

The Pastor and the Gift of the Spirit

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APPOINTED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

To serve the word of God in the ministry of preaching, in the giving of wise counsel and to meet the demands of leadership, it is indispensable for the pastor to be empowered perpetually with the Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit who both endows and empowers. Learning is no burden for the pastor wanting to develop and understand the gift of ministry, but these significant contributions do not of themselves produce pastors. The effectiveness of ministry is not due to human competency, but to the power of God.

The Holy Spirit appoints shepherds and overseers of God's people. To the elders at Ephesus Paul says: 'Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock, of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God, that he obtained with the blood of his own Son' (Acts 20:28).¹ The work of the Spirit is to conform our humanity into the shape of Christ. Whilst this is essential for the whole body of Christ, Christ shapes pastors with the particular ingredients of being shepherds after his own likeness.

After Christ's sacrificial self-giving in his atoning death, the risen Jesus appeared in the midst of his disciples, engendering peace and joy to the shattered group who were just like small children who had lost their mother and father. Then Jesus commissioned them for ministry:

'As the Father has sent me, so I send you.' When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained' (John 20:21-23).

The forgiveness of sins is a transcendent act of God which delivers and affects those who hear with an action that no pastor can do. Forgiveness of another person's sins is beyond my capabilities. As a pastor I am called to proclaim absolution in the preaching of the Gospel and at a personal level. But, unless the Holy Spirit authorises me and communicates divine pardon for all sin, my presence and eloquence is, at best, an echo or mimicking of the promise of God.

¹ Unless otherwise stated, all Scripture quotations in this study are from the New Revised Standard Version.

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At the festival of Pentecost after the Spirit was poured out on all flesh, the apostles proclaimed that the crucified Jesus was Lord and Christ whilst also proclaiming the forgiveness of sins which was received in repentance and new life (Acts 2:36–38; 10:43–44).

By the innateness of the Holy Spirit, the risen and ascended life of Christ is working in the pastor:

Jesus Christ is become a Priest after the power of an endless life. These precious words are the key to the higher life. Jesus lives in heaven as High Priest in the power of an endless life. And as he lives, so he works in that power . . . He works with us *as a life*, as our own life, so that it is our very nature to delight in God and in his will. His priesthood acts as an inner life within us, lifting us up, not in thought but in spirit and in truth, into a vital fellowship with God. He breathes his own life in us. And he works it in us as *the power of life*, a life that is strong and healthy, because it is his own from heaven.²

Summarising, the pastor is appointed to service by the Holy Spirit, who is witness to God's own presence, 'and therefore entitled to right of way before all arguments based on an *a priori* reasoning'.³

PASTORAL GIFT EMPOWERED BY THE SPIRIT

In Ephesians 4:7–13, amongst the gifts given to the Church by Christ are 'pastors and teachers'. (The 'and' between pastors and teachers does not have to be so translated, for it can read: 'pastors, that is, teachers', or 'pastors, in particular, teachers'.) The giving of the diversity of gifts to God's people is seamlessly one with Christ's ascension.

Jesus the man's ascension, is of one piece with the resurrection and transformation of Jesus Christ from the grave. The resurrection means that Jesus has stripped the devil and the tyrants of this world of their power, death is defeated, sin has been conquered and God's new creation has begun. In this worldly present age Jesus has been raised, so he is the Messiah and therefore he is the world's true God.

Ephesians 4 says that the risen Jesus has ascended as conqueror to the Father's right hand having disarmed and captured the world powers. In ancient times, after every conquest by a king, there was a receiving of tribute and a giving of largesse. The gift of God's grace is Christ (Eph. 1:6; Rom. 6:23; 8:32). Christ then is the measure of God's gift (Eph. 4:7). When Christ gives gifts he gives himself, his true humanity, to us. This greatest of gifts is disclosed as the various gifts given to the Church.

The coming of the Holy Spirit is dependent on the atoning death of Christ and his resurrection (Acts 2:23, 32f.; John 15:26; Acts 1:21–22). The gifts, then, are the actions and the powers of the ascended Jesus at work in the Church for the consummation of God's kingdom.

The ascension of Jesus is the ascension of the glorified flesh and blood of Jesus into the presence of the Father. He ascends as bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh, still knitted to us and brings us in him into the face to face presence of God (Heb.

