

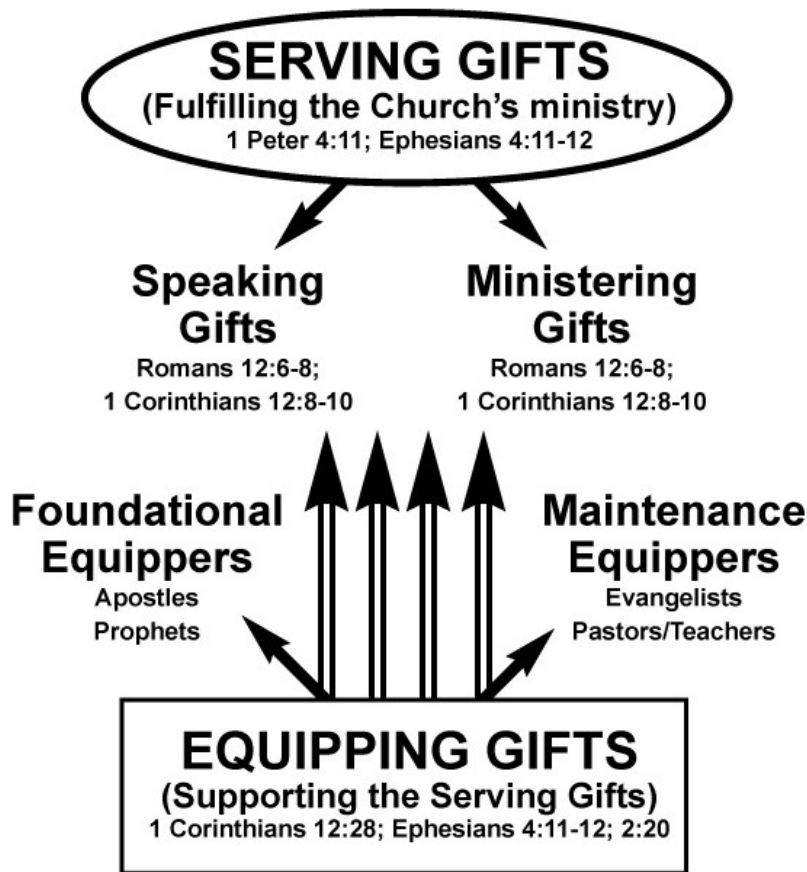
# THE GIFT OF GIFTED EQUIPPERS

Theme: The Holy Spirit gifts the church with gifted leaders who equip God's people for ministry.

In our last lesson, we went through a basic introduction to the subject of the 'spiritual gifts' that the Holy Spirit gives to the church. But in this lesson, we'll begin to study what the Bible tells us about these individual gifts in greater detail.<sup>1</sup>

There are four New Testament passages that give us lists of the specific spiritual gifts: Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12:8-10 (along with vv. 28-30); Ephesians 4:11-12; and 1 Peter 4:11. It's important to understand that these lists are probably not meant to be thought of as exhaustive. There are, no doubt, far more gifts that the Spirit gives His church than are specifically listed in these passages. But taken together, they give us the complete overview that the Spirit would want His church to have of the spiritual gifts as they are revealed in God's word. These passages tell us all that we need to know in order to appreciate and to make use of the giftedness with which the Spirit has blessed the body of Christ for the edification of its members.

The way these passages present the gifts to us follows a particular arrangement. We can broadly categorize them as either 'serving gifts' or 'equipping gifts':



The first category—'serving' gifts (gifts given for the work of the church)—can be further categorized as either “speaking” gifts or “ministering” gifts. This distinction is seen in 1 Peter 4:11;

*If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen (1 Peter 4:11).<sup>2</sup>*

And those serving gifts should be distinguished from “equipping” gifts. The “equipping” gifts are provided by the Spirit in order to make the “serving” gifts effective. We find this distinction shown to us in 1 Corinthians 12:28;

*And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues (1 Corinthians 12:28);*

and even more clearly in Ephesians 4:11-12;

*And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ ... (Ephesians 4:11-12).*

This morning’s study focuses on the “equipping” gifts. These are gifts that are specifically identified as gifted persons who provide for the equipping of the others in the church, so that those others may do the work of the ministry. These equipping gifts are essential to the design of the Spirit with regard to the church; because they are specifically given “for the equipping of the saints”. The equippers do the work of the ministry too; but their primary role is that of equipping the rest of the saints so that they may do the work of ministry. The church body cannot do what God calls it to do—with all the other gifts that the Holy Spirit gives—without those equippers!

