

## MAJOR BIBLE DOCTRINES

### Part 45: The Church: edification

Edification refers to the building, growing, maturing, and nurturing of the church in whole and its individual members. The church as "the mother of us all" (Gal.4:26), is the primary context for edification.

Let us learn from the simple title *mother* how useful, indeed how necessary, it is that we should know her. For there is no other way to enter into life unless this mother conceive us in her womb, give us birth, nourish us at her breast, and lastly unless she keep us under her care and guidance until, putting off moral flesh, we become like the angels (Matt.22:30)—John Calvin [*Institutes*, 4.1.4]

#### I. The Church

##### A. Three facts about edification

1. *Christ has given the church men as gifts, for the formal and express purpose of edification.* The first three of these gifts were extraordinary and temporal, while the fourth is ordinary and continual.<sup>1</sup> [1] Apostles. The apostolic office was foundational. "It would be impossible for any contemporary Christian to meet the biblical qualifications required for someone to be considered an apostle. The NT articulates at least three necessary criteria: (1) an apostle had to be a physical eyewitness of the resurrected Christ (Acts 1:22; 10:39-41; 1Cor.9:1; 15:7-8); (2) an apostle had to be personally appointed by the Lord Jesus Christ (Mk.3:14; Lk.6:13; Acts 1:2, 24; 10:41; Gal.1:1); and (3) an apostle had to be able to authenticate his apostolic appointment with miraculous signs (Matt.10:1-2; Acts 1:5-8; 2:43; 4:33; 5:12; 8:14; 2Cor.12:12; Heb.2:3-4)" (MacArthur). [2] Prophets. Both OT and NT prophets spoke the infallible word of God. Prophets, along with apostles, were foundational to the church, which is "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets" (Eph.2:20). "A foundation is not something that can be rebuilt during every phrase of construction. The foundation is unique, and it is always laid first, with the rest of the structure resting firmly above it" (MacArthur). [3] Evangelists.<sup>2</sup> These too were foundational and temporary. Evangelists accompanied and assisted apostles (Tit.1:5; 3:12), were ordained by apostles (1Tim.4:14; 2Tim.4:5), and performed signs and wonders similar to the apostles and prophets (Acts 8:6, 7, 13). [4] Pastor-teachers. "And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers" (1Cor.12:28). Though apostles and prophets were foundational and temporary, pastor-teachers are the only office given to the church for her continued edification. "Although the revelatory gift of prophecy has ceased, the proclamation of the prophetic Word still continues today – as preachers exposit the Scriptures and exhort people to obey (2Tim.4:2)" (MacArthur). "The first great duty of the ministry, with reference unto the church, is the dispensation of the doctrine of the gospel unto it, for its edification" (Owen).

(1) Eph.4:7-16 (Ps.68:17-18)

<sup>1</sup> Therefore it pleased the Lord at sundry times and in divers manners to reveal Himself, and to declare that His will unto His church; and afterward for the better preserving and propagating of the truth, and for the more sure establishment and comfort of the church against the corruption of the flesh, and the malice of Satan, and of the world, to commit the same wholly unto writing; which makes the Holy Scriptures to be most necessary, those former ways of God's revealing His will unto His people being now ceased—LBC [1:1]

<sup>2</sup> That their call was *extraordinary* is hence apparent, in that no rules are anywhere given or prescribed about their choice or ordination, nor qualification of their persons expressed, nor any direction given the church as to its future proceeding about them, no more than about new or other apostles—John Owen [*Works*, vol.4, 446]

