

Five-Fold Ministry Gifts

Part 1: Overview

Introduction

There is a genuine reformation that the church is experiencing today in regard to how we think and relate to what is commonly known as the Five-Fold Ministry Gifts. We are moving from the limitations of a church experience where the Pastor/Teacher model of equipping for ministry predominates to a re-emerging revelation in doctrine and practice where Apostles, Prophets and Evangelists are also taking their places. C. Peter Wagner calls it an “Apostolic Reformation.”¹ It is theologically based on Ephesians 4:11-15:

It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we 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. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.

The Scriptures say that *when he ascended on high, he [Jesus] led captives in his train and gave gifts to men* (Ephesians 5:8). The specific gifts referred to here are apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor and teacher. We have many “gifts” identified in the New Testament that are spiritual graces given within the church, but these are the five “ministry offices” that Paul identifies that have been given for the purpose of:

- Equipping the saints for works of service
- Building up the body of Christ to maturity
- Bringing the whole church to unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God
- Preventing the church from being deceived by false doctrine
- Attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ

The Five-Fold Ministry as the Expression of the Ministry of Jesus

The restoration of the five-fold ministry offices is revolutionary in the sense that these five gifts represent the full expression of the ministry of Jesus to his church. Jesus had in mind that, as he left his earthly ministry, he would pour out from his authority and Spirit callings and giftings that would continue to express his ministry to the church and to the world. As you look at the life and ministry of Jesus you see how he was the prototypical expression of these ministry gifts:

- **Apostle:** Jesus was the one “sent” from the Father (“apostle” means one who is sent) on the ultimate heavenly mission. *Therefore, holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we confess* (Hebrews 3:1).
- **Prophet:** Moses predicted the coming of Jesus saying, *“The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him”* (Deuteronomy 18:15). In Matthew 21:11 the people said, *“This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.”*
- **Evangelist:** *Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. “The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!”* (Mark 1:14-15).
- **Pastor:** “Pastor” means “shepherd.” Jesus said, *“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep”* John 10:11.
- **Teacher:** Jesus was the consummate Rabbi. His Sermon on the Mount and parables are literally life-changing. *He taught as one who had authority, and not as the teachers of the law* (Matthew 7:29).

The Need for the Five-Fold Ministry

There are those who say that the day of the apostle is over and the Apostolic/Prophetic movement is dangerous. I would agree that it is dangerous—to the religious status quo and to the work of the evil one. There is absolutely no sound scriptural basis to say that the apostle and prophet are not needed today. Such teaching is a doctrine of demons. As I look at the context of Ephesians 4, I find at least half-a-dozen reasons why the full compliment of five-fold ministry is for today.

First, it was when Jesus, *ascended on high* that he *gave gifts to men* (v8). If there are no other apostles than the original twelve then Jesus did not give these gifts when he ascended on high because those apostles were already here. Second, if you leave out the apostle and the prophet you have left out two-fifths of the ministry offices that Jesus gave to the church. Not only that, you have left out the two most prominent and influential of the five. Ephesians 2:20 says that the church is *built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone*. I believe that this is what Jesus meant when he told Simon Peter, “*You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church.*” The differing interpretations of the Catholic and Evangelical traditions are both inadequate here. It was not Peter alone or his revelation on which Jesus would build his church. It was the strong foundation of delegated apostolic authority given by Jesus to apostles and prophets who would lead and direct the church until his return.

Third, if apostles were needed then, why are they are not needed today? Why would Jesus give all five at the beginning of the church and then take two of them away? Fourth, if the evangelist, the pastor and the teacher are still needed today *to prepare God's people for works of service* (and they are) then the apostle and the prophet must be as well because the five are listed together. Fifth, have we all reached *unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God* (v13)? Have we *become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ* (v13)? Have we *grown up into him who is the Head, that is Christ* (v15)? That’s why the five-fold ministry gifts were given to the church. Until we arrive, we need all five. Sixth, if when Jesus gave “some” to be apostles he only gave twelve, then why are a number of post-ascension apostles named in the New Testament: Matthias (Acts 1:26), Barnabas (Acts 14:4,14), James, the brother of Jesus (Acts 15:13; 1 Corinthians 15:7, Galatians 1:19), Andronicus and Junias (Romans 16:7) and Silas and Timothy (1Thessalonians 1:1, 2:6)?

The main argument that I have heard against the need for apostolic/prophetic ministry today is the fact that we now have the New Testament Scriptures and that is all the authority and word of God that we need. If Ephesians 4 had said, “It was he who gave some to be apostles to write the canon of the New Testament,” then I could accept that argument. That is not the case. It is clearly evident that apostolic and prophetic ministry is still needed—perhaps more than ever. There is also the weak argument that Paul is declaring the end of the need for prophecy in the church age when he says, “*Where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears*” (1 Corinthians 13:8-10). But the perfection that he speaks of here is not the coming of the New Testament canon but the perfection of our heavenly existence. Paul’s admonition to the church to *eagerly desire...the gift if prophecy* (1 Corinthians 14:1) was certainly not for his generation only.

