church is all about. Everyone in the body of Christ, according to Scripture, is a minister in that sense, but not everyone can equip and train and mentor others to do ministry.

My Dear and Beloved: The important point here is one’s ability to see and understand that the plurality of this leadership ministry can move into and through the congregation, allowing them to be equipped by the Holy Spirit for service in the kingdom of God. That is how individuals and the body of Christ grow. Each individual member must exercise those spiritual gifts that have been given so the church can be what it really should be in the world today.

My prayer: *Father God we come before you in the name of Jesus who died on the cross for our sins to give us eternal life. Lord thank you for all these gifts that you gave to your church to equip the saints for service. Lord help us and give us the grace, the love and wisdom to use all these gifts for your glory and for your church to grow. This all we ask and pray in Jesus name, Amen.*