

The Gifts of the Son

The office gifts

Summary: Jesus prayed for the unity of his friends —that is what it is to be the Church. Our unity and fellowship leads to faith and maturity. This does not happen by accident; therefore, Christ provided all we need to this end and leaders, of all kinds, are a gift. Let us grow into our gifts and calling.

Scripture: Ephesians 4:1-16; Matthew 20:20-28

Date: Sunday, 15 October 2023 (Narellan Cong)

You may have noticed in the bulletin this week a request for recommendations for new Elders and Deacons. Men and women stepping up to take on these very important roles is vital as we continue to transition toward governing ourselves for the future God is calling us to together.



When this church was planted in Narellan, it governed itself with a different strategy. Once the weaknesses in that strategy became apparent, our *Rules & Procedures* were drafted; however, we are still not operating completely according to its directives. The Deacons, for instance, are learning new ways of operating during this transition —just this week, we had a riveting conversation over our agenda. You should have been there (you could have taken my place).

All jokes aside, continue praying for your Elders and Deacons at this time, and consider volunteering for one of these important roles if you sense a calling.

“Why not just get back to a biblical model for church governance?” you may be wondering. That would be the answer if such a model were described in the Bible.

According to Pastor Jack Hayford,

The concept of church organization and government in the New Testament was flexible, geared to meet changing needs. In the earliest days, the apostles directed the work of the church. Then seven men were chosen to assist the needs (Acts 6). Later, prophets, evangelists, elders, bishops, and deacons were chosen.

No single or conclusive pattern of government can be mandated by reading the New Testament. Thus, various forms of church government are employed by different groups today, to provide order and structure for the work of their churches. Most expressions of church government can be classified in the six following forms:

Congregational [I list this first because it's the best]. This form of organization focuses on a local congregation's retaining entire freedom to determine what it considers the will of Christ as it governs its own affairs.

Presbyterian. This form of church government also focuses on Christ as Head of the church, and that He will guide His church through elders (Greek, presbuteros) who seek to serve the congregation's interests in leading the church.

Episcopalian. This system of church government views the bishop as the principal officer. Decisions are made at levels higher than the local congregation, but common sense often dictates that the will of God and the opinions of members should be given prayerful consideration.

Roman Catholic. Roman Catholic clergy —priests, bishops, etc.— forms a hierarchy that governs the church. The Pope, as the “bishop” of Rome, is the highest authority, and the authority of the papal office is believed to have originated with Peter as the first pope.

National Church Government. This form of church government (found mostly in Europe) recognizes the state’s authority as decisive over church matters.

Quakers. The Quakers refuse any type of church official or organization, depending on the inner light which any believer has the right and power to receive directly from God. Decisions are arrived at by mutual agreement among the believers.¹

As the Church grew from a house church to many house churches, from Jerusalem to other cities in other countries, from being merely a Jewish sect to become legally recognised by the state and the dominant religious movement around the world to this day, the changing context has required governance and leadership that leads the Church ever forward, in the power of the Holy Spirit, to fulfil the eternal purpose of God.

The Son’s Purpose

In this sermon series, we have explored the nature of the spiritual gifts described in the New Testament and the responsibility that comes with them. We then discovered each person of the Trinity gives gifts: the Father gives *creational gifts*, the Holy Spirit gives *manifestation gifts*, and the Son gives *office gifts*.

Ultimately, all of these gifts are given to the friends of Jesus who willingly bear our Creator’s image to his glory and honour and praise, for the common good of the Church and even all humankind. *The gift is the Holy Spirit* who helps each of us to become fully human and to serve the eternal Purpose of God in our own unique way.

While, clearly, there is a variety of gifts, these categories of creational, manifestation and office distinguish them. Let us explore today the purpose of the gifts of the Son, which are the *office gifts*.

which is his body, the fullness of the one who fills all things in every way.
(Ephesians 1:23)²

Our scripture focus comes from *The Letter to the Ephesians*, a book of the Bible which deals with the nature of the Church. In it, Paul the apostle described the Church as the universal body of Christ (Eph. 1:23) rather than local congregations being the Body —this is as important a distinction as understanding the Great Commission is laid on the whole Church rather than just individuals (Mt 28:18-20). *The body of Christ is The Church*, not this church!

