

# Spiritual Gifts and Church Leadership

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## Introduction

The relationship between spiritual gifts and church leadership is important and clear in the NT. Twice as he discusses spiritual gifts, Paul links these two concepts of gift and church leader, in Eph 4:7–14 and 1 Cor 12:28. Paul states that church leaders are *themselves* gifts given by Christ to the church for the edification of the believers.

## The Gift of Church Leader

First, speaking of spiritual gifts in Ephesians 4, Paul states that “to each one of us grace was given [ἐδόθη ἡ χάρις] according to the measure of the gift of Christ” (v. 7; cf. Rom 12:6). For support Paul quotes Ps 68:18, asserting that when the risen and triumphant Christ ascended to heaven, He “gave gifts [ἔδωκεν δόματα] to men.” Paul continues further in vv. 11–12, stating specifically that to the church Christ “gave (ἔδωκεν) apostles, and prophets, and evangelists, and pastors and teachers for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ.” The Triune God has thus ordained to gift the church with qualified spiritual leadership so that the whole body of Christ might be built up and experience unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God, and reach spiritual maturity after the fullness of Christ (v. 13).

Second, in 1 Corinthians 12, Paul makes a similar connection between spiritual gifts and the leadership of the church. After speaking generally in vv. 4–26 about the nature of spiritual gifts within the body of Christ, in vv. 28–30 Paul essentially identifies church leaders themselves as “spiritual gifts.” Notice how the leadership *officeholders* (apostle, prophet, teacher) are placed in the same category as the other *gifts* (miracles, administration, tongues, interpretation, healing). Just as he did in Ephesians 4, then, Paul is telling us here in 1 Corinthians 12 that the leaders of the church are *themselves* gifts granted to the church for the building up of the body of Christ (cf. 1 Cor 14:12).

There are some particulars, however, of Paul’s presentation of spiritual gifts and church leadership that have changed. For example, the offices of apostle and prophet, as well as the miraculous sign gifts of healing, tongues, and interpretation were transitory in nature and not meant to extend beyond the founding generation of the church. Nevertheless, the principle remains today: *the Spirit of God continues to gift the church with pastoral leadership for the building up of the body of Christ.*

## The Gifts of Church Leaders

There is one final point in this discussion. Not only does the Holy Spirit give pastors *themselves* to the church as gifts for the church's edification; the Holy Spirit also grants *to* those pastors the spiritual gifts necessary for carrying out their ministry as leaders of the local church. The NT seems to highlight at least three spiritual gifts which are linked to pastoral ministry. First, in 1 Tim 3:2 Paul states that the overseer (or pastor or elder) must be skillful in teaching (διδακτικός; cf. 2 Tim 2:24). This requirement for pastoral leadership may be linked to the spiritual gift of teaching (διδασκαλία) mentioned by Paul in Rom 12:7.

Second, according to 1 Tim 3:4 the overseer must be one who manages (προΐστημι—"put oneself at the head, lead, direct, rule"; cf. 1 Tim 5:17) his own family well, for if he does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of (ἐπιμελήσομαι—"look after, have charge of") God's church? Here there appears to be a connection with the spiritual gift of administration (κυβέρνησις—"administrative ability, managerial skill"; from κυβερνήτης—"a steersman or pilot of a ship") given in 1 Cor 12:8, and the spiritual gift of leading (προΐστημι) set forth in Rom 12:28.

Third, in Titus 1:9 Paul speaks again of the qualifications of an elder, stating that the elder must hold fast the faithful word as it has been taught, that he may be able to exhort (παρακαλέω) in sound doctrine and refute those who contradict. This ability may be linked to the spiritual gift of exhorting (παρακαλέω) mentioned in Romans 12:8.

## Conclusion

I have not exhausted the subject, but several points seem clear from the above discussion. First, the Holy Spirit of God grants spiritual gifts to believers for the edification of the body of Christ. Second, as part of that work the Holy Spirit grants as gifts to the local church those men who exercise leadership in the body of Christ. Third, in conjunction with this the Holy Spirit grants these men the spiritual gifts they need in order to exercise leadership in directing the church, teaching and exhorting the believers, and building up the body of Christ.