The local church should seek to have the consistent functioning of all five-fold ministry gifts. Churches that exclude any of the equipping ministry gifts or emphasize one over the others will become unbalanced in their approach to ministry. Churches tend to do this based on the ministry gift(s) of the person or persons who are leading the church. But if we want to have a healthy spiritual diet and have the full compliment of Jesus’ ministry to the church, we need to release, raise up and import all five of these ministry gifts for the local church.

Callings, Titles, Designations and Functions

Before we move into a discussion of the five different ministry offices, allow me to make some needed observations and distinctions:

- There is a difference between gifts and offices: Because someone is able to function in a certain gift does not mean that he or she has attained to one or more of the five-fold ministry offices. We are all encouraged to prophesy (see 1 Corinthians 14:1ff), but because someone is operating in the gift of prophecy does not mean that he or she should be designated a prophet in the church. The same holds for those who are functioning or beginning to function with gifts of evangelism, teaching and shepherding. The functioning of these gifts should be encouraged in everyone but designating someone to the office of evangelist, teacher or pastor comes only after much time so that a person's gifts, calling and character can be fully tested and they can be fully entrusted to that office.
- There is a difference between callings and designations: The principle that "*many are called but few are chosen*" (Matthew 22:14 NASB) can be applied to the five-fold ministry offices. One may have a calling to be an apostle or prophet or shepherd or pastor or teacher but they may have yet to come into that designation. Paul received his calling as an apostle in Acts 9 but was not called an apostle until Acts 13. One may receive a calling as a pastor at a young age but certainly would not be known as a pastor until designated as such by the church. And remember, being called is no guarantee that the calling will be fulfilled. There are those who have gone to their graves without fulfilling their call to ministry.
- There is a difference between designations and titles: With the restoration and recognition of the five-fold ministry offices, we need to be careful to avoid the trap of seeking and using the titles of those offices. Even though we should heartily receive, recognize and own every calling, gift and office designated by Christ, the New Testament church is to be devoid of titles. Why? Because Jesus taught against the seeking of titles (see Matthew 23:5-12). There is empowerment in the designation (see Luke 6:12-13) but pride in the title. To aspire to the office is good (see 1 Timothy 3:1) but motives have to be right. Wanting a title is a sign of insecurity and spiritual pride. Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for their love of titles. If you are an apostle or prophet or pastor you may refer to yourself as such in an appropriate context (Paul certainly did) but to desire the title of Apostle or Prophet or Pastor (or Reverend or Bishop or Doctor) has to be considered a carnal aspiration. Those who deserve the title don't need it and those who need the title don't deserve it.
- There is a difference between function and title: More important than the title of the office is the function of it. What good is the title without the function? Five-fold ministers should be recognized if the church wants to receive the full benefit of the ministry of Jesus but you don't always need the title or even the designation in order to function as a five-fold minister. I do not mean to encourage loose cannons who refuse to be accountable, but it is possible that you could function in five-fold ministry without human recognition. Functioning will naturally precede recognition and will be the continuing confirmation that one stands in the office of a five-fold minister. The fact is, we all are called to function to some degree in all five of the ministry gifts: Each one of us is "sent" by God to prophesy, evangelize, shepherd and teach in the sphere of influence that he gives us.
- There is a difference between governmental and ministry offices in the church: "Overseers and deacons" (see Philippians 1:1) are the governmental offices of the local church. The five-fold ministry offices of apostle, prophet, evangelist, shepherd and teacher are the ministry offices given as gifts by Jesus to equip the church for ministry. On the local level the elders are the authority (the terms "overseers" (KJV 'Bishops'), "elders" and "pastors" (literally, "Shepherds") are used interchangeably in the New Testament (see Acts 20:28 and 1 Peter 5:1-3). Apostles were, and still are, commissioned by God to establish the kingdom, strengthen the church in various places and to be a voice of authority among a plurality of churches. When an apostle was established in a local church setting, like Paul and Barnabas at Antioch, they were part of the eldership of that church. Remember that Peter referred to himself as a "fellow elder" (1 Peter 5:1).

Conclusion

The restoration of the five-fold ministry to the church today is a God-inspired movement. We cannot deny the Lord's will that the apostle and the prophet be pre-eminent in his church: *In the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers...*(1 Corinthians 12:28); *God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone* (Ephesians 2:19). Any church that seeks to equip the saints through the ministry offices of the five-fold ministry gifts will be well-balanced in its approach to ministry.

¹ C. Peter Wagner, *The New Apostolic Churches*, Gospel Light Publications (May 2000)