The apostle also described the eternal Purpose of God and the role of the Church in that purpose —in other words, the Great Commission. When the Kingdom is finally realised, our Creator will fill all things in every way, for that is how it should be, and will be far better than anything humankind can imagine or achieve on its own.³

And he himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists,
some pastors and teachers (Ephesians 4:11)

From this perspective, the apostle argued the gifts listed in our scripture focus are timeless gifts to the Church universal. Those gifts are to find their outworking in and through local congregations, for the sake of the whole Church. This is how we each participate in the eternal Purpose of God.

Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas,
Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen, a close friend of
Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. (Acts 13:1)

For example, Paul, an apostle, was himself based in the local church at Antioch (Ac 13:1)—a local church blessed with these office gifts—and Paul returned there in between his missionary journeys. In fact, the call for him to be apostle and sent out on his missionary journeys was confirmed through the worship life of that congregation.⁴ Without the local church at Antioch, we would not have Paul the apostle and would be poorer for it. He was truly a gift to the Church!

Now grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. For it says: When he ascended on high, he took the captives captive; he gave gifts to people. (Ephesians 4:7–8)

In his letter, the apostle explained the office gifts are “given according to the measure of Christ's gift” (Eph 4:7). That they are given at all is a reflection of God's grace, not of any merit of the ones to whom they are given. The gifts are given because the King above all kings, Christ Jesus, came into his kingdom through his death on the cross and subsequent ascension to the right hand of the Father. As all kings have done historically, they shower their benevolence on their subjects. King Jesus is no different, but his gifts are so much better!

And he himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists,
some pastors and teachers (Ephesians 4:11)

Continuing with the language of this image, these office gifts are, therefore, officers of the king's court, ensuring his will is communicated to the people, responded to and obeyed.

to equip the saints for the work of ministry, to build up the body of Christ
(Ephesians 4:12)

This obedience is not for the purpose of expressing his authority or to exact justice, but to equip the work of ministry that builds up the body of Christ, which is the Church, the worldwide and eternal fellowship of all the saints. These gifts are expressed primarily in the local gathering of saints for fellowship, worship and discipleship.

until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of God's Son,
growing into maturity with a stature measured by Christ's fullness.
(Ephesians 4:13)

The Church, then, with its local expressions of churches, is the place where people come to place their faith in Jesus and mature in living a Christian lifestyle. Our progress is measured by how like Christ we are, measuring up to the example of his faith and lifestyle—and *his faith is our standard, as much as is his lifestyle!*

This transformation into the fullness of Christ is not accidental nor does it occur by osmosis. The friends of Jesus gather to be encouraged and equipped in their knowledge, faith and lifestyle with intention, strategically, and the officers of local churches are themselves called and equipped to ensure this discipleship occurs for all.

From him the whole body, fitted and knit together by every supporting ligament, promotes the growth of the body for building itself up in love by the proper working of each individual part. (Ephesians 4:16)

When properly equipped saints become part of a local church and effectively do the work of ministry, the body of Christ, the Church, is built up, expanded in maturity and numbers precisely because each member is realising his or her fullest potential, according to the will of our Creator.

Pastor Jack Hayword has noted,

“The ‘work of ministry’ is the enterprise of each member of the body of Christ and not the exclusive charge of select leaders The task of the gifted leader is to cultivate the individual and corporate ministries of those he or she leads ... A progress in maturity (v. 13), stability (v. 14), and integrity (v. 15), taking place in every individual member’s experience, results in the whole body’s growth (numerical expansion) and edifying (internal strengthening).”⁵

The Office Gifts

The example and model for each of the gifts is Christ Jesus Himself. He’s the “Apostle ... of our confession” (Heb 3:1), “a Prophet” like Moses (Ac 3:22), an evangelist “anointed ... to preach good news” (Lk 4:18-19), “the Shepherd ... of your souls” (1 Pet 2:25) and the “Teacher ... speaking rightly” (Jn 13:13). As the flawless example, Christ intends his ministry to be carried on in the Church through the direction of those with the office gifts. They are, therefore, necessary to the kingdom of God. Let us investigate these gifts, that we might understand them and appreciate the tasks to which they’re called to fulfil.

