

5 ASCENSION GIFTS IN THE CHURCH.



•AFRICA •ASIA •AMERICA
•EUROPE

Equipping, and releasing believers to actively
function in the body of the Christ.

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FOREWORD.

Pastor Joseph Chepkoyo graduated from one of the oldest and best Bible Colleges in Kenya, Scott Theological University, with some seemingly new and radical ideas that would certainly have perturbed and perplexed some of his professors, teachers and fellow students.

Unlike most of his peers, teachers, fellow church leaders and members, as well as almost all of his denominational descendants, he refused and ceased to believe in cessationism! That is, the belief that the gifts of the Holy Spirit that we find in the book of Acts and extraordinary signs and wonders as in 1 Corinthians 12 ceased with the apostles in the book of Acts.

Quite to the contrary, having thoroughly searched in the Bible, even before enrolling at Scott, he was already seized and held captive to the strong unshakeable conviction (quite disquieting within his denomination) that all of those gifts of the Holy Spirit were among those bequeathed to us by the Church's founder, the Lord Jesus Christ, when He ascended to heaven (Ephesians 4: 7) hence the title of this book: The Ascension Gifts.

Moreover, those gifts are not only alive and operational today but necessary for the church's existence, well-being, and fulfillment of God's purposes for His Church.

Furthermore, despite the traditional clergy/ laity dichotomy and their different roles that were assumed and implied in his training, as in almost all traditional and accredited theological institutions around the world, he

kept finding in the New Testament a much different model of the Church.

We observe in most churches, two classes of people, clergy and laity, separated by education, ordination and intonation. In common usage, the term ‘Lay’ has come to mean ‘unqualified’ or ‘Un-professional’ but as Chepkoyo dug further and searched deeper into the Scriptures, he found out, to his pleasant surprise, that the New Testament knows nothing of such thing. And the more he could clearly see, as multitudes of other believers and Bible scholars have seen through the history of Christianity is that all Christians are called to be ministers of the manifold and varied graces and giftings of God (1 Peter 4: 10). ALL are called and gifted and need to be equipped to serve the Lord Jesus Christ and each other as His ministers (Ephesians 4: 11-13). The people of God, both clergy and laity, are one people, all gifted and called in diverse ways.

Even the early critics of Christianity in the first century could not miss the fact that every Christian saw himself or herself as a carrier of the message of Christ. Very different and a far cry from the Career-ism or Professionalism that is so rampant in the church today. At the beginning of the second century, even Celsus, one of Christianity’s earliest harshest critics, sneered at the fact that, “Wool workers, cobblers, leather dressers, the most illiterate and vulgar of humankind were zealous preachers of the gospel.”

Not that there was no Church leaders or elders, then and now. Clearly, they were very much there, then and now; but not as a separate and a higher class from the 'laity'- they were called by God, not to do all the work of the ministry but to equip ALL the saints for the diverse ministries that the Lord has gifted and called ALL of us for.

The very concept of 'clergy and laity' is actually conspicuously absent from the pages of the New Testament. What can be clearly seen are apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers whose main job description is to prepare and equip all of God's people, every believer for his or her own ministry in the church and in the world. This does not mean the demotion of so-called full-time ministers or the promotion of the so-called laypersons.

This, one of the central themes of the New Testament has been at Chepkoyo's heart beat for as long as I have known him. Hardly any other book out of the very few that have come out of Africa can beat this one when it comes to expounding and shedding light on this very important subject. It is actually the best that I have come across so far.

This book is very far from such narrow anti-clericalism. Being a highly trained and ordained clergyman himself, Chepkoyo's Biblical goal is just this; the elevation of ALL the people of God, clergy and laity, to their true dignity as gifted ministers of Jesus Christ (Ephesians 4: 7-13).

Also conspicuously missing from the New Testament is the false dichotomy (inherited from Greek dualistic thinking) between the ‘Sacred’ and ‘Secular’. Yes, God calls many of us to serve in the sacred (the Church); and also calls many more of us to serve Him full-time, in the secular (the world)- the world of Business, Medicine, Academia, Communications, Engineering etc, even ‘dirty’ politics! Serving the Lord in the Church is not more sacred and ‘holier’ than serving Him in the world. As Chepkoyo rightly puts it, every Christian needs two conversions: First, conversion from the world to Christ; secondly, conversion to serve Christ in the world. As the Lord of the Church Himself declared, “You are the salt of the earth...and light of the world,” (Matthew 5: 13, 14).

Yet, William Tyndale, the English Reformer, who translated the Bible into English and was martyred (his body burned to ashes) for it, was also considered heretical for teaching that, “There is no work better than another to please God; to pour water, to wash dishes, to be a cobbler, or an apostle, and to preach, all are one to please God.”

No one's gifts or calling is more important than any other. We don't find any one person in any of all the churches in the New Testament calling all the shots. To speak of any one person, or group in any congregation, denomination or ministry as ‘the minister’ or ‘ministers’ is to fall short of Christ's intention and purpose for His Church.

But alas! In many if not most churches, it often seems like the main role of the ‘laity’ is to show up inside a building or tent, sit up, shut up and pay up, while so-called ‘professionals’ run the show. No one that I personally know of, has labored so long, so persistently and restlessly to lay to rest the lie that God cannot use the so-called laity as much or as well as the so-called clergy.

One outstanding characteristic that has stood out in Chepkoyo’s life and ministry throughout the years, is the courage of his convictions. As has been well said, the measure of a man is the beliefs, convictions and ideals he not only lives for but is also ready to die for. You can be sure that along the way, Chepkoyo’s convictions have costed him dearly. At one point, rather than toe the denominational line, recant his beliefs and retain his relatively lucrative and comfortable position as pastor in a thriving urban church, true to form, he refused to conform, and chose to walk out.

Chepkoyo has done an excellent and commendable work in compellingly showing God’s people that they are gifted. He has been ably and lucidly teaching them to identify and activate by the Spirit’s enablement their true giftings and ministries.

It is crucial for us to recognize our God-given giftings and those of others, so that we may better be able to accept each other’s ministries and to know what to expect from one another.

God has entrusted every believer with talents/ gifts (Matthew 25: 14-30; Luke 19: 12-27). He expects all of

us to invest these gifts and resources to advance His Kingdom. ALL of us will ultimately, be held accountable for the way we have invested and used these gifts for the advancement of His Kingdom.

Having lived and served the living Lord for 44 years, together, he has proved to be tried, tested, and seasoned servant of God. He is competent and balanced teacher of the word.

It is my joy and honor to highly commend to you this timely, excellent and life-changing book that has flowed through the heart, and pen of this true servant of God. It is a book not only to read, but also to implement and act upon. It will change your life, ministry, church and the world around you. Welcome to the life-changing adventure of discovering and using the ascension gifts that our ascended, living Lord and Saviour has gifted to all His people – you included!

Dr. Kenneth Odhiambo, ThD,
Senior pastor, Nakuru Chapel,
Chaplain, Maasai Mara University.

DEDICATION

- To the body (all believers in Christ) of which I proudly belong to.
- To all equipping church leaders: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers whose mentorship and literature have influenced my life and ministry through the power of the Holy Spirit.
- To my dear family, dear wife Dinah, beloved Daughters: Joylyne, Jacklyn and Daisy, who have celebrated my pastoral fruitfulness and supported me during tough times when leading them and ministry.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I am grateful foremost to Jesus Christ for saving and guiding me on the journey of faith. I acknowledge Him as my Savior and Lord. He is my perfect apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, and teacher, glory and honor be unto Him.

Secondly, my beloved wife Dinah, I always cherish your prayers, advice and kindness. You have stood with me through ministry's joys and challenges. You are a competent copy typist and a good listener. Your patience as I dictated notes to you was incredible, exciting and inspiring. I am forever obligated to you my dear for your encouragement, and literally journeying with me in the adventure of writing this book.

Thirdly, my daughters: Joylyne, Jacklyn and Daisy you are lovely and greatly inspiring. I value your contribution in God's work.

Fourthly, Bishop Julius Chepsat, your consistency in demonstrating the love of God during discussion on this subject significantly motivated me. Thank you for your stand in Christ, and taking care of His Church. Your humility and sacrifice have impacted my life, and family. Apostle Peter Keitany, Secretary General Jesus Foundation Ministry Sogon, I appreciate your support and standing with me during rough times in ministry and

transitions. You have done a lot of work on the journey towards the publication of this book.

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Fifth, special thanks to Jon Byler, your great suggestions in early stages of the manuscript. I highly appreciate your guiding questions that shaped the flow of my ideas in this book.

I am also indebted to you Rev. Peter Kingori for your faithful, and skillful editorial well done job. Your face-to-face meetings, kind compliments and suggestions lead to reduction of the volume of this book bringing it to the current shape and size.

Finally, I praise God for apostolic, and prophetic movements whose literature and counsel have influenced my faith and ministry.

INTRODUCTION

Forty days after Jesus' resurrection, the Biblical storyline took a remarkable turn: Jesus was taken up before their very eyes as they looked steadfastly toward heaven. Two men stood by them in white apparel; and said, "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11).

The ascension gifts of Jesus Christ in these gifted persons are all leadership ministries. They give leadership to the believers in terms of direction, outreach, knowledge of the word of God and protection from the enemies of their souls. They do this according to each given grace, and gifted ability in their own area of gifting.