2. *Christ has given specific spiritual gifts to each individual Christian for the purpose of edification.* A spiritual gift is an ability given by the Spirit that enables a Christian to edify the church. "A spiritual gift is an ability, divinely bestowed and sustained, to grasp and express the realities of the spiritual world, and the knowledge of God in Christ, for the edifying both of others and of oneself" (Packer). "A spiritual gift is a channel through which the Holy Spirit ministers to the Body" (MacArthur). Spiritual gifts are closely related to natural abilities, as the latter are enlisted within the former. For example, Paul spoke of the gifts of "serving" (Rom.12:6) and "helps" (1Cor.12:28). These gifts find expression through various skills and abilities (i.e. cooking, giving, teaching, etc.). "We cannot sharply distinguish between new supernatural gifts of the Spirit and 'natural' gifts renewed by the Spirit" (Clowney). [1] Gifts are extraordinary and ordinary.<sup>3</sup> Like offices (apostles and prophets), the Spirit gave certain gifts that were extraordinary and temporary. "As there were *offices* extraordinary (apostles and prophets) at the beginning of our dispensation, so there were *gifts* extraordinary; and as successors were not appointed for the former, so a continuance was never intended for the latter. The gifts were *dependent upon the offices*. We no longer have the apostles with us and therefore the supernatural gifts (the communication of which was an essential part of '*the signs of an apostle*', 2Cor.12:12) are absent" (Pink). Healing and miracle working, were signs that verified the word of God. Speaking in unknown languages (tongues), was a gift through which divine revelation was given, and the universality of the gospel illustrated. "The gift of tongues endowed a person with the miraculous ability to speak in unlearned foreign languages for the sake of proclaiming the Word of God and authenticating the gospel message. When used in the church, it had to be translated so other believers could be edified by the message" (MacArthur). The revelatory gifts (prophecy, tongues, knowledge, wisdom, discerning of spirits, interpretation), and the signs that verified these gifts (healing and miracles), were restricted to the apostolic age.<sup>4</sup> [2] Gifts are given to every Christian. "But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift" (Eph.4:7). "All true believers have received spiritual gifts from the Lord. There is not one Christian in this world who does not have some ability to serve others in the body" (Mack). Each Christian should know his gifts to use them for the good of others. "As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God" (1Pet.4:10).<sup>5</sup> NT lists of gifts,

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<sup>3</sup> The extraordinary gifts of the Spirit, such as the gift of tongues, of miracles, of prophecy, etc., are called extraordinary, because they are such as are not given in the ordinary courses of God's providence. They are not bestowed in the way of God's ordinary providential dealing with his children, but only on extraordinary occasions, as they were bestowed on the prophets and apostles to enable them to reveal the mind and will of God before the canon of Scripture was complete, and so on the primitive Church, in order to the founding and establishing of it in the world. But since the canon of the Scripture has been completed, and the Christian Church fully founded and established, these extraordinary gifts have ceased. But the ordinary gifts of the Spirit are such as are continued to the Church of God throughout all ages; such gifts as are granted in conviction and conversion, and such as appertain to the building up of the saints in holiness and comfort—Jonathan Edwards [*Charity and its Fruits*, 29-30]

<sup>4</sup> The supernatural gifts of inspiration and miracles which the apostles possessed were not continued to their ministerial successors, because they were no longer necessary. All the doctrines of Christianity had been revealed to the apostles, and had been delivered to the church in a written form. There was no further need of an infallible inspiration. And the credentials and authority given to the first preachers of Christianity in miraculous acts, did not need continual repetition from age to age. One age of miracles well authenticated is sufficient to establish the divine origin of the gospel—William Dagg [*Reformed Dogmatics*, vol.2, 369]

<sup>5</sup> Wayne Mack provides six helps to discern spiritual gifts. (1) Study the Bible. Read the passages that discuss spiritual gifts (Rom.12:3-8; 1Cor.12; 1Pet.4:10-11). (2) Pray. First John 5:14 says, 'If we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.' God has said that He does not want us to be ignorant regarding spiritual gifts (1Cor.12:1), so asking for wisdom in determining our giftedness is a request that is according to His revealed will. (3) Examine your motives. Jesus said, 'If any man is willing to do His will, he shall know' (Jn.7:17). You must seek understanding with a humble heart that is open to whatever God wants you to do. (4) Evaluate your abilities. In the context of spiritual gifts, Romans 12:3 says that we should exercise sound judgment regarding the allotment of grace that has been given to each of us. (5) Ask others. The Scriptures repeatedly affirm the importance of receiving godly counsel (Prov.11:14; 15:22), and the area of spiritual gifts is no exception to that principle. (6) Take opportunities to serve. That is, be sensitive to the needs of others and prayerful and humble meet those needs.