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These “equipping” gifts can be organized under two categories: 'foundational equippers' and 'maintenance equippers'.

## **I. FOUNDATIONAL EQUIPPERS.**

These first two gifts are those gifted individuals that God gave to provide the “foundation” upon which the church has been built. As Paul wrote in Ephesians 2:20; the church exists and functions “having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone ...” These gifted 'foundational' individuals are gifts given just once to the church and are no longer being given.

**A. APOSTLES:** *those men sent by the Lord Jesus, having seen Him in His resurrection, to testify of Him and provide the foundational witness of the church.*

The word “apostle” comes from the Greek word that means “sent one”. In some churches today, there are those who believe this to be a gift that is still given in our time; and some even currently call themselves ‘apostles’. But the gift that the Scripture is speaking of refers to those whom the Lord Jesus had specifically chosen (John 6:70) to bear witness of Him, because they had been with Him “from the beginning” (John 15:27) as “eyewitnesses and ministers of the word” (Luke 1:2). These ‘sent ones’ uniquely shared a witness together of Jesus’ resurrection (Acts 1:22). They were provided with a special grace of the Holy Spirit to be taught all things that Jesus taught after He ascended, and to have all things that Jesus said to them brought to their remembrance (John 14:26), in order to accurately provide this foundational teaching to the church (see 1 Corinthians 2:11-12). Later in the earliest formation of the church, Paul was called into the role of apostleship (1 Corinthians 15:8-10; Galatians 1:1ff).

**B. PROPHETS:** *those individuals used by the Lord to serve as the instruments of special divine revelation prior to the completion of the New Testament (although this may also refer to the writing prophets of the Old Testament).*

This should be distinguished from the gift of “prophecy” in 1 Corinthians 12:10; because this is speaking specifically of the gift of a “foundational” person in the church (see 1 Corinthians 12:28; Ephesians 4:11). An example of this might be Agabus. In Acts 11:28, amidst the activities of the early church, we read, “Then one of them, named Agabus, stood up and showed by the Spirit that there was going to be a great famine throughout all the world, which also happened in the days of Claudius Caesar.” He is found again in Acts 21:10-11; “And as we stayed many days, a certain prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. When he had come to us, he took Paul’s belt, bound his own hands and feet, and said, ‘Thus says the Holy Spirit, “So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man who owns this belt, and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.”’”

## **II. MAINTENANCE EQUIPPERS.**

These second two gifts are given to provide for the ongoing support of that which was built upon the foundational gifts (Ephesians 4:11). Unlike the foundational equippers, they are continually being given to the church even today.

**A. EVANGELISTS:** *those who were sent out authoritatively as traveling missionaries who introduced the gospel to unreached people and helped establish a church in an unreached area.*

This gift very much parallels the idea of a missionary or a church planter. A wonderful example of this gifted person would be Philip. In Acts 8:26-40, we’re given a marvelous and miraculous story of his work in the fulfillment of this ministry. Several years later in the story of Acts, in Acts 21:8, we find that this same man came to be known as “Philip the evangelist”. (Note that we’re told that he also had “four virgin daughters who prophesied”; v. 9.)

**B. PASTORS AND TEACHERS:** *two words that describe one role (“pastor” emphasizing the shepherding work, and “teacher” emphasizing the instructional and exhortational work); those men who serve as the ruling elders and teaching elders of a local congregation.<sup>3</sup>*

It's a serious work! Paul told the elders that had gathered to him from Ephesus;

*“Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves” (Acts 20:28-30).*

The apostle Peter wrote;

*“The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away” (1 Peter 5:1-4).*

The elders are the “appointed” leaders in a church (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5), who serve it by providing the spiritual oversight of God’s household and see to the care of its people (1 Timothy 5:17; 1 Timothy 3:4-5). They are to provide this service in a shepherd-like manner under the authority of Christ (1 Peter 5:1-4). Because of this, they must meet certain spiritual qualifications (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Timothy 5:17-21; Hebrews 13:17).