These gifts should be treated more than an amazing exclamation point for the resurrection. It is a new event in its own right. The ascension is a vital part of the redemption story. If we simply collapse the ascension into the resurrection, we miss stunning benefits tied directly to Jesus being taken into heaven.

We cannot limit these 'fivefold ministries' to certain ministerial activities or leadership positions nor can we put them in 'described boxes' as we humanly would like to do. There are no scriptures that even suggest this. Together we must receive from one another, be prepared to be corrected and be taught from each other.

I will use the term ASCENSION GIFTS in this book instead of the common term - FIVE-FOLD MINISTRY.

This is a deliberate choice: “When Jesus ascended on high, He gave gifts to men” (Ephesians 4:8). I will simply avoid some common terminologies, and illustrations used by some teachers on this subject which elevates one gift in detriment of the others. It is important to understand the scope which these five ascension gifts revealed by apostle Paul’s influence in the church today.

This book will guide members of the church to discover their gifts, and challenge church leaders to maximizing people’s potentials. Max De Pree states: “Leaders owe the people space to grow, space in the sense of freedom, freedom in the sense of enabling gift to be exercised.”

The word of God teaches us that each Christian has a gift ministry, that is, a ministry he or she is to carry out in the body of Christ. 'Ministry' simply means 'service', and every Christian has been specifically enabled and empowered to serve. 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 makes it clear that God assigned each Christian’s position in the body of Christ, and that every member is necessary.

Romans 12:3-8 informs us that although we are different members of the body and have different functions, we each have the gifts of God’s grace that were given to us, enabling us to serve a specific purpose in the body of the Christ, the Church. Thus, each Christian has a 'gift for service ministry'.

God has placed them in the church, together with the elders that they can effectively build up the body of Christ, and bring it to maturity; thus accomplish His will. The enormous responsibility which God has accorded

them in the church is “to prepare God’s people for works of service” (Ephesians 4:12).

It has been said, “He who buries his talent is making a grave mistake.” This is true according to the parable in Matthew 25:27. God has given each believer a spiritual gift, and He wants them to use it for His glory. We often fail to use these precious gifts.

We may deny that we actually have a spiritual gift or if we acknowledge it, we may doubt its usefulness to glorify God, and then bury it, but we must realize that God wants us to be involved in His work. He is so glorious that by His Holy Spirit He freely gives gifts to all who are saved. He not only wants us to discover our spiritual gifts, but also expects us to grow and put them to work each day.

The primary purpose of spiritual, and the ascension gifts is to empower the church in order to preach Christ to the entire world. It is also given to grow the church. In 1 Corinthians 14:12, the Bible says, “So, also you since you are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek to abound for the edification of the church”. Therefore, our goal should be to establish, build, and uplift the believers with our gifts.

These ascension gifts are diverse; how can we work as a team in bringing unity in diversity? As church leaders and believers, we will be interacting with men and women of God with these 'titles'. Their ministry will affect us in one way or another. We should never become weary, but always keep exploring and growing in the revelations of the Spirit for the glory of God.

We need to give each other the space to grow, be ourselves, and exercise our diversity. It is important for church leaders to develop a philosophy of ministry that details how member's spiritual gifts should be used in the ministry. Programs should be initiated to help people put their gifts into use in specific ways within church.

Let me say here that, none of them can claim to be the sole custodian of all God's truth. All apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers must agree; each gifted person should know how best he can work with the churches that embrace the five ascension gifts and be of corporate benefit to the body of Christ, in terms of checks and balances of these precious gifts given graciously by Christ.

I intend to look at the functions of each of the five ascension gifts, the challenges facing those who operate in these graces and also sensitize believers. Every believer has a role to play in the body of the Christ. So, there is a need to discover your gift and how to use it to benefit the church.

This book is a benefit to all church leaders and believers to get a proper perspective and know their divine role in the body of the Christ. In this book you will understand some reasons why apostolic, and prophetic gifts are rejected in some denominations today.

So, again, each Christian has a gift that was given due to the ascension of Jesus Christ, not just a few select Christians. The epistles of Romans, Corinthians, and Ephesians are all in an agreement that each Christian has

a 'gift' ministry, a way of serving that is specifically given to him or her.

CHAPTER 1: UNDERSTANDING THE ASCENSION GIFTS

Seven years after receiving Christ, I attended an evangelistic seminar where the speaker taught on the gifts of the Holy Spirit from 1 Corinthians 12. As I listened keenly, I realized that it was an important teaching that touches my life journey of faith in Christ. When the seminar ended, I began my search to identify what gift God has endowed me with.

The quest for knowledge of spiritual things was triggered, and this led me to read many Christian literature to further my understanding. I found that the gifts of the Holy Spirit were associated with pentecostals and charismatics. I attended Christian meetings ministered by people with different gifts of the Holy Spirit. I made a decision to embrace these divine resources which were rarely utilized fully in the church.

In 1990-2000 a great revival broke out in our district, Kabarnet, Baringo County, and brought about significant impact in the body of Christ in Baringo and neighbouring counties. The fire of prayer and intercession, bold preaching of the gospel, new spiritual songs and new forms of worship, visions and dreams became the order in some fellowships whose members had experienced revival.

Gathering of brethren with less or no program became the norm of these fellowships. Sensitivity to the leading of the Holy Spirit was encouraged during worship. Listening to the prompting of the Holy Spirit in the planning of church

activities was promoted by a team of leaders. Great conviction of sin, repentance and reconciliation was the hallmark in this move of God.

Those who were filled by the Holy Spirit started questioning hypocrisy and sin in the church. During this revival movement, God gathered brethren in His own unique ways to manifest His glory through healing, deliverance, prophetic utterances signs and wonders accompanied those preaching the gospel. In 1999-2000 the revival had restored the church back into apostolic, and prophetic foundational truths collaborating with ascension gifted persons. This saints' revival movement got in touch with a team of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers (APEPT) to accelerate this move of God. These teams organized conferences for the new fellowships. Evangelists visited churches to challenge members to reach out to the unreached. Pastors and teachers assisted each other taking care and nurturing the new believers. Other gifts of the Holy Spirit were recognized and functioned accordingly. Spontaneous move of the Holy Spirit was experienced during the gathering of believers. A number of new fellowships were started to accommodate those who were rejected by their denominations.

As common with other revival movements, Baringo revival had its own share of pitfalls and setbacks. Despite the good things accompanying the revival and emerging of ascension gifts in the churches, immaturity and appetite

for power proved and pruned some leaders in the movement on the way. However, those who kept listening to the Holy Spirit, and took all risk in obeying Him are still enjoying the sweet fruits of the revival in Baringo County, and beyond.

There are benefits from true apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers in the church. Until we learn to pursue, and accommodate these gifts, we are prone to reject everything that is not appealing to the norms, systems or our theological inclinations. It is my prayer that we walk in step with the Holy Spirit to experience the fresh move, the Spirit of revival from any drowsiness that might have gripped within to make us fall back to routines, forms and empty, boring religious activities in our churches. By understanding the ascension gifts, we will move forward with zeal, and spiritual fire to do exploit in expanding the Kingdom of God. This is the purpose behind the writing of this book.

Jesus gave the church gifted persons to continue His service of equipping believers to develop and employ their own spiritual giftedness. These are called ascension gifts because they were given by Jesus to the church after His ascension to heaven. Ephesians 4:7-8, states, *“But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it”*.

When He ascended on high, He led captives and gave gifts to men. The ascended Lord Jesus is actively managing the flow of graces to all parts of His body. The Greek word for gifts we find in this portion of passage is “*doma*”, it

implies the gift of a person as in Hebrew (*Targum*) “*He gave gifts to the son of men*” (Psalm 68:18). Rick Wideners explains: “*When Christ ascended He took possession of a group of people and gave out specific set of gifts.*”

Paul under inspiration of the Holy Spirit amplifies the original Psalm to explain what Christ captured from the enemy through His death, resurrection and ascension which He distributed to the church. While our treasure in Christ includes spiritual blessings (Ephesians 1:3), it also comprises of spiritual gifts given to 'each one' (Ephesians 4:7; Romans 6:12).

Paul followed the Jewish Rabbis exegesis to explain that Jesus, the conqueror distributed the gifts to His loyal subjects. Some commentators see a reference here to the custom of the triumphant Roman emperors who on return home from war would throw coins or plunders to the rejoicing crowds. This is brought out in verse 8 and 11, where we are told that Christ Himself gave ascension gifts to the members of His Church.

Paul explains how the Lord worked out. First, he came on earth among the captives and led them to Himself. This is an important fact which sometimes is overlooked. The Lord does not come to set us free to do what we like. He frees us, delivering us from one captivity to become captive to Himself.

The Lord Jesus went down during His death; He was raised and then ascended to Heaven. When He ascended, having conquered sin, death and Hell; He led captives in

His train, and gave gifts to men. Christ received gifts from the Father so that He might bestow to His body.

So, Paul says Christians are to see themselves as God's gifts to a community of believers, who live as captive of Christ and exercise the gifts given to them through the power of the Holy Spirit. The ascension gifts continue and accelerate the pouring out of grace in the church. This is as a result of Jesus' victory over death, and the ascension to heaven as described in Ephesians 1:20-23.