are only suggestive and NOT exhaustive. They merely provide broad categories of gifts. Furthermore, Christians are given several gifts that may vary in strength and usefulness. "When the NT says that an individual has received 'a gift' it may be referring to a package of giftedness that includes a blend of various gifts that have been given to the church as a whole" (Mack).<sup>6</sup> [3] Gifts are given as the Spirit wills. "The Spirit is both Giver and Gift, present as Lord and as the Source of all blessing" (Clowney). The Spirit gives gifts to whom He wills, and to the degree He wills. "This variation in strength in spiritual gifts depends on a combination of divine and human influence. The divine influence is the sovereign working of the Holy Spirit as he '*apportions to each one individually as he wills*' (1Cor.12:11). The human influence comes from experience, training, wisdom, and natural ability in the use of that gift" (Grudem). Thus gifts must be stirred up and strengthened. "Do not neglect the gift you have" (1Tim.4:14. "Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands" (2Tim.1:6). [4] Gifts are given to edify others. Spiritual gifts are "abilities that God has granted to Christians for the edification of others in the body" (Mack). "Let all things be done for edification" (1Cor.14:26). "Even so you, since you are zealous for spiritual gifts, let it be for the edification of the church that you seek to excel" (1Cor.14:12). "As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another" (1Pet.4:10). "The manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all" (1Cor.12:7). "These *gifts*, whereby the Spirit evidences and manifests his power, are bestowed on men for this very end, that they may profit and benefit others in their edification; and yet, also, where they are duly improved, they tend much to the spiritual advantage of them on whom they are bestowed. Wherefore, as *grace* (fruit of the Spirit) is primarily given unto us for ourselves, and secondarily for the good of others; so *gifts* are bestowed in the first place for the edification of others, and secondly for our own spiritual advantage also" (Owen). [5] Gifts are given to imitate Christ. Spiritual gifts enable Christ's spiritual body (church) to continue His ministry. "Spiritual gifts are the reproduction of Christ's ministry. They are gifts given to the church by the Holy Spirit so that it may be the continuing life of Christ" (MacArthur).<sup>7</sup>

The rich supply of EXTRAORDINARY GIFTS bestowed at Pentecost was not intended to continue when they had served their purpose in founding the Christian Church. The other GIFTS OF AN ORDINARY CHARACTER were given for the permanent advantage of the Church, and are so essential to her edification, that, without them, she would collapse or disappear. Their continuance is a constant proof that Christ lives as the dispenser of the Holy Spirit. Some of them are gifts of office, for acting in the mind of others; while the general body of Christians are supplied with gifts and endowments, wealth and influence, which the Spirit induces them to use for the common benefit. The permanence of the Church does not depend on OFFICES ALONE, NOR ON GIFTS ALONE, but on both conjoined—George Smeaton [*The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*, 276-277]

(1) Matt.25:14-30; Rom.12:4-8; 1Cor.12:4-11<sup>8</sup>; 1Cor.12:12-31<sup>9</sup>; 1Pet.4:10-11

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<sup>6</sup> For instance, Timothy is said to have 'a gift' in 1Tim.4:14 and 2Tim.1:6, but throughout the pastoral epistles, He is described as exercising giftedness in various areas, including teaching (2Tim.2:2), preaching (2Tim.4:2a), exhortation (2Tim.4:2b), and evangelism (2Tim.4:5). So it is possible that his 'gift' was a composite of ministry capabilities that enabled him to fulfill a unique role in the body. Every individual Christian seems to be this kind of 'spiritual snowflake' who can serve in a way that no one else can—Wayne Mack [*Life in the Father's House*, 130]

