

## “Spiritual Gifts from God: Part Four”

The past three Sundays I have taught about the Spiritual Gifts from God that have been given to those who belong to the church of God. The first and foremost gift is the Holy Spirit, given at Pentecost, when God’s Church on earth was birthed. And then, to all who believe in Jesus Christ for salvation, spiritual gifts were given so that we may serve God and one another as members of God’s Family.

To the Church, God has given the gift of Elders to shepherd, manage, and care for the Flock of God. God has also given to the Church, the gift of Deacons who are to serve under the leadership of the Elders for the purpose of caring for the basic needs of those who are members of God’s Church.

Today it is my desire to help you understand the qualifications of and the responsibilities given to the Elders. But in case you may have missed one of the last few weeks, and also, to remind those who were present, I will highlight the primary truths in Scripture concerning spiritual gifts.

**1Corinthians 12:1**, “Concerning spiritual *gifts*, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware.” **4-5**, “Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord.” **7**, “But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.” **13-14**, “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many.” **18**, “But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired.” **27**, “Now you are Christ’s body, and individually members of it.”

Every believer has been gifted to serve in the body of Christ, the church of God. Spiritual gifts from God are listed in **Romans 12:6-8**: **prophecy** [proclaiming God's Word], **servicing** [to minister to the basic needs of believers], **teaching** [to interpret and explain God's Word], **exhorting** [to encourage obedience to God's Word], **giving** [to generously and cheerfully give to those in need], **leading** [to guide or govern by example, with diligence], **showing mercy** [expressing compassion and empathy, in order to lessen another’s burdens and comfort their sorrows].

For the sake of unity and order in God’s Church, God has clearly established specific leadership to oversee and care for His children. Numerous passages in the New Testament indicate that the terms “elder” (*presbuteros*), “pastor” (*poimen*), and “overseer” (*episkopos*), all refer to the same office, that of Elders, who are not distinct from overseers and pastors; the terms are different ways of identifying the same men.

The qualifications for an overseer in **1Timothy 3:1-7**, and those for an elder in **Titus 1:4-9** are the very same: this man must be above reproach; *He must be* one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity; he must teach what aligns with God’s Word, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict; And he must have a good reputation with those outside *the church*, displaying God’s approval.

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Elders are repeatedly mentioned in the Book of Acts, during the time when there were still Apostles and Prophets in the Church, before the completion of the Bible; however there is absolutely no mention of Deacons in the Book of Acts.

**Acts 11:29-30**, “And in the proportion that any of the disciples had means, each of them determined to send *a contribution* for the relief of the brethren living in Judea. And this they did, sending it in charge of Barnabas and Saul to the elders.”

**Acts 14:23**, When they [Paul and Barnabas] had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

**Acts 15:4**, “When they [Paul and Barnabas] arrived at Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they reported all that God had done with them.”

**22-26**, “Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them to send to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas—Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren, and they sent this letter by them, ‘The apostles and the brethren who are elders, to the brethren in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia who are from the Gentiles, greetings. Since we have heard that some of our number to whom we gave no instruction have disturbed you with their words, unsettling your souls, it seemed good to us, *having become of one mind*, to select men to send to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.’”

**Acts 16:4**, “Now while they were passing through the cities, they were delivering the decrees which had been decided upon by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem, for them to observe.”

**Acts 20:17**, “From Miletus he [Paul] sent to Ephesus and called to him the **elders** of the church,” saying to them (**verse 28**), “Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you **overseers**, to **shepherd** the church of God.”

Peter also uses the very same three terms to describe those whom God has placed in leadership over the Church of God.

**1Peter 5:1-3**, “Therefore, I exhort the **elders** among you, *as your fellow elder* and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, **shepherd** the flock of God among you, exercising **oversight** not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for [dishonest] gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock.”

The different terms speak to **who** the man is (an **elder**), i.e., mature in the faith and knowledgeable of God’s Word; **what** the man does (**overseer**) in leading and managing the flock; **how** the man does it (**shepherding**) feeding and caring for the sheep by equipping, and exhorting them with God’s Word..

These men are given to the flock by God (**Ephesians 4:11**), “for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ.”

The consistent pattern throughout the New Testament is that each local body of believers is shepherded by a plurality of God-ordained elders. Simply stated, this is God’s clear mandate concerning church leadership, to guard and care for the flock.

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Nowhere in Scripture is there a local assembly ruled by majority opinion, congregational vote, a committee, or by a single pastor. The Apostle Paul left Titus in Crete and instructed him (**Titus 1:5**) to, “appoint elders in every city.” James instructed his readers (**James 5:14**), “Is anyone among you sick? *Then* he must call for the elders of the church and they are to pray over him.” Paul and Barnabas (**Acts 14:23**), “appointed elders for them in every church”.

In Paul’s first epistle to Timothy (**1Timothy 5:17**), he referred to, “the elders who rule well” in the church at Ephesus. The book of Acts indicates that there were “elders” in the church in Jerusalem (**Acts 15:2, 4; 21:18**).