The ascension gifts are not given to help people get offerings or honor. They are not functioning titles for flaunting or boastful display. They are tasks given to accomplish the intended purpose, 'preparing God's people for service' (Ephesians 4:12).

Too often, as God's people, we have highly regarded some gifted individuals in expense of others. We fail to understand that what they have are gifts from God and that the Holy Spirit's power is at work in them. The Purpose of all these gifts include the following;

(i) To prepare us for service. This is what verse 12 tells us, the Lord has given these gifts to prepare His people for the work of service. The chief task is making the saints function actively as members of the body of the Christ.

(ii) To help us grow. The Bible says these gifts are given, so, that the body of Christ may be built up (Ephesians 4:12). God does not want us to remain as spiritual babies (1 Corinthians 3: 1-3). When the gifts operate effectively in the church, we are all encouraged and grow up (2 Peter 3:18). We all grow to become in every respect the mature

body of him who is the head of the Church, Jesus Christ (Ephesians 4:15).

(iii) To protect us from harm. The Lord has distributed these gifts in the church so that we may be instructed in the truth and know how to detect the devil's deadly counterfeits and lies.

The enemy is always ready to deceive even the 'elect' (Matthew 24:24). The proper guidance from these gifted leadership will help us to detect the devil's schemes, and the false prophets (Mark 13:22). As these gifts function appropriately, they easily warn against 'destructive heresies' (2 Peter 2:1).

It is actually clear that these are equipping gifts released by the gifted persons to cause the church to grow, increase and ground the believers in the faith of the only true God. Jesus said you will know a tree by its fruit because the fruit will identify what type of tree it is (Matthew 7:17-19). In the same way, the fruits of the ascension gifts in individuals can be identified.

The apostles are to set things within the church according to the divine order of God. The prophet is to expose and rebuke sin. This will bring fear of the Lord, and holiness to the church.

The fruit of the evangelist is that they may have a divine authority, and passion to reach those who are yet to believe in Christ. The fruit of a pastor is to provide oversight over a congregation; like the way shepherd watches over the sheep.

The fruit of a teacher is that they may have special endowments to teach the word of God, and bring revelation of God's word to feed the sheep. If any person claims to operate in the ascension giftedness, and does not have the fruit of the gift evident in their lives, then they are not called into the ascension gifts leadership.

It is important for the believers to know why these endowed resource persons were given to the church by Jesus Himself who is the head of the church (Ephesians 1:22; 5:23; Colossians 1:18). The Holy Spirit is the administrator of all. Jesus came to do and teach. Jesus distributes the ascension gifts to the church; the Holy Spirit is working to bring forth the mind and the will of the Father and the Son to the church (John 16:13-14).

The ascension gifts are instruments used by the Holy Spirit to equip believers to serve effectively. We need to recognize and embrace these equippers for who they are. The purpose of ascension gifts is to build up believers in love, unity and deep relationship with Jesus. Individually and corporately, all must be connected to the head of the Church, Jesus. "From whom the whole body is joined, and held together by every supporting ligament, and grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work" (Ephesians 5:16).

THE DURATION OF GIFTS.

How long will the gifts be needed in the church? The ultimate purpose of these ascension gifts given by the Lord to His church is indicated in Ephesians 4:13, it tells

us the duration of the gifts: "...until we all reach unity in understanding and knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ." The contentious passage is 1 Corinthians 13, "But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away." Some evangelicals believe that this passage should be taken literally including its description of when apostles stopped to be in the church. How long will the gifts be needed in the church? The same passage also determines when that end will occur. I believe that, time is still way off. It is only until Ephesians 4:13 is actualized.

When we will be with Christ, who is the head of the body, the church, He will be "All in all" (Ephesians 1:23), and there will be no room for, or need of gifts. It is written, "But when perfection comes, the imperfect disappear" (1 Corinthians 13:10).

By the time Ephesians was written, the church had moved from its early energetic somewhat chaotic beginning to an increased sense of order. Paul in the book of Ephesians receives a revelation which identifies five key leadership roles. These are the core leadership functions and their purpose is to train, and empower the members of the congregation for ministry.

Over the centuries some dispensational theologians developed doctrines that taught that these ascension gifts had been removed from the church. Until the late 20th century, the church functioned without recognizing these

foundational truths. But the apostolic-prophetic movement has restored some Biblical truths, spiritual experiences and ministries.

God has “...placed all things under His feet, and appointed Him to be head over everything for the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fill everything in every way” (Ephesians 1:23). Indeed, the apostles today are simply pointing us back to early church teaching, apostolic doctrine.

The view point that apostles and prophets were only there during the early church, and after the Church was birthed and the Bible was written, they were removed from the church, does not match with the word of God. No scriptures suggest that apostolic, and prophetic functions in the church were deleted.

Church history reveals that the 1950s primarily emphasized the role of evangelist, the 1960, 1970, 80s, 90s emphasized the role of the pastor, evangelists, teacher, prophet, and apostles respectively, *Dr. Bill Hamon, (2007)*. The restoration of these ascension gifts has equipped the church to mature into full measure of Christ.

The restoration of the apostles brought about the activation of power of gifts in the saints. The apostles kept teaching more on ministering to the whole man; to meet both natural, and spiritual needs. The prophetic anointing brought about the activation of vocal, and revelation gifts among the saints (1 Corinthians 12: 7-11). This brought about the revelation of ministers in the marketplace.

During the Pentecostal movement there was a revelation of not only the gifts of the Holy Spirit with speaking in other tongues, but also the nine spectacular gifts of the Holy spirit recorded in Acts 2:1-39; 1Corinthians 12:7-11).They greatly taught, preached, and prayed for the believers to receive, and manifest the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

However, there was no open revelation for activating the saints to function in the gifts of the Holy Spirit as it is written in 1 Corinthians 2:4;12:7-11;14:1,3,6,12,31,39; 2 Timothy 1:6; 2 Corinthians 3:6; Romans 12:6). Throughout church history, the rejection of truth occurs when the desired revival, and restoration comes through unexpected source, person or at an undesirable place.

As I have stated before, this dispute deals with only two of five gifts: apostles and prophets. The other three - evangelists, pastors and teachers enjoys popular acceptance among those who deny the existence of the above two gifts.

Those who reject the presence of apostles today in the church maintained that it would be impossible for any contemporary Christian to meet the Biblical qualifications required for someone to be considered an apostle. The New Testament articulates at least three necessary criterias which they reinforce this disagreement as follows:

- 1) An apostle had to be physical witnesses of the resurrected Christ

2) An apostle had to be personally appointed by the Lord Jesus Christ.

3) An apostle had to be able to authenticate his apostolic appointment with miraculous signs.

It is sustained that qualifications alone exclusively demonstrate that there are no apostles in the church today. No living person has seen the risen Christ with his or her own eyes; no one is able to perform miraculous signs like those done by apostles in the book of Acts and in spite of presumptuous claims to the contrary; no one in modern history has been personally, and directly appointed as an apostle by the Lord Jesus.

To them, those who claim to have seen visions of the resurrected Lord are slammed as highly suspects, and impossible to verify; they simply don't meet the apostolic criteria – since an apostle had to see the resurrected Christ in the flesh in his own eyes. Matthew McMahon candidly advances the above controversy by saying, “Apostles were required to have seen the risen Christ, so that he could preach a resurrection which he had himself been an eyewitness (1 Corinthians 9:1).

He had to be called, and commissioned by the risen Lord directly (John 20:21; Acts 26:15-18), which also meant that he had received the gospel from Christ Himself (Galatians 1:11-12).” Other additional credential which are used to disqualify the presence of apostles today are: Lack of miraculous power (Hebrews 2:4; 2 Corinthians 12:12), success in evangelism (1 Corinthians 9:2;2

Corinthians 3:1-3; Galatians 2:7-9) and capacity to suffer patiently (2 Corinthians 12:12).

Concerning the replacement of Judas in Acts chapter 1, some claims that such replacement was necessary at this point in redemptive history because Judas wickedly removed himself from the apostolate before the apostles were really able to begin their major function as witnesses to the resurrection of Christ.

Are there prophets in the church today? It is said that there have been no such prophets in God's church for centuries. Part of the reason is that the Bible, God's revealed Word, is now complete. It is the work of evangelists, pastors and teachers to continue to warn the world, and preach the gospel.

The contention is that the gift of prophet seems to have been a temporary gift given by Christ for the laying of the foundation of the church. They cite (Ephesians 2:20) that prophets were foundational to the church. The prophet proclaimed a message from the Lord to the early believers. Sometimes the message was revelatory (new revelation, and truth from God), and sometimes predictive (see Acts 11:28 and 21:10).

The reason given for prophets in the early church, and not today is that the early Christians did not have the complete Bible; some early Christians did not have access to any of the books of the New Testament. Thomas Schreiner who defends this argument says, "The early churches didn't have the complete canon of Scripture for some time, and hence an authoritative and infallible prophetic ministry

was needed to lay the foundation for the church in those early days”.

The advancement of these thoughts is that, in the early church New Testament prophets 'filled the gap' by proclaiming God's message to the people who did not have access of the written Scriptures.