<sup>7</sup> Every gift was characteristic of Jesus Christ during His earthly ministry. He was a teacher; He was full of faith; He was wisdom personified; He had all knowledge; He was the discerner of spirits; He showed mercy; He was the ultimate giver; He was ruler and leader; and He was servant and minister—John MacArthur [*The Body Dynamic*, 111-112]

<sup>8</sup> The spiritual gifts mentioned in the New Testament, primarily in Romans 12 and in 1 Corinthians 12, fall into three categories: sign, speaking, and serving. Before the New Testament was written, men had no standard for judging the truthfulness of someone who preached, taught, or witnessed in the name of Christ. The sign gifts authenticated the

3. *Christ has given each individual Christian universal and saving graces for the purpose of edification.* By *grace* is meant the fruit of the Spirit (faith, love, joy, peace, hope, etc.). These are called "saving" because they accompany salvation. Though no Christian has every gift, every Christian has, in some measure, every grace.<sup>10</sup> [1] Gifts must be exercised with grace. Great gifts without grace are useless. Gift and grace must never be separated (1Cor.13:1-3). "The *fruit* of the Spirit ('love...', Gal.5:22) should be distinguished from the *gifts* of the Spirit, but ought never to be absent in their exercise. For without love, and the humility which accompanies it (Rom.12:3; 1Cor.4:7), the purpose of the gifts of the Spirit is thwarted (1Cor.13:1-3)" (Ferguson). [2] Gifts excite or strengthen grace. Christians exercise gifts for the purpose of strengthening grace within others. Faith and love are increased through the diligent and humble use of gifts given to the church. [3] Grace, like gifts, edifies others. "Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies" (1Cor.8:1). Love labors to edify.

(1) Rom.14:19; 15:1-3; Eph.4:29-30; 1Thess.5:11

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teaching of the apostles—which was the measure of all other teaching—and therefore ceased after the apostles died, probably even earlier. "The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance," Paul explained to the Corinthian church, "by signs and wonders and miracles" (2Cor.12:12). The writer of Hebrews gives further revelation about the purpose of these special gifts: "After [the gospel] was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, God also bearing witness with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will" (Heb.2:3-4). Even during Jesus' earthly ministry, the apostles "went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them, and confirmed the word by the signs that followed" (Mk.16:20). First Corinthians was written about a.d. 54 and Romans some four years later. It is important to note that none of the sign gifts mentioned in 1Corinthians 12:9-10—namely, the gifts of healing, miracles, speaking in tongues, and interpreting tongues—is found in Romans 12. The other two New Testament passages that mention spiritual gifts (Eph.4:7, 11; 1Pet.4:10-11) were written several years after Romans and, like that epistle, make no mention of sign gifts. Peter specifically mentions the categories of speaking and serving gifts ("whoever speaks" and "whoever serves," v. 11) but neither the category nor an example of the sign gifts. It seems evident, therefore, that Paul did not mention the sign gifts in Romans because their place in the church was already coming to an end. They belonged to a unique era in the church's life and would have no permanent place in its ongoing ministry. It is significant, therefore, that the seven gifts mentioned in Romans 12:6-8 are all within the categories of speaking and serving—John MacArthur [taken from article on internet]

<sup>9</sup> (1) The Spirit gives gifts to each Christian to fulfill a specific part in the body. (2) Each part depends upon the others and is equally important. (3) Together the individual parts comprise a unified whole. There is one body with many individual parts.

<sup>10</sup> The distinction and relation between *gift* and *grace* is illustrated in the office of elder. Both are necessary as they interrelate and supplement each other: (1) Gift. He must be able to teach, govern, and rule (1Tim.3:2, 4-5). (2) Grace. He must be blameless, pure, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, not quarrelsome, not covetous, but gentle. Both are necessary and equally important.