Their role is essential; because they are given by God to the church to teach (1 Timothy 3:2; 1 Timothy 5:17), appoint others to ministry (1 Timothy 4:14), shepherd God's flock (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:1-2), set an example for the people of God in Christian conduct (1 Timothy 4:12; 1 Peter 5:3; Hebrews 13:7), protect the church’s doctrine and teaching (1 Timothy 4:13), prioritize the ministries of preaching the word and of prayer (Acts 6:2; 2 Timothy 4:1; James 5:14), and rebuke false teaching and defend the truth (Titus 1:5, 10-11; 2 Timothy 2:23-26).

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These 'equipping gifts' are indispensable! When the ministry of the foundational equippers of the church (once given) is ongoingly preserved and faithfully built upon, and when the ministry of the maintenance equippers of the church (continually given) is respected and diligently fulfilled, then every member of the body of Christ can do the work that the Holy Spirit has gifted them to do.

Thank God for His faithful provision!

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<sup>1</sup>Much of the material for this study was adapted from “Your Giftedness to The Body: A Biblical Study of The Nature, Purpose, and Use of Spiritual Gifts” from Bethany Bible Church, 2005.

<sup>2</sup>All Scripture readings are taken from *The Holy Bible, New King James Version*; copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc.

<sup>3</sup>*"The Greek word that the Bible translates 'bishop' is episcopos. It is a word formed by joining two Greek words together: epi, which means 'upon'; and skopeó, which means to 'pay careful attention to', or 'look out for' something. An episcopos, then, is someone appointed to the role of safeguarding or overseeing something—and in respect to a church, it means someone who is the 'overseer' of that church. (The word 'bishop' comes from the Old English word bisceop; which itself came from the Latin ebiscopus.)*

*"In the Scriptures, three words are used to describe the same office in the church: 'pastor', 'elder', and 'bishop'. These three words highlight different aspects of this one office—the word 'pastor' or 'shepherd' tends to emphasize personal care and nurture (1 Peter 5:2); the word 'elder' or 'presbyter' emphasizes the spiritual maturity and moral character that befits the one holding that office (note how, in 1 Timothy 3:5, Paul mentions 'elders', and then goes on to describe moral qualifications in verse 6); and 'bishops', emphasizes the function of providing for the spiritual oversight of the church (note how Paul then says, 'For a bishop must be blameless, as a steward of God ...'; that is, as one into whose hands God has entrusted the care of His church).*

*"These three functions are often very clearly used in Scripture to describe the same office. In Acts 20; Paul calls the 'elders' of the church of Ephesus together and tells them, '... Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock [i.e., 'shepherd/pastor'], among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers [i.e., 'bishops'] (v. 28). Peter mentions all three when he writes, 'The elders who are among you I exhort, I whom am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers ...' (1 Peter 5:1-2). In Titus 1:5-9, we find that Paul writes that Titus should appoint 'elders' and gives their specific qualifications (v. 5); and then says, as the reason for this command, that 'a bishop must be blameless ...' (v. 7).*

*"The New Testament, then, presents these three words as describing one office. But 'elders' and 'bishops' do not appear to be considered distinct offices in the church until the Second Century. Since that time, many traditions in Christianity (including Anglican, Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and Scandinavian Lutheran) retain a distinct office of 'bishop'; but they do so on the basis of tradition—not on the basis of a clear distinction in the Scriptures. Hence, some churches have a distinct office called 'bishop'; while churches that have their roots in the reformed tradition simply see 'bishop' and 'elder' as describing one office. Many churches include 'pastor' as a word to describe this office as well (Ephesians 4:11)." (From Note Concerning the Relationship Between "Bishops", "Elders" and "Pastors/Shepherds; Bethany Bible Church.)*