It is advanced by this school of thought that today the New Testament stands where the apostles, and prophets stood. Their authority is exercised today through their writings, and of their close associates like Luke, Mark, and James. The same way Paul made apostolic teaching the final authority in those days, we make it in our day.

That means the truth is our authority. Therefore, they conclude, since the New Testament endorses the Old Testament as God's inspired word, we take the whole Bible as our rule and measuring rod of all teachings and all prophecies about what we should believe and how we should live.

Others claim that a look at the New Testament itself seems to indicate that the early period of Christianity included some aspects unique to the period. Among these are the role of apostles, and prophets. The latter New Testament books, they say, give much emphasis to warning believers about false prophets.

Though there do not appear to be apostles and prophets today as of the early church, there are concessions which must be noted. First, it is still possible that God can speak through people in whatever way He chooses to reveal certain information at certain times. This 'revealed' will

does not contradict what God has already revealed about Himself in the Bible.

In standard, this type of 'apostles' and 'prophets' are different from being a prophet in the same way certain figures were in New Testament. We cannot add the Scriptures.

Secondly, the need for apostles, and prophets in the essence of those who speak truth to a sinful culture are still of great value. Though these individuals may not be prophets in the same sense as the New Testament prophets, the role of bold speakers of God's truth remains a great need to the body of Christ. Jesus said "Whoever welcomes a prophet as a prophet will receive a prophet's reward." (Matthew 10:41). In Ephesians 3:4-5 Paul's teachings on the calling of gentile church which was made known by the prophets in different ages of the Jewish church is exceedingly clear.

It is implied here that apostles and prophets were intended for the full church age, and not just for the first century church. Paul declares that these discoveries are totally new, and now revealed for the first time by the Spirit of God. The mystery is 'now', several decades after Christ resurrection and ascension to heaven.

If we ask when the score of that revelation came to Paul, it was undoubtedly in the Damascus road experience (Acts 26:12-18; Galatians 1:11-12,15-16); but the process by which it was revealed and established to the wider circles of apostles and prophets took longer (Acts 15; Galatians 2).

I wish to stress again that, the giving of the gifts by Christ was not just to get the early church started. It is needed, "...until we all become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ." (Ephesians 4:13). I agree with Tim Vink who stated, "The passage in Ephesians 4 has the ascension of Jesus in full view as the gospel hinge of history on display. The implication is clear, the five-fold equipping leadership roles are the post-ascension strategy from heaven. They are for today, while Jesus reigns at the right hand of the Father for the church and over the world, until His second coming." It is undouble, it is an ongoing process occupying the entire time between Jesus' first coming, and His second.

The prejudice, fear or misinterpretation have deprived the Lord's Church of the two foundational gifts, apostles and prophets who He placed in the church. The pastors, evangelists, and teachers alone cannot bring the church to maturity. They were not intended to; Jesus gave all five gifts for that purpose.

We need to give a room to all five ascension gifts to develop, be established and flourish so as to impact both believers and unbelievers. James H. Feeney categorically states, "And along with these much-needed fivefold gifts, may the church recognize also the Biblical, local church ministries of God - called elders and deacons, as well as the supernatural gifts of the Holy Spirit".

Before we embrace these persons and their functions in the church, we need to understand the importance of these essential gifts. If we are to receive and benefit from these

gifts which are there simply to equip, and release the members in the church to effectively serve the Master. If we are to allow them take their rightful places of services and fulfill their destinies, we must grasp and embrace the ministry of apostles and prophets in our local churches.

We need their services for the continual building of the church. I do agree that, the foundation was laid "...for no one can lay any other foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 3: 9-11). God is building the church through the five gifts, and other gifts of the Holy Spirit. All the five leadership functions-gifted persons are God's fellow-workers, the church is God's field, and building.

Apostle Paul clearly stated, "By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder; someone else is building on it." (1 Corinthians 3:10). What should worry us are the materials we use in building the church. Are we using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw? Verse 12. The building will continue, "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" (Ephesians 4:13).

DM Lloyd stated: "We must continue to bear in mind that God's ultimate object and purpose is to re-unite in one all things, and that one of the chief functions of the Christian church is to manifest this to the world." Every believer must portray the life of Jesus in all aspects of life.

While we discuss these ascension gifts, we must remind ourselves that apostle Paul is not setting out a full

exhaustive account, and description of church's divine resources. He is just illustrating a principle which should be viewed in the larger picture of other gifts of the Holy Spirit in church. What must be clear is, in the life of the church there are different gifts, and every one of them is designed to lead to same end of unity (1 Cor 12:4-6). “...Until we all attain to unity of faith and knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ...”(Ephesians 4:13)

The apostles, and prophets must remain and function in the body of Jesus until the above objective is accomplished. These gifts are for today, while Jesus reigns at the right hand of the Father, the church and the world will continue enjoying the services of these gifted individuals until His second coming.

The Church needs the leadership of prophets, and apostles. There are great results as we embrace, encourage and nurture these gifted persons in our local churches. It is clear, Jesus, the chief apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor and teacher is giving expression of Himself to the church in form of these gifts. The believers should be determined to search Scriptures and rediscover the proven historical landmarks of God's Word.

God has chosen us for the purpose of serving Him, and His glory. Ephesians 2:10 says, “For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” God already has plans for all believers in Christ. He wants us to listen

to His calling, discover our gifts and make ourselves available to serve.

He expects us to use the gifts He has given us. We may know what the Bible says about exercising our gifts, pray fervently and live self-sacrificial life, and at the same time, know nothing about the impact of shared ministry.

Mutual submission to each other and respecting diversity of gifts will greatly benefit the church. When we discover our ascension and other spiritual gifts; and serve with the love of Christ, good things happen, the church grows and reaches out to those who have not believed in Jesus.

God wants to reconcile with us through His Son Jesus, and not only with us, but all people in the world. “This is good, and pleases God. He wants all to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:3-4). That is why, we, by His Spirit, are called to be part of His redeeming work on earth.

CHAPTER 2: DESCRIPTION OF THE ASCENSION GIFTS

The church continues witnessing the emerging of apostles, and prophets who equip the believers to function effectively in their local churches and market ministry. This means, they identify both spiritual and natural talents to guide them to the areas of their gifting where they can excel wherever they are placed by God.

1: APOSTLES

Apostles have a heavy burden of building on the only true foundation. They lay the foundation of new local churches, and see that they come into full maturity. They are visionary, usually see and focus on the future of the church. As the 'sent ones', they ensure that faith is well transmitted from one generation to another.

They think about the future, bridging barriers, establishing the church in the context of truth, developing leaders, and networking trans-locally. They can solely focus on initiating new ideas and rapid expansion; this may stretch others and even offend many. Their function is to father. It was Paul who planted, and fathered the church at Corinth (1 Corinthians 9:1, 2); he did not manipulate or exploit them.

The word apostle in the Greek literally means, 'Sent out one'. An apostle can be defined as one called and sent by God to have spiritual authority, oversee the local church and extend the kingdom. The apostolic gift is a special

ability that God gives to certain members of the body of Christ to assume and exercise divinely.

Paul sees himself as a planter of the gospel into unbroken soil. This is perhaps one of the Paul's metaphors for apostolic function. All contemporary apostolic services share in this planting function (1 Cor 3:6-8). That is why Paul reprimanded the Corinthians, "I am not writing this to ashame you, but to warn you, as my dear children. Even though you have ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus, I became your father through the gospel (1 Cor 4:14, 15).

He reminded the Galatians church of his effort to see them grow in faith, he challenged them, "My dear children, for whom I am again in pain of childbirth until Christ is formed in you" (Galatians 4:19). The apostolic grace helps to keep the church's growth, health, and maturity. The churches Paul had planted, and laboured for them were clear evidence for his apostleship. I think our struggle with the idea of 'an apostle' today, and finding difficulty to identify this gift in the emerging forms is either because of its assumption to have expired, or because an apostle hears from the Holy Spirit and sets things in order accordingly; or because we often see abuse, among those who are gifted in apostolic leadership.

The word apostle is defined as one who is chosen and sent with a message. They were referred to as wise master builders (1 Cor 3:10). Apostles envision a house from blueprint through construction to the last nail, and roof shingles. They think systematically about how to build

something from the ground up in the most efficient, and effective way. A preacher does not wake up in the morning and come up with a title of an apostle. In Revelation 2:2, the Lord commended the church at Ephesus, "I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but they are not, and have found them false."

Today we have some preachers with titles of apostles. The question is, who are you an apostle to? Where are the churches you have planted, and natured?

Apostles have courage and ability to keep the church moving forward, growing and building in new directions. Paul confessed that, "Beside everything else, I face daily pressure of my concern for all churches" (2 Corinthians 11:28). Paul didn't only plant churches, but trained and raised up leaders in the cities the Holy Spirit sent him to work.

Once he left physically, he continued to minister through the many letters he wrote to them and constantly prayed. Whenever he had a chance, he visited and strengthened the believers.

Apostles are to exercise spiritual authority which flows from Christ through their character, gifts and abilities to reach and establish the believers in the kingdom. Their burden is to ground the church on solid Biblical teaching. Their desire is to train, and raise up leaders who will come into maturity, release them and move on to function in new grounds or regions beyond.