² Andrew Murray, *The Holiest of All: An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, Fleming H. Revell Co., Old Tappan, n.d., p. 241.

³ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Household of God*, SCM, London, 1955, p. 89.

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9:24). The incarnate Son of God lived in our flesh; we participated in Jesus' dying flesh. When Christ rose we rose with him and he carried us, in his humanity, into the presence of God.

The point I am making is that there is no break in our union with Christ so that in God's gift of Christ to us we receive all of Christ and the gifts of his true humanity. As pastors we derive our life and ministry from Christ. Jesus is the true shepherd, teacher, prophet, healer and leader of his flock and he continues his priestly ministry in the gifts he has given to the Church. The gifts of Christ or of the Spirit are not properties we gain or tools that we control. Therefore the gift of pastor does not become our property. No! We have the gifts as we participate in Christ and in the body of his people, the Church.

The Holy Spirit actualises the gift of pastor which we have in Christ. While we remain outside of Christ all that he has done remains useless to us. While we have the gift of pastor but are not filled with the Spirit our pastoring will lack cutting edge, we will be lame and the Gospel dishonoured. Our creedal orthodoxy avails us nothing. Paul bluntly says: 'Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him' (Rom. 8:9).

PASTORS AS MINISTERS OF THE SPIRIT

As we have already seen, teaching shepherds are given to the Church to equip the whole body for works of service of every kind (Eph. 4:11ff.). The service of pastors, elders and bishops probably belong together: 1 Timothy 3:2 and Titus 1:9 stipulate that 'a bishop must be . . . an apt teacher . . . able to give instruction in sound doctrine'. The book of Acts makes it abundantly clear that the Holy Spirit was given for power to witness to Christ. As that witness was powerfully and fruitfully declared, it is reported in Acts that the word of the Lord grew and multiplied.

Amongst the pastor's primary gifts is the priority of being a minister of the word of God. To preach the word is to proclaim Jesus Christ, his deeds, words and particularly his death for the reordering of human relationships with God and with each other. Because Jesus has been raised from the dead we must act as his heralds, announcing Christ's lordship to the entire world.

The word we preach is Christ's own word and we receive that word from the original prophets and apostles in the Bible. God speaks in the Bible and, when the Bible is proclaimed, God speaks to men and women as the living Christ works his salvation and leads his people who hear with faith.

Nevertheless, ministers of the word must also be ministers of the Spirit. To amplify this essential point we need to read 2 Corinthians 3:1–11. In verse 6 Paul says he is a minister of the Spirit. Those who have come to faith are themselves a recommendation that it was the Spirit's work in their hearts who commended Paul's ministry, and not any written authorisation. Paul argues that he was not competent to achieve this marvellous work apart from the Spirit. We are never capable of bringing the transcendent transformation event of the new world into people's lives.

We are not questioning the power of the authority of the scriptures as coming from the Holy Spirit (cf. 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:20f.; Matt. 5:17). These are written and prescribed for our salvation. Paul is not in favour of the Spirit over against scripture. However, the written word (*gramma*, v. 6) kills and the Spirit gives life. Apart from

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the Spirit, a ministry of teaching the scriptures is deadly. Like the law it works in concepts and theological ideas and propositions. Not only are these abstractions powerless to save, they also act to condemn us because of our inability to do them (Rom. 7:11f.; 8:2, 6). Without the Spirit, scripture is veiled, whatever its origin and no matter how great its glory. Pastors do not have the Gospel in their hands when they have an excellent knowledge of the Bible and the skills to teach it. The Word of God is the living Christ. For example, we are not saved by learning the doctrine of justification by grace alone through faith alone. We are saved by Christ alone. The Spirit of the Lord removes the veil over our minds because we do not have the capacity to know divine things (1 Cor. 2:11ff.). John Calvin in dealing with the contrast between letter and Spirit says:

... by the letter he means an external preaching which does not reach the heart, and by the Spirit life-giving teaching which is, through the grace of the Spirit, given effective operation in men's souls. Thus the term 'letter' means literal preaching which is dead and ineffective and perceived only by the ear: but the Spirit is spiritual teaching that is not uttered only with the mouth but effectively makes its way with living meaning into men's minds.⁴