“Some To Be Apostles”

And he himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers (Ephesians 4:11)

The first office gift described in our scripture focus is that of apostle. An apostle is an authorised agent of Christ Jesus, one commissioned for a particular task or role, one who is sent forth with a special message. In the New Testament the word is used to identify twelve disciples chosen as a special team, as well as other prominent leaders outside the Twelve or the first successful missionary to a region.

There are three features of the use of the term. An apostle is: 1) one who has had a visible encounter with the resurrected Christ; 2) one who plants churches; and, 3) one who functions in the ministry with signs, wonders and miracles. One or all of these features must be present to be called an apostle.

It seems to me it is the planting of churches and being a successful missionary in a region that distinguishes apostles today. They are like the entrepreneurs of the Church, pushing us into geographical areas that are unreached or ministries we would not have otherwise considered. Apostles are a much needed gift in the Church.

“Some Prophets”

The next office gift indicated is that of prophet. This is a unique gift in that is also counted among the creational and manifestation gifts. There must be a distinction alongside the commonalities between the different expressions of this gift.

As we have already discovered, a prophet is primarily a forth-teller, one who speaks a divine message that can at times include foretelling future events. The prophet is an interpreter of the divine will in a specific context. Prophets are therefore specially endowed with insight into the counsels of the Lord and, therefore, serves as a spokesperson.

Prophecy is a very diffuse biblical gift. Prophets in the New Testament are specially graced speakers for the Spirit, making known God’s will for given situations from an ongoing church leadership perspective. Though authoritative, they are not above criticism nor above challenge, as seen in the incident between Paul and a prophet named Agabus, who predicted the apostle’s arrest in Jerusalem (Ac 21:10–14). While the prophecy was true, the prophet himself interpreted this as a reason to dissuade the apostle; yet, Paul took this warning to heart and became even more determined to complete his intended mission.

All of us can read the Bible and understand its instructions and wisdom. Some of us get education and training to dive deeper and share more ‘advanced’ wisdom. Yet both levels of insight require the Holy Spirit open our hearts and minds to the word meant to encourage, equip and edify us.

Yet in some situations even more insight and wisdom is required. This word can only come from the Holy Spirit to one especially disciplined to receive such messages. That is the gift and office of the prophet.

“Some Evangelists”

This brings us to the office of evangelist, one called and equipped to announce good news, especially the Gospel, to declare good tidings. The word “evangelist” occurs three times in the New Testament.⁶ Many evangelists in the early Church were itinerate, travelling around from church to church, city to city, etc.

The message of the evangelist is naturally to unbelievers, unlike that of the prophet which is largely to the Church. Yet, the evangelist’s function is also “for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry”. They are to keep the preaching of Christ constantly before the Church, while training and encouraging believers to spread the good news about him outside the Church.

“Some Pastors”

A pastor is a herdsman, shepherd; one who tends, leads, guides, cherishes, feeds, and protects a flock. The New Testament uses the word for a church leader to whose care and leadership others will commit themselves (Eph. 4:11). The term is applied metaphorically to Christ.⁷

In the NT, pastor-shepherd defines the nature of the task involved, while the word translated is also translated as “bishop”, which defines the responsibility of taking charge or giving oversight, and with “elder”, which defines the character of the person as a mature, experienced example of Christian faith and lifestyle.

The duties of a pastor are many. For example, Paul instructed his young disciple Timothy: “Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; correct, rebuke, and encourage with great patience and teaching” (2 Tim 4:2).

“And Teachers”

Finally, there is the office of teacher, which is closely aligned with the office of pastor. Those who pastor should pay attention to developing sound teaching abilities; those with the gift of teaching should keep themselves within a pastoral environment. But not all pastors are good teachers and *vice versa*.

Teachers are those generally able to communicate well and display a profound depth of biblical wisdom and knowledge; they are concerned with and passionate about sound doctrine. This, then, is an essential office in and gift to the Church.

The five office gifts are given by God-the-Son to build up the Church and lead us all from faithlessness into maturity of faith and lifestyle, unity and fellowship. Whatever we call them, whether they are paid positions or not, these office gifts are essential functions for the Church to be the Church in the world. Without their leadership and guidance, the Church would be rudderless and would too quickly sink, as has happened throughout the Church's history when its leaders became corrupt or negligent.