The truth is, one may have gifts and fail to fulfill the purpose of these gifts. In any event, the main thing we need to recognize is that these gifts are given by Christ and are supposed to function inside and outside the church under the covering, umbrella of the local church leadership.

While apostolic gift is still being operational today in the church, there is no new truth to be added to the Scripture because the precious truth is poured to us by the Holy Spirit. Those who teach the truth wrongly are men and women who deliberately ignore the work of the Holy Spirit. They fail to understand that apostles have been mandated to equip the church for its discipleship task of reaching out to those who have not given their lives to Jesus Christ.

Apostles inspire, and motivate others towards the fulfillment of God given goals. An apostle builds and establishes God given work in the church. Apostolic grace is a mobilizing grace. We need apostolic vision of the hour to point us towards and bring us into God's present-day purposes. In short, it is important for the church to embrace apostolic leadership.

At the core of apostolic functions lies a cluster of God's given, and Spirit produced abilities; the ability to nurture and protect believers from falsehood. The church needs this level of leadership if we are going to rise in our potential as sons and daughters of the living God. First Corinthians shows how rare true spiritual fatherhood is.

While it is true that apostles build and establish God's work in the body of the Christ, they are not satisfied simply to shine as 'superstars' or merely to preach to congregations of thousands. They have a burden to establish something. They agree with Apostle Paul, "By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds" (1 Corinthians 3:10).

They see the value of equipping, and working with others. D.L Moody is reported saying, "I don't want to do the work of 1000 men. I would rather set 1000 men to work." All the equipping gifts of Christ mentioned in Ephesians 4:11 are leadership, enabling gifts sent to equip the body of Christ. But nowhere is this more apparent than in the equipping gift of the apostles in the church today.

They don't attempt to do everything themselves. In fact, their primary concern is to raise others. Apostolic grace is strategic level of leadership and has potential to proclaim the gospel and establish churches in cities or nations. Therefore, we easily see how much we need the full expression of apostolic grace in our time.

In these seasons of apostolic anointing, I challenge every leader working within apostolic and prophetic networks to embrace this timely leadership. To all of the ministers, let us rise and press on and do whatever level of apostolic service God is directing us to do as we function in the body of Christ. More importantly placing ourselves in the apostolic focus on equipping every believer to do what they are called to do.

Equipping is the only one measure of the five ascension gifts. While a pastor might focus on identity and purpose, the apostle is into the next level of mobilizing into that purpose. Along with other gifts, apostles identify both spiritual and natural talents in people and put them where they need to be.

We know that everything rises, and falls on leadership because leadership models the way. The apostolic grace is always ready to create a leadership development culture.

It is also clear that most of our churches are weak in leadership, and are desperate of apostolic leadership. If we give room to the apostolic grace, it will spotlight into our leadership weakness. Since the apostolic grace is relational and focuses on leadership development, it is upon the local church leadership to invite or relate with apostolic networks.

IDENTIFYING APOSTOLIC LEADERS.

How do we identify apostolic gift or grace in the church today? Jon Hietbrink states the following six (6) indicators that are evident as an apostolic gift function in the church.

A) APOSTOLIC LEADERS START NEW THINGS.

Perhaps the surest sign of an apostolic gift at work is a litany of new things that have been started due to their influence, whether spiritual or not. Apostolic leaders

demonstrate a remarkable ability to raise things on ground, be it a new initiative, gathering, or community.

Gifted apostles leave behind a trail of new communities that have come into being due to their vision and initiative. In your network, whose vision was behind the new communities or initiatives that have started?

B) DEMONSTRATE SPIRITUAL INTENSITY.

Another indicator of the apostolic gift at work is unusual spiritual intensity, especially focused towards starting new things. Apostolic leaders are visibly zealous for God, God's mission and people, their passion leads them to act, even when the odds are stacked against them.

In younger leaders, this passion can often create as many problems as it solves, either because they find themselves passionate about everything or sometimes the wrong things, but we can't allow immaturity to blind us to see the potential latent in these emerging leaders. Who in your network radiates an almost exhausting expression of passion?

C) THINK STRUCTURALLY.

Apostolic leaders are consistently thinking about the system and structures that undergird a community and how they could be redesigned to produce more fruit. The redesigned might be devising new, overhauls to current structures or suggesting brand new initiatives. Apostolic leaders often demonstrate an aptitude for connecting

previously desperate parts of a given network in a way that releases new energy and momentum.

Who in your community is regularly coming up with better ways to structure your ministry for greater momentum?

D) EXPRESS A BURDEN FOR EXPANSION.

Apostolic leaders express an innermost burden for what isn't yet – for the people not in the room, a community not yet reached, and the territory no one else is talking about. Apostolic leaders have more than a vision to reach new territory; they have a genuine burden to do so. This is housed not just in their mind, but burns in their souls.

Who in your community is constantly championing growth and expansion to new territories?

E) RESPONDS TO BIG CHALLENGES.

The apostolic leaders have a huge vision and consistently respond to big challenges. The more impossible the dream is, the more motivated they become to achieve it. Of course, these often get them into trouble as they regularly bite off more than they can chew. This willingness to jump in with both feet is a hallmark of emerging apostolic leaders.

Who are the people in your community who respond to your biggest challenges?

F) TURNS MOMENTS INTO MOVEMENTS.

A last distinctive trait of apostolic leaders is their desire and ability to turn moments into movements. Apostolic people demonstrate an uncanny ability to recognize moments that are filled with possibilities and often know instinctively how to capitalize on those events for greater influence and momentum.

Because of their burden for expansion, apostolic leaders are constantly looking to pivot off catalytic moments to release movements.

Who in your life seems to demonstrate a knack for recognizing moments that are filled with possibilities?

THE ROLE OF APOSTOLIC TEAMS.

During restoration of apostolic-prophetic movement, there were some shaking in the church, the day of 'one man ministry' started coming to an end. God used the movement to emphasize the 'team ministry' principles as never before. Apostolic-prophetic teams were restored. Local churches began seeking to be truly apostolic-prophetic by preparing every member to be in the ministry team.

They began forming prophetic, apostolic, healing, administrative, pastoral, and visitation teams, just to mention a few. All church members were encouraged to be in a team that fit their calling, and anointed ability to minister to people. (Romans 15:7-20).

Apostolic teams are focused; they are not satisfied with just overseeing the affairs of local churches. They burn with a desire to plant churches, and reach those outside the influence of the gospel especially those who have never heard of God's love in Christ.

Apostolic or prophetic teams are not apostolic or prophetic because the team members are prophets or apostles, they are apostolic because they have a vision to plant churches where the gospel has not yet been proclaimed. You can be an apostle by gifting and fail to fulfill the purpose of your gift.

Apostles are pioneers by calling, but they start new churches to fulfill their calling. Their functions are seen in the book of Acts; they preached the gospel, made disciples for Christ, planted churches; and appointed overseers and elders of local churches.

They believed God for the impossible and pulled down satan's strong holds amongst the unreached and those not in their fellowship. They suffered and sacrificed for what they believed in. In short, they won, gathered and multiplied disciples and churches for Jesus, especially to the unreached people. Floyd and Sally McClung writes following 10 functions of apostolic teams;

- a) Impart core values to empower movements, Acts2:17-32.
- b) Inspire a common vision, 1 Corinthians 3:5-17.
- c) Model what they believe, 1 Thessalonians 1:5-16, 1 Corinthians 4:16.

- d) Equip and empower others for ministry, 2 Timothy 2:2, Ephesians 4.
- e) Guard against compromise, 1 Timothy 6:20.
- f) Strengthen people's heart as they live radically for God, Phi4:2, 6-7.
- g) Cultivate a culture of transparency, and accountability, Philippians 2:1-11.
- h) Facilitate hearing God in His Word, 2 Timothy 3:16.
- i) Listen to the Spirit together, Acts 13:1-3.
- j) Learn, and grow together, Luke 10:17-20.

EMBRACING APOSTOLIC GRACE.

It is important for the local church leadership to recognize apostolic grace in order for them to fulfill God's purpose in the body of Christ. The purpose as to why we should recognize apostolic functions in the body of Christ is as follows:

A) TO ALLOW THEM RELEASE THE FUNCTION.

Those who like to use the title 'apostle', have argued that we need to recognize an apostle in the same way we need the military to have uniforms, titles and ranks that release them to their function.

It is said, not having the title will cause confusion in the chain of command as well as among civilians since they will not know who is responsible to enforce the law of the land, and protect them. However, serving the body of

Christ with simplicity and humility will release the grace to the Church more than titles.

B) TO ALLOW ASCENSION GIFTS TO FUNCTION EFFECTIVELY.

Some supporters of the title 'apostle' insists that this is one way of wholesome expression of the body of Christ in church history; recognizing the ascension gifts of Ephesians 4:11. Indeed, if apostolic grace was good enough for Jesus and the early church, it should be crucial for us to do the same, if you want to experience the same kind of apostolic fruits.

C) TO USHER NEW REFORMATION, AND TRANSFORMATION.

It is evident that the old way of doing things through hierarchical ways is boring, and tiring. Most denominations are experiencing spiritual exhaustion, and deterioration for lack of engaging apostolic ministry.

By recognizing apostolic graces, we could further quicken the apostolic transformation that is based on enhancing unity, voluntary associations of pastors, and leaders in the regions irrespective of denominational affiliations for the sake of reaching cities, and nations. The synergy will bring visionary leaders in each region who have God's anointing to unite the body of Christ, and bring change in the society.

