

Spiritual Gifts at Work in the Healthy Church

Spiritual Gifts are the way in which the Lord equips his saints to carry out his work in the Church. When we experience salvation through rebirth, the Holy Spirit endows gifts for the benefit of the body of Christ. All Christians are called to serve the body, and the gifts enable that service. This study will help us understand how the scriptural gifts, their use, and how we are put in the body by the Holy Spirit to contribute to a healthy Church.

We will also study how the gifts compliment the responsibility of Church members, offices, and functions of the body of Christ.

Read 1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12: 3-8, Ephesians 4:11, 1 Peter 4:7-11

What is the Church (in review from last lesson)

A brief recap of the Church which was covered last week. Also to orient for this week to set the tone for how the spiritual gifts enables the fulfillment of offices and responsibilities that make up the body of Christ.

The Church is both universal (invisible) and local (visible).

One of the considerations of the reformers in the 16th century was the organization of the local body of believers. The reformers (men like Martin Luther, John Calvin, Ulrich Zwingli, John Smyth) wrestled with what is the scriptural organization of Church. They rejected the papal structure of the Roman Catholic Church and the patriarchal structure of the Eastern Church.

What emerged were three major views.

- Episcopal. A hierarchal structure of bishops over groups (dioceses) with individual Churches. The pastor is appointed by the diocese but not necessarily a member of the Church therefore not holding the responsibility of membership.
- A Presbyterian. A less formal but still hierarchal structure. Groups of local churches are governed by a higher assembly of elders known as the presbytery or classis. The local pastor is appointed by the presbytery but not a member of the local Church.
- Congregational. Each congregation is autonomous, appoints its own offices, functions, determines its conduct, order of service etc. The congregation determines the processes and procedures for matters such as calling pastors, elders, deacons and members. Pastor/Elders are members of the congregation and therefore enjoy the benefits and responsibilities of members.

Congregationalism is one of the major Baptist distinctives. Baptist Churches may form cooperations and associations for the furtherance of the gospel and other mutually beneficial arrangements. The local body is self-governing.

Why does all that matter? Our view of Church polity forms how we endeavor to properly and rightly carry out the function of the Church and the great commission.

To be consistent, throughout the lesson, when speaking of the local church or congregation we will use the Historic Baptist Congregational View.

Christ is the head of the Church both universal and local. **Colossians 1:18** *And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent*

Church members are those who are: 1. Regenerate (saved) 2. Confirmed by Congregation 3. Baptized. A Baptist distinctive is the congregation is composed only of the regenerate. It is the responsibility of the congregation to endeavor as much as humanly possible to ensure only the saved are brought into membership.

The local congregation Church Members – Members of the body of Christ. Then within the Body there are offices, functions, and services to carry the responsibilities and work of the Church.

These offices, functions, and services are enabled through the gifting of the Holy Spirit and placed within the Body by God.

1 Corinthians 12:18 -... God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose.

Ephesians 4:4- 7 - There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—⁵one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. ⁷But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.

Throughout the Bible, there are admonitions about submitting. Ephesians 5: 21 in leading up a series of submission statements, Paul sets the expectation that we are all to submit to one another. This attitude of submission is critical to how the congregation functions to glorify God.

In the Bible submission is not about hierarchical control. Moreover, it is about how God has gifted and designates one for service. How God has placed his people into the body of Christ.

- Submit comes from the Greek *hupotassó*, meaning "to arrange under". It means voluntarily yielding and arranging oneself under another's leadership out of love, respect, and a desire to honor God, not as weakness or blind obedience, but as a principle of order and cooperation in relationships (family, church, civil) and ultimately, to God Himself.
- It's a display of strength and faith, reflecting Christ's own submission to the Father, creating harmony and efficiency in God's kingdom. The emphasis is on the voluntary submission as unto God.

Submission is about respecting what God has put in order (gifts, office, etc) and affirmed by congregational assent. Then supporting that individual in executing their office, gift, etc.