Let us do better.

Grow Into a Leader

Let me recap: The creational gifts of the Father are the inherent skills and qualities built into us by our Creator. They are tangled and twisted by our sin, but living in the power of the Holy Spirit releases them and us into the fullness of our humanity, as we participate in God's eternal purpose.

The manifestation gifts are more extraordinary expressions of the power of the Holy Spirit when the situation requires extreme intervention. The Spirit empowers people to fulfil the will of God in and for the moment.

As should be obvious from our exploration, the office gifts of the Son are quite different. They are not titles and positions in the Church as much as they are people who have developed their creational and manifestation gifts to a greater degree that they are equipped to fulfil important functions in the Church. For example, anyone can teach another person a basic skill they have acquired —just yesterday I learned how to fold a fitted sheet from an Instagram reel; she wasn't a good teacher, I suspect, since she insisted I make a face when making the folds ☺

Some people are just very good at teaching —I come from a long line of teachers and my great grandfather was a Baptist minister in Wales, so it must run in the genes and my son has caught the bug ☺ This would then be a creational gift.

A particularly difficult situation may arise for which our church is not equipped. Someone among us may have the skill without the creational gift nor desire to teach. Nevertheless, they can be filled with the Holy Spirit such that they teach what needs to be taught, even though they would not normally be so bold. This is a manifestation gift.

Then someone with the creational gift feels so passionate about teaching the Bible that she puts in the time to go to Bible college and study. She then is called upon to expound on sound doctrine when her church is struggling to find its way forward. The church then appoints her as a teaching pastor, thus assuming the office of teacher.

The office gifts are one way the Church is involved in the work of the Holy Spirit. It discerns who among its ranks has the character and calling, thus revealing a creational and/or manifestation gift, then encourages and equips, so developing that person's competency to fulfil a role and function in its life and governance.

Which is why we are having two leadership retreats every year, from now on. As a church, we want to discern with you your creational gifts and put them to use in a way that is a natural fit to your lifestyle and the vision/mission of our church. There will come times when we need the Holy Spirit to especially empower people in situations that may arise.

Together, we all work alongside each other and recognise in each other our calling as we volunteer as helpers. The Elders then evaluate our character and encourage us to develop our gifts for greater competency, so that some among us may rise to become associates on a Ministry Team and even leaders in our various ministries.

The point is if you are a friend of Jesus, then you have spiritual resources and gifts that are meant to be used to build up the Church, leading others to faith and contributing to the maturing your brothers and sisters. These are resources and gifts not meant to be squandered. We must all commit to growing and maturing.

What gifts have you been given by the Holy Spirit? Where would God have you to grow? Take these matters before him in prayer and ask Him to show you ways to implement and develop your gifts. If this includes fulfilling an important function in the Church, do so not out of your own ambition but from the compulsion of the Holy Spirit.

Conclusion

Jesus prayed for the unity of his friends—that is what it is to be the Church. Our unity and fellowship leads to faith and maturity. This does not happen by accident; therefore, Christ provided all we need to this end and leaders, of all kinds, are a gift. Let us grow into our gifts and calling.

Endnotes

- 1 Jack W. Hayford, *Hayford's Bible Handbook* (Nashville, TN, USA: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1995).
- 2 Unless otherwise noted, all scripture quotations are taken from *The Christian Standard Bible* (Nashville, TN, USA: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017).
- 3 For this analysis I relied on Jack W. Hayford and Gary Matsdorf, "People of the Spirit: Gifts, Fruit and Fullness of the Holy Spirit", *Spirit-Filled Life Kingdom Dynamics Study Guides* (Nashville, TN, USA: Thomas Nelson, 1993).
- 4 Ac 13:2-3; cf. Ac 9:1-16; 22:17-30. Paul's progress is not dissimilar to my own ordination. A Christian feel called by God to this, that or the other, but than call must be confirmed by elders in his or her church.
- 5 Spirit-Filled Life Bible (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1991), pg 1793.
- 6 Ac. 21:8; Eph. 4:11; 2 Tim. 4:5.
- 7 Jn. 10:11, 14, 16; Heb. 13:20; 1 Pet. 2:25.