D) TO HELP THE CHURCH MOVE FROM LOCAL TO REGIONS BEYOND.

It is the focus of every apostolic engagements to send forerunners to launch new regions in expanding the kingdom of God. Naturally, pastoral work is focused inwardly, taking care of the congregation.

Apostolic leadership is always concerned with the expansion of the kingdom of God. Consequently, when apostolic leadership is recognized and encouraged the church will nurture leadership that is not only shepherds' congregation but also members of the church functioning in their calling in reaching communities with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

In the early church, an apostle would only stay in a local church long enough for the purpose of establishing elders who would take care of these churches. Through the support of these local churches, they were then sent to establish new churches and reach new areas. Let me say, without apostolic understanding we will greatly limit kingdom expansion.

Apostles who attempt to use titles or positions to usurp power for themselves are abusing God's gifts. For sure, apostolic ministry is not the only function in the church which is used to manipulate members, to be fair, it happens with other four ascension gifts. This is clear from the following observations:

a) Some apostles who use the title have no apostolic fruits: These leaders are using the title to artificially give themselves some sort of status, but what they don't know is that they run the risk of being branded false apostles. I believe that, one may not use the title apostle, but just allow apostolic fruit be displayed in their daily ministry to the body of Christ. The more the fruit you display, the less you need to use a title amongst the leadership you work with.

b) A number of apostolic leaders use dictatorial leadership style: They use titles like 'apostle' just to advance a domineering approach with a 'heavy top, top-down' leadership style. They are to give out plans and commands without tolerating decisions of others in the team.

Such leaders fail to develop homegrown teams. It is hard for them to cultivate true relationships with those they are raising or emerging leaders.

c) Some apostles have an independent spirit: These group of 'apostles' don't work well with denominational overseers or leaders. They see themselves as 'men' of God above other leaders, and proudly they only support their own ministries. They fail to mentor others to achieve their God given visions.

Others believe all denominational leaders operate an 'old wineskin model', thus, they disrespect, and ignore them.

Just because someone is in the apostolic movement doesn't mean they are favored by God or on the cutting edge above other denominational leaders. I have interacted with many denominational leaders who are not using the title of an 'apostle' but they have apostolic fruit through God's anointing.

d) Some apostolic movements have caused dissections in certain cities, and nations: The leaders of these apostolic revival movements fail to work with other groups. This is occasioned by leadership insecurity. When this happened, often there are unnecessary conflicts and divisions rather than unity in the body of Christ.

These few individualistic leaders have given apostolic movements teams a bad reputation of being conceited opportunists who build their own empire rather than God's kingdom.

e) Other leaders in apostolic movements have introduced leadership hierarchies: They think they have more authority in their region. They use these titles to falsely endorse themselves regional apostles. They disregard other pastors or leaders in that area. It is unfortunate that some have hanged up on title practices to the point of losing sight of the nature of Christ (Mk 10:42-45; Colossians 2:19).

f) Some apostolic leaders have grabbed some pastors, and churches away from their denominations into their own covering / affiliations: This behavior has caused much suspicion amongst denominational, and evangelical leaders. Genuine apostolic leaders never build upon the foundation of other leaders (Romans 15:20). They never try to build their vision by coercing or taking weak leaders away from their spiritual overseeing work.

g) There is self-appointed apostolic group: To be fair, some pastors, bishops and others are self-appointed as well. This creates suspicion, and slows the work of the Kingdom. I believe if a person has a true apostolic calling, then the pastors in their own community or region will recognize it. After apostolic teaching they request the elders in their churches to initiate the commissioning or confirmation ceremony.

h) There are leaders who travel outside their city or region to be commissioned or ordained as apostles outside their influence: In my opinion, this kind of action is very disrespectful, and lacks wisdom in most cases because a true apostle will be distinguished as such in their own area; they don't need an outsider to legitimize them.

However, if the said leader is a part of an apostolic organization, and their spiritual mentors lives outside their region then it is very appropriate with the knowledge

of their overseers to be commissioned by outside apostolic leaders. These local leaders should be involved in the process and ordination, to be legitimized and respected by all.

i) Some have titles without due process: Those emerging potential apostles must be allowed to mature enough to carry the function. It is encouraging for young leaders to function and continue to grow apostolically even before hands are laid upon them and released to function in apostolic grace.

It is important to recognize apostolic anointing in young leaders if only they are leading apostolic network and /or churches. It is work of the apostolic teams to recognize the apostolic grace in them. It is much safer for older, and more mature leaders be confirmed if they have apostolic grace, they are more experienced and stable (1 Timothy 5:2). The mature apostles have passed the storms of dealing with marriage, family and ministry over the years.

j) During restoration and revivals some members might be endowed with apostolic anointing and giftings: When some pastors see this, they get excited and call themselves apostles just because they had apostolic revelation and terminologies. It is true, they may even be able to teach and preach well than true apostles but this only demonstrates anointed teaching ministry, not necessarily apostolic grace.

Apostles in the church today must understand that, in sending Jesus on earth, God the Father released the apostolic dimension of His kingdom on earth. Jesus brought great apostolic reformation when He divinely accomplished complete work of our salvation on the cross. What He achieved on the cross laid the firm foundation for apostolic ministry on earth. He is the chosen and precious cornerstone, Chief Cornerstone (Ephesians 2:20; 1 Peter 2:6). Apostolic grace experienced, and released in church as in Acts 4:33 is possible today. Catharine Brown rightly said, “It was a fresh outpouring of apostolic grace that transformed a quivering wreck of eleven men and propelled them into the place of miracles-working holy boldness and power with signs and wonders following their ministry on daily basis with apostolic teachings, prayer, fellowship, and communion at the heart of the explosive growth of the New Testament Church.” Indeed, we will experience increased and growth in our churches as we embrace apostolic gifts and ministries. For us to see the impetus, spontaneous growth and expansion of God’s Kingdom, God’s people must be equipped for the work of service; God’s plan is that, every believer should use his or her gift. The church grows, when 'each part does its work'. God has a job for everyone in His army; no one is listed to sit. When believers use their gifts, they will grow spiritually.

God is in the business of expanding His kingdom through the distribution of the gifts of the Holy Spirit to believers. Look at the parable of the ten minas. The noble man called

his ten servants, and gave them ten minas. The clear instruction was, “Put this money to work,” he said, “until I come” (Luke 19:9-10).

Each recipient was responsible to put the money to work. Diligence was required in terms of strategic survey, and marketing so as to gain profit for their master.

My appeal to apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers and all those in church leadership is, before we hear, “Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful with a few things...” (Luke 25:21), let us value what is in the lives of others, and build them up so that they can be useful to the Master.

CHAPTER 3: PROPHETS

Much as we must listen to what the Spirit says in the word of God, we need also to listen to what the Spirit speaks to us now through prophetic revelation. We need the freshness of prophetic revelation, the life-giving *Rhema* “the now” word, which comes through prophetic gift. It is of great impact when the church and the world hear the word of the Lord with power and freshness that comes from the prophetic anointing.

We need to hear and see more impact of such statements from the servants of God. Apostle Paul says to us, “My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power, so that your faith might not rest on men’s wisdom but on God’s power” (1 Corinthians 2:4-5).

In essence, prophecy in the context of ministry simply means God speaking to, and through us to other people. In the New Testament prophets are generally attached with apostles, as in Ephesians 2: 20, “And are built upon the foundation of the apostles, and the prophets, Jesus himself being the chief cornerstone”.

The prophets have always been God’s messengers or mouthpiece. God used them to communicate His warnings, and plans. Prophets always appear negative to the average believers, and more so to unbelievers. They represent the interest of God to the people. When prophets have right relation with God, they receive His council, then they release it to the people.

Prophets receive the mind of God by revelation through vision, dream or audible voice and pass it to target audiences. They declare the will of God regarding situations in individual lives and corporate body of Christ. The church must have these men and women of God, to give guidance, by speaking the mind of God as they are moved by the Spirit of God (2 Peter 1:21).

Essentially a prophet was a man who spoke under the direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit. It is clear also that sometimes a prophet was a woman as in the case of the second chapter of Luke, here is a prophetess called Anna. In the book of Acts, there are also people with prophetic gift mentioned like;

- 1) The prophet Agabus (Acts 11:28; 21:10-11).
- 2) The individual in Acts 13:1
- 3) The prophets Judas and Silas (Acts 15:32)
- 4) The disciples at Tyre who through the Spirit urged Paul not to go to Jerusalem (Acts 21:4)
- 5) Philip's four unmarried daughters who prophesied (Acts 21:9)
- 6) Ananias (Acts 9:10-18)

The ministry of prophets involves being moved in prophetic utterance, which can be predictive (Acts 21:10-11; 11:27-28), directive (Acts 13:1-3), and corrective (Acts 15:22-23, 27, 32). Prophets have a strong sense of right and wrong, but even more than that, they have a strong sense of Spirit's leading.

They are gifted with living, and revealed word of God (Rhema), the now word. Prophets flow in revelation or rhema. They declare to their audience, “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches” (Revelation 2:29).