Church membership has benefits and responsibilities. The offices and functions within the body have responsibilities. God equips the members with specific responsibility with the spiritual gifts to carry out that responsibility.

The effective work of the Church is dependent on each member knowing and carrying their responsibility.

Within the body of Christ there are spiritual gifts tied to a service, function and/or office. Functions are varied and may depend on the local body

What is a Gift

By definition, a gift has been described as a special qualification granted by the Spirit to every believer to empower the believer to serve within the framework of the Church.

Another definition, gifts are extraordinary endowments of the Holy Spirit sovereignly and undeservedly on believers as instruments of Christian service and Church edification.

These definitions point to certain facts that take the realm of gifts out of human hands. The source is the Holy Spirit. The nature of the gift is spiritual ability, endowment, and power. The purpose is for service in supporting the Church, ministry, and edification of the saints.

Gifts are not singular but are a collective to ensure needs of the Church are met.

Gifts are not offices. Offices in the New Testament – apostles, prophets, evangelist, teachers, pastor, elder, deacon, member.

The office incumbent will have gifts, and some will correspond to the office more than others. The obvious are evangelists will have the gifts of evangelism, elders the gift of leadership, teachers the gift of teaching.

Often someone may have a gift without an office. Showing Mercy or Giving is not necessarily tied to an office. A person could have the gift of evangelism without being an evangelist, for instance. We are all called to do the work of evangelist, but to some there is a special gift, and to some that gift is accompanied by a call to the office. One we often see is the shepherding gift in Christians that are not called to the office of Elder/pastor.

Picture of the Optimal Church

Charles Spurgeon said, "If I had never joined a **church** till I had **found** one that was **perfect**, I should never have joined one at all"

Billy Graham. "**If you find a perfect church don't join it:** You'd spoil it."

While one may argue that the invisible Church is perfect, the visible or local Church is composed of imperfect people, therefore, it will not be perfect. The good news is that all members of the true Church are seen by God as perfect by the blood of Jesus Christ.

Even though we are not perfect, we endeavor to align our Church as close to scripture as possible. The picture of the Biblical Church is one where Christians serve the body using their gifts, offices and functions for the good of the body the Glory of God.

Paul wrote 1 Corinthians 12 to clarify and instruct us on the proper understanding and use of the gifts. One was of no more importance than another. 1 Corinthians 12: 30 – Paul ends the gift chapter with "I will show you still a more excellent way" Then goes into 1 Corinthians 13 – the Love chapter. So, we can conclude Love is more excellent. Love God, Love others.

Corinthians 12 is a great model for how the congregational Church should work. When taken with the Instructions in the following passages:

Ephesians 4,

Romans 12,

1 Peter 4,

Philippians 2,

Hebrews 13,

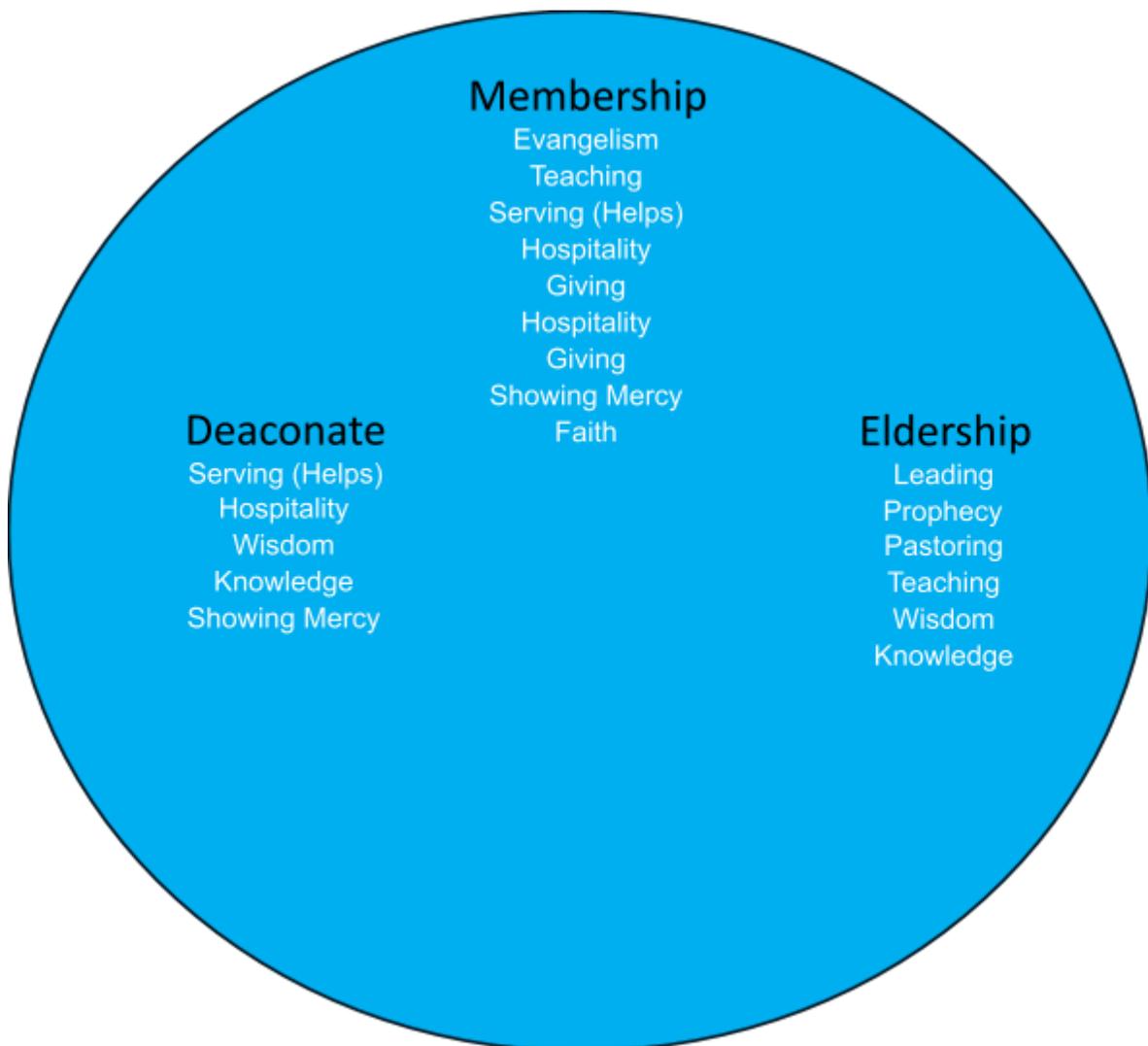
Along with other passages we get a beautiful picture of how the Church should work.

It is each of us loving one another, holding each in higher regards than ourselves, and honoring God in submission the office, role, responsibilities and spiritual gifts of each of the members.

As a wonderful example is that of Paul in 1 Timothy 5: 17-19. Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. ¹⁸ For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain," and, "The laborer deserves his wages." ¹⁹ Do not admit a charge against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses.

As we said earlier and depicted on the chart below. The elder is a member of the body of Christ, with all the responsibilities of membership. However, they have the additional responsibilities of watching for the souls, guarding the flock, ensuring doctrinal purity, leading the congregation, etc. If they do that well, they are worthy of double honor – honor as a member and as an elder.

General Gifts Associated with Offices



General Responsibilities

All Members

Assemble
Protect the Gospel
Define Membership
Love One Another
Evangelize the Lost
Disciple the Saved
Submit to One Another
Submit to the Eldership

Deaconate

Serve the Practical Needs of the Church to enable others to exercise their gifts.
Serve the needy in the body
Intentionally Broad to accommodate needs of the body

Eldership

Oversight for good order
Doctrinal Purity
Congregational Unity
Guard the Flock
Equipping the Saints for Service
Teach the Teachers