To be a minister of the Spirit we must have first received the Holy Spirit and determined to have our ministry directed all the way by the Spirit (John 16:13; Eph. 5:18). We will then expect the effusion of the remainder of gifts given to the congregation to wisely and enthusiastically empower the service of the congregation. While the fullness of the Spirit does not mean chaos, it can mean the unexpected happening as the Spirit interrupts our managed orders of service in worship, preaching, healing and evangelisation. It would also mean that we would have new ideas (often called fresh expressions) for ministry and outreach that do not necessarily come off a whiteboard planning session. Our teaching would be biblical, but not stuck in the text, not commentary on the text, but as revelatory as the word of God lifts the bar and demolishes mediocrity.

LEADER OF THE COMMUNITY SPIRIT

From previous schools we will recall that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of community, fellowship, and radical hospitality (2 Cor. 13:13; Eph. 4:4f., 15f.). The Spirit is a divine person within the divine Trinity of persons, the community of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. There is a communion of love where each person makes room in their inner self. In the hospitality of the Godhead each person is in the other, serves the other, and receives from the other in perfect knowledge of each other. In the ever-blessed Trinity there are no secrets, but communication, harmony and no separation. This is the community of love that goes out to create and redeem so that ultimately humanity may participate in the divine nature.

The incarnate Son, Jesus, shows us the nature of the Triune community as he pours himself out obediently for the sake of those outside the community of God. This pouring out of himself or self-emptying is called *kenosis* (Phil. 2:7):

⁴ John Calvin, *The Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians, and the Epistles to Timothy, Titus and Philemon*, Calvin's NT Commentaries, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1980, p. 42.

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He puts himself in a position where only he knows himself in the way that the Father knows him. In the unknowability into which he enters, it is certainly the Father's part to reveal him . . . He emptied himself of the form of God in taking our form . . . God's Equal forgoes asserting himself as such, enters into the obscurity of human nature, seeks not to be called good (Mark 10:18) but like all other men to live by grace.⁵

Jesus descended to the deepest depths on the cross for our sake. The Holy Spirit upon whom Jesus depends for the entirety of his ministry is already familiar with abiding in human flesh and is the Spirit who forms the pastor into one who finds his real existence in the presence of others.

In the community of the Holy Spirit the pastor as leader will need to teach the congregation that we quench the Spirit when we introvert the gifts for our own sake. We will adjust our lives to the lives of others, not wanting to please ourselves. The pastor will find the reality of being a person of the Spirit, not studying at his desk but out and in with his community.

The community of the Spirit's radical hospitality does not wait until people show the fruit of conversion before it includes them but will accept them as God in Christ accepts us. The pastor will assist people to receive the life-changing Spirit. Neither can pastors of this community set themselves arrogantly above the rest to rule as a monarch. Rather, in the giving of leadership he will listen with the company of bishops (Phil. 1:1), in the congregation to the whole community as together they seek the will of God.

This is the one community that does not live for itself but for the world:

... a Church which has ceased to be mission contradicts part of the essential character of the Church, so we must also say that a mission which is not at the same time truly a Church is not a true expression of the divine apostolate. **An unchurchly mission is as much a monstrosity as an unmissionary Church.**⁶

CALL ME

Call on me in the day of trouble;
I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me (Ps. 50:15).

We are all familiar with trouble in ministry. A serious component of our trouble may be our lack of the Spirit and power. We cannot presume to have the Spirit's fullness (Eph. 5:18). The trouble is we have grown defensive in the troubles we have seen so that now it is difficult for us to be told anything by our leaders or congregation. We may have chosen not to delegate ministry and to invert our ministry, thus quenching the Holy Spirit in the community. Legalism and exclusivity soon follows such a disposition.

Deliverance for us will come through a fresh flow of the liberty of the Spirit. We have tended to call upon every other power and resource in the place of the Spirit. We may call upon our theology, biblical knowledge, or humanistic schemes. However, we may be the problem and all the other sources we call on have the same problem as we do. To call on the Father in our situation is to call for the deliverance of the Spirit, in the name of our sympathetic High Priest, Jesus, and to do this with deliberative faith and surrender to his gracious will.

⁵ Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Philippians*, SCM, London, 1962, pp. 63f.

⁶ Newbigin *The Household of God*, p. 148 (emphasis is mine).