The church is desperately in need of prophets and prophetic leaders who have been delivered from the fear of men and who are not men pleasers. Prophet’s spiritual antennae start quivering when things go off balance or in wrong direction in the local church or wider body of Christ. The prophetic voice is important for keeping the church on track in what the Lord wants to be done.

They carry a great sense of spiritual authority. They pull down, and destroy spiritual foundations which hinder the plans and the purposes of God in believers’ lives and the church at large. Prophets are aware of the scripture, “For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does; the weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds” (2 Corinthians 10:3-6).

They are God’s spiritual reformers, and spiritual revolutionaries. They receive a revelation of truth, and are given power also to speak and utter this truth in a more or less ecstatic manner. This is made evidence by Paul’s teaching in 1 Corinthians 14:29 where he says, “Two or three, prophets should speak, and others should weigh carefully what is said.”

Prophets receive revelations, messages or insight; they are enabled to make utterances which are of value, and profit

to the church. Prophets make some people nervous. They may try to run a way out of churches ministered by prophets. In some cases, some prophets will do their best to close their mouths or restrain themselves before they get to do what the Spirit tells them.

The truth remains, God builds by His Spirit and there are many spiritual obstacles that must be dealt with before prophetic ministry become effectual in the church. It is clear, prophets speak, and people get stirred, troubled and are often offended. Offences are baits which evil forces use to disconnect spiritual relationships between prophets, and the body of Christ.

The prophets see seasons or God's calendar and are able to announce to the church or believers to seize God's given grace for the time. They forth-tell the now God's opportune time. For example, a prophet may speak against some prevalent sin in the society.

What makes a true prophet unique is that he or she is moved by the Holy Spirit to speak against a condition that the Lord wants to change at the given moment. Sometimes, the Holy Spirit reveals to a prophet some good plans He has for the church including blessings.

What should be clear to the church is, in the Old Testament, there were relatively few prophets and seldom did anyone other than a prophet prophesy. With the coming of the Holy Spirit in the day of the pentecost, things changed.

The prophecy through Joel says, "And afterwards I will pour my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will

prophecy and old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions” (Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2:16-18). With the coming of the Holy Spirit, it is evident that there is a sense in which every believer is to be prophetic as well as priestly (1 Peter 2:5, 9). Although not all believers are prophets but they have the ability to be prophetic i.e. they directly hear God, and get directions.

While any believer at any time can be granted by the Holy Spirit some supernatural revelation, power or utterances gifts during gathering of believers or otherwise; this does not warrant one to assume prophet’s authority. It does not mean he or she is a prophet.

I do believe the operation of the gift of prophets is a prescribed ingredient of the normal functioning, growth and consequently maturing the body of the Christ. When the Holy Spirit comes upon a believer to minister in a prophetic gifting, or when a prophet utters God’s revelatory insights, it is always for the following reasons:

A) COMMON GOOD.

(1 Corinthians 12:7, 31; 14:1, 39).

It is for the benefit of all believers. At no time should any gift be used for personal gain, and exploitation of innocent congregations.

B) TO STRENGTHEN AND COMFORT BELIEVERS.

(1 Corinthians 14:3).

When prophetic gifts are operational in the church, not only are the comfortable, and complacence believers disturbed, but the disturbed are comforted. That means, ministered with love in the hearts of those given the revelation, all believers will be encouraged to grow in their faith in Christ.

C) THE CHURCH IS BUILT UP.

(1 Corinthians 14:5-5, 12).

In both corporate and individual prophecies, it may come during prayers, worship songs, or even at the end of the service. In such instances, a prophet or one given utterance of prophetic words to the congregation or to individuals should minister without disregarding the leadership of the church or disturbing the flow of the worship.

I mean wisdom from the Holy Spirit must guide the one given prophetic words to know the timing of sharing the revealed word, rhema. For prophetic ministry to benefit believers, order must be observed. Secondly, mature believers in the congregation should be alert to judge; weigh to ascertain all prophetic words in order to provide the benefits of any revelation, vision, dreams, impressions and other revelatory ministry during the service.

Individual prophecies may vary as the one ministering is prompted by the Holy Spirit. Some prophetic or prophets gifted persons move directly to where the individuals are sitting or standing and give the word to that particular person.

Others request the individuals to be on a line as the Holy Spirit moves using the one ministering. Still others call individuals in front of the congregation to receive prophetic words. Utilization of private ministering after the service may fit others. All in all, caution must be taken so that there is no room for error, and exploitation slipping in without the notice of the church leadership.

TESTING PROPHETIC WORDS

As believers exercise their Biblical rights to examine, weigh teachings or prophecies (1 Corinthians 14:29), the following seven (7) guidelines for testing prophetic words can greatly assist the church leaders to take care of the flock from falsehood;

a) Does it align with the Scriptures? Does the Rhema (“now” word) prophetically agree with the Bible, written word?

b) Does it confirm what the Holy Spirit is already doing? The prophecy should bear witness or bring confirmation to the hearers to whom the word is given.

c) Does it edify, comfort or encourage? Prophecy does edify the recipient, believers and the church at large.

d) If it is predictive, does it actually come to pass? Time factor should be considered. If forth-telling it should be ministered by telling the truth in love, not destructive speculations.

e) Is spoken in love and for the welfare of the recipient or in manipulation of the church or promotion of the prophet? The spirit of the prophet must represent the Holy Spirit's redemptive benefits; saving power and exalting Christ.

f) Does the broader believing community (Church) endorse the word? The love of God for individual, and the congregation should be evident in the prophecy. Rebuking, and corrective prophecies have qualities of God's grace.

g) Does it correspond with personal experience? (See Acts 21:3-4; 21:10-14 with Acts 20:22-23).

HOW TO DELIVER PROPHETIC MESSAGE.

Receiving a word from the Lord is the easiest part of the prophetic gift. The hardest part is learning how to

communicate the word once it has been received. When God gives a prophetic word, He also gives instructions about how it should be delivered.

Prophets must make sure they listen prayerfully and carefully; and act upon when delivering a message to individuals or the church at large. Paula Sanford has said, “So a prophet needs to know more than what to say. He needs also to discover how God wants him to say it”. Helen Calder adds, “Being prophetic is not about performance, but following the Holy Spirit’s unique direction to the church.”

Writing on Paul’s journey to Jerusalem Luke narrates, “Leaving the next day, we reached Caesarea and stayed at the house of Philip the evangelist, one of the seven. He had four unmarried daughters who prophesied” (Acts 21:8-9). We are not told what Philip’s daughters prophesied concerning Paul’s journey.

Pay attention to the verse 10, “After we had been there a number of days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. Coming over to us, he took Paul’s belt, tied his own hands and feet with it and said, “The Holy Spirit is saying, In this way the Jews of Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt and will hand him over to the Gentiles”.

From the above examples, and my observation with prophetic persons in the church, it is important to pay attention to the elements of their message rather than the methods they use to convey the message. Tom Harmon writes, “Many times the biggest challenge for prophets is

not necessarily hearing the voice of God, but in learning how to minister the word in wisdom".

This speaks of timing, the manner, the place, the wording, the intent, the context and the attitude of hearing when ministering figures. "A word can be delivered in several ways which fits the workings of the Holy Spirit; consequently, the Church is edified and built for the glory of God."

How do prophets discharge the burden of the Lord in their hearts? After they received the revelation, and made intercession, they will know the best method to release what the Lord has given them for the Church.

Old Testament prophets always came forward openly, and spoke the word of the Lord. They believed that God has spoken to them, they delivered His words fearlessly. A. Motyer writes, "The prophet stood before men as a man stands before God."

It should be clear to the church that prophetic gifting are crucial to the emerging move of God, bringing revival, and awakening in the church. There is a great need for powerful, and authentic prophetic functions in our churches today. When the local church progressively embraces and allows the prophetic ministry to minister to the believers and glorify Jesus the church will flourish (1 Thessalonians 5:20).

If we can receive a word from the Lord, we are capable of receiving guidance about how to communicate the same. When God gives a prophetic word, He also gives us instructions about how it should be delivered. Prophets

must make sure that they get His instructions, and act on them. A word that is delivered in an incorrect way is easily nullified, and effectively becomes a false prophecy.

Ron McKenzie lists four (4) principles to guide prophetic persons when delivering a prophetic word:

1. **Ask the Lord how He wants the word delivered.** If He is able to give the prophetic word, he is able to give instruction about how He wants it delivered.
2. **The speaker's only responsibility is to deliver the word in the way that He guides.** Prophetic people are not accountable for the success or failure of the word, or the distance it travels.
3. **The Holy Spirit is responsible for watching over His word, and ensuring that it gets to those who need to hear.** He can achieve that in a multitude of ways. If a word is pure and clear, He will get it to those who need to hear it. He is an expert at getting the word of a voice crying in the wilderness into the anterooms of kings.
4. **Communicate clearly, and precisely.** The first task of the prophet is to listen to the Lord and get the word.

FACILITATING PROPHETIC MINISTRY.

The church leadership should embrace, and facilitate prophetic persons. As I have said earlier, prophets and prophetic gifted persons in the church are susceptible to rejection. This rejection leads to bitterness which may cause them to get out of their original fellowships and start their own ministries.

When they do this, they limit themselves to their own new congregations. When they move out, we term them rebels yet we are to blame for not accommodating and nurturing them in our churches.