Again and again, reference is made to a plurality of elders; in fact, in every New Testament use of the term elder, it is plural, except where the apostle John uses it of himself in 2nd and 3rd John, and Peter uses it of himself in 1Peter.

Nowhere in the New Testament is there a reference to a one-pastor church. It may be that each elder in a city had an individual group in which he had specific oversight; but the church was seen as one church, therefore decisions were made in unity, as the whole church, not the individual parts.

The biblical norm for church leadership is a plurality of elders, overseeing and governing, while feeding, protecting, and caring for the sheep.

There is great benefit to a plurality of unified leadership, for this combined counsel and guidance helps assure that decisions are not self-willed or self-serving but of one mind, as the original 120 believers and followers of Christ were (**Acts 1:14**), “These all *with one mind* were continually devoting themselves to prayer.”

**Acts 2:46-47**, “Day by day continuing *with one mind* in the temple... praising God and having favor with all the people.”

**Romans 15:5**, “Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to ***be of the same mind*** with one another according to Christ Jesus.”

**Philippians 2:2**, “Make my joy complete by being *of the same mind*, maintaining the same love, *united in spirit, intent on one purpose*.”

The people of God, and especially the leadership God has ordained for the Church, must be of one mind, one Spirit, one purpose. If there is division among the elders in making decisions, the elders must study, pray, and seek the will of God together until a unified consensus is achieved.

The character and effectiveness of any church is directly related to the quality of its leadership. That’s why Scripture stresses the importance of qualified leaders and gives specific standards for evaluating those who would serve in that position.

The specific qualifications for elders are found in **1Timothy 3:2-7; Titus 1:6-8**, but the single, overarching qualification is to be “above reproach,” that is, he must be a leader who cannot be accused of any sinful pattern in his personal life, marital life, family life, social life, business life, or his spiritual life. In this way, elders are to be a model to the congregation (**1Peter 5:2-3**) as they, “shepherd the flock of God... as overseers, ...proving to be examples to the flock.”

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What about women Pastors-Elders-Overseers?

**1Timothy 2:12-14**, “I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man. For it was Adam who was first created, *and* then Eve. And *it was* not Adam *who* was deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression”

In **1Timothy 3:2-7**, ten times the masculine gender is used to refer to an overseer; and in **1Timothy 2:12-13**, it is clear that in the church, women are to be under the authority of the elders, as is everyone else; but also, they are excluded from teaching men or holding positions of authority over men.

Women have opportunities to serve in very important roles in the church: ministering to other women, caring for shut-ins, teaching children, serving in leadership concerning children, women, fellowship, outreach, benevolence, and missions, etc. However, a woman is not to be in spiritual leadership over men in the church or serve as Pastor-Elder-Overseer; for God ordains that church leadership be male.

As the apostolic era came to a close, at the completion of the Canon of Scripture, beginning with Genesis and ending with the Book of Revelation, the office of elder emerged as the highest level of local church government. Thus, it carried a great amount of responsibility. There was no higher court of appeal and no greater resource through which to collectively know the mind and heart of God, in reference to biblical authority in regard to issues concerning the church of God.

The primary function and responsibility of an elder is to serve as a leader of the church (cf. **1Timothy 3:5**). That involves specific duties as spiritual overseers of the flock, for elders are to determine church policy, i.e., belief and practice (cf. **Acts 15:1-16:5**); manage the church (cf. **Acts 20:17-28**); affirm and set apart other elders (cf. **1Timothy 4:13-16; 2Tim. 2:2-7; Titus 1:5**); rule, teach, and preach (cf. **1Timothy 3:2; 4:13; 5:17-20; 2Timothy 4:1-5; 1Thessalonians 5:12**); exhort obedience to God’s Word and refute false teachings (cf. **2Timothy 4:2; Titus 1:9**); to act as shepherds, setting an example for all the flock, as one who must give an account to the Chief Shepherd, Jesus Christ (cf. **1Peter 5:4**). **2Timothy 3:16-17**, “All Scripture is inspired by God [God-breathed] and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man [women and child] of God may be adequate [complete], [fully] equipped for every good work,” and this, to the glory of God.

**Ephesians 2:10**, “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.”

Scripture declares the biblical mandate for church leadership is a plurality of God-ordained men, who have been granted unified authority and oversight for everything done in and through the church, always in alignment with and in submission to God’s Word, for the purpose of equipping the people of God for good works of service, by building up of the body of Christ.

**1Thessalonians 5:12-13**, “We [Paul, Silvanus, Timothy] request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work.”

**1Timothy 5:17**, “The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching.”

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**Hebrews 13:17**, “Obey your leaders and submit *to them*, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.”

Next week we will study the other Office ordained by God to serve the Church, the office of Deacon. We will look at how deacons are selected, what responsibilities they have, and how they are to fulfill their duties under the leadership of the Elders.

**Ephesians 4:1-7**, “Therefore I ...implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all. But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift.” **29-32**, “Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such *a word* as is good for edification according to the need *of the moment*, so that it will give grace to those who hear. Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.”

*Pastor Mike*  
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