Prophets have sensitive spirits. Sometimes, they are faced with dilemma when handling revelations from the throne of God. Prophetic persons likewise may look arrogant when reprimanded by other ascension gifted persons.

The weight of God's purposes to be fulfilled in a prophet's heart sometimes affect their personality and lifestyle, and this may be misconstrued by the Church's leadership. The level, and authority God endowed to prophets varies according to the His intention for that season or generation. The need of different congregations also dictates the direction of prophetic undertakings in the body of the Christ.

There are three (3) foundational Biblical principles we need to understand for us to accommodate prophetic work in the church:

- i. **The primary purpose of prophetic function is to edify, encourage and comfort God's people (1 Corinthians 14:3).**
- ii. **All believers are exhorted to earnestly seek after spiritual gifts, especially prophecy (1 Corinthians 14:1).**

iii. All prophetic words must be judged/weighed by the body of Christ (1 Thessalonians 5:19-22; 1 Corinthians 14:29-35).

Church leaders have a pivotal role in promoting prophetic activities in the body of Christ in the following ways:

1. In order to encourage prophetic work (1 Corinthians 14:1), Church leaders must create a safe environment where people are willing to take risk, obedience, using their gifts.

2. Leaders must be intentional in creating opportunities for prophetic ministries to emerge during worship. During a meeting, one can ask, does anyone have a word or sense from the Lord about the direction of our meeting today? Did anyone have a dream recently or feel burdened or impressed in some way?

3. Leaders should not be afraid or offended by silence when asking the above questions. May be God isn't speaking at this time. Keep sensing the direction of the Holy Spirit as you proceed on. Each believer is responsible to listen, and obey the voice of God.

Prophets reveal God's heart to His people, giving guidance to individuals, the community of believers, and giving revelations. The prophet foretells and tells forth the revelation that God has for His people, the church. They are particularly attuned to God, and His truth for today.

They bring correction, and challenge the dominant assumption we inherited from our denominational

cultures. They insist that the community must obey what God has commanded. They question the status quo. Prophets can become aggressive advocates or unpredictable. Others may disengage from reality of life. These may bring distress, and fear to the body of the Christ. Teams of other ascension gifts (apostles, pastors evangelists, teachers) will effectively prevent such unfortunate prophetic practices. The secret here is for church leaders to always work as a team.

CHAPTER 4: EVANGELISTS

The gift of evangelism is a special ability that God gives to certain people in the body of the Christ to share the gospel with unbelievers in such a way that men and women become Jesus' disciples, and responsible members of the body of the Christ.

Evangelizo simply means, I preach, proclaim or announce. Evangelist is the messenger or the preacher, one who proclaims the good news or the message.

Evangelists have important responsibilities in the church, their most distinctive work is to preach the gospel to those who have not yet accepted Jesus. Evangelists are fishers of men (Matthew 4:19). Heralding the gospel is powerful; it not only jolts demons but recognizes its effects, salvation of men (Acts 16:1).

They are passionate to ensure that those who don't know Christ are reached. They are part of the answer to these pertinent questions in Romans 10:14, "How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent?"

They are men, and women whose foremost goal is to preach the gospel of the Christ. They preach the word 'in season and out of season' (2 Timothy 4:2). They emulate the early church apostles, "Every day in the temple and at home they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ" (Acts 5:42).

In Acts 8:12, we see Philip preaching to sinners, winning converts, and baptizing men and women. In Acts 8:26, he met the Ethiopian, witnessed to him, and baptized him. Therefore, evangelists, preach to unbelievers, either as a group or individuals. They present Christ, leads people to Christ, some experience miracles during prayers or when ministering.

They also baptize believers with water. In the second example of Timothy, Paul tells him to do the work of an evangelist. We are not given a description of the work (2 Timothy 4:5). It is true to say, he was to do what Philip and other evangelists did. Evangelists extend the frontier of God's kingdom. They are co-workers with, and extensions of apostolic ministry (2 Timothy 4:5; 1 Thessalonians 3:2). They also equip the body of the Christ with evangelistic spirit of outreach.

Evangelists are warriors, the foot soldiers who take the gospel to remote areas of the world. They advance the gospel, and in so doing they battle directly with the forces of darkness which hinder the gospel. There are many more warriors in an army than the generals, and so there must be many evangelists in the church.

Evangelists need to be held with high regard as the prophets of God who are winning souls for Christ. The work of an evangelist is to evangelize with greater grace than other believers. Although everyone in the body of the Christ has a responsibility to fulfill the great commission, evangelists are called, equipped, and anointed into proclaiming the good news with power of the Holy Spirit

to convict unbelievers to turn to Christ. Another part of their ministry is to encourage, and challenge believers to serve God in winning souls to Christ.

Among the five ascension functions, none requires varied endowments than that of an evangelist. Depending upon the field of function which the evangelists are to venture, whether they must speak one language or more, their work is to proclaim the word of God intelligibly and persuasively. More importantly, to always allow the Holy Spirit to convince and convict both believers and unbelievers to realign their lives to the will of God.

An evangelist must preach the word effectively; both publicly and privately to instruct and develop new believers, organize them into ministering congregation. Along with the elders and teachers, evangelists have been provided to build up the body of the Christ (Ephesians 4:11).

They are to teach the disciples to observe all that Christ has commanded (Matthew 28:20). These responsibilities also entail travelling to strengthen the new fellowships of believers. We see Paul returned to strengthen congregations. The Bible says, “After spending some time there he departed and went from place to place through the region of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples” (Acts 18:23; 14:22; 15:41).

At Crete where many churches were planted, Titus' work was to exhort brethren and establish leadership (Titus 1:5, 12, 13, 15). Even Paul's main goal was to take the gospel into new areas; it took him three years at Ephesus (Acts

20:31). Paul's focus was regions beyond. Paul wrote, "It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation" (Romans 15:20).

Evangelists have the responsibility to edify the church by rebuking sin and encouraging holiness but they do not have a monopoly on the edification of the believers. The concept of mutual ministry is Biblical, and an evangelist may miss if the other gifts are not encouraged.

Some prevalent common extremes must be checked in the lives of evangelists by the other gifts. An evangelist who has been given a special empowerment by the Holy Spirit is to evangelize, and empower other believers to win souls for Christ.

Those who are gifted are fixed and focused on people who have not believed. The salvation of souls and burden for the lost is a priority. Undoubtedly, the church that embraces the ministry of evangelists will experience transformation, and better results.

Some evangelists are good at communicating effectively, others are followed with wonders and miracles. The truth is, they focus on evangelism, and messages that will stir up believer's faith. They have a God given, unique passion for those without Christ. Some evangelists see things pastors don't see. They hear the crying souls. They sense sinners languishing in their desperate situation. They heed the cry of those who have not yet accepted Christ, and challenge the Church's attitude of being unconcerned for unreached communities.

Imagine one day you come across a drunkard, and reluctantly you share the word of God. Hesitantly, he repeats after you led a prayer of confession, and receives Christ. You take his name and phone number, and then you encourage him to go to church on Sunday. Then you forget about him. Ten years later his name appears in your Face book page. He likes what you shared, he briefly reminds you the day you prayed for him. With some excitement he tells you that he is now a pastor of 500 people in a certain town. Out of 500 people, many apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers and other productive church leaders will be multiplied through his ministry to the congregation.

Investing in one person has resulted to a greater harvest. When we use our God given gifts to win souls for Christ, we will one day hear the voice of the Master, "...well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your Master's happiness" (Matthew 25:23).

The capacity to appreciate the gifts of widely varying kinds of workers in the body of the Christ and helping them along the line of their own gifts is a fundamental calling of the ascension gifts leadership. As church leaders, let us not hold people. Let us identify their gifting, mentor and release them to serve the Lord in their diverse areas of graces.

Sometimes we forget 2 Timothy 2:2 which says, "And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many

witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.”

The church leadership team should, identify reliable people in the congregation and give them work to do. They should also intentionally release mature leaders among them to open other fellowships in places where the Lord is leading them to serve with their gifts. Mega churches are good. Have you thought of the tremendous impact of multiplication if you release some of your leadership to open a satellite or fellowships at one corner of the town or next village?

Some of us are worried when those we release excel more than us. That should not be the case; we should have an attitude to multiply people of great influence in the kingdom of God than us. Let us not forget, “A student is not above his teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher” (Luke 6:40).

ACCOUNTABILITY TO THE LOCAL CHURCH

The evangelist must be someone who understands the true gospel, and has trusted Christ as a Savior in order to preach the gospel. (John 15:2, 2 Timothy 2:1-7). For evangelists to be successful, they must clearly understand their responsibilities in performing this type of work. As I said before, the church is not a place for one man show. Timothy was taught, trained, and developed under the skillful guidance of apostle Paul (2 Timothy 1:6), he had the approval of the congregation and elders (2 Timothy

4:14). Travelling evangelists should work closely with local churches; updating the leadership about their ministry to the unreached.

Mel Cooley (1991) warns, “Some rather than having a spiritual 'covering' of likeminded brethren concerned for their safety, morally, financially, domestically, have perhaps a 'cloak' for their independent ways.”

It is important for traveling evangelists to maintain close relationship with their local churches, and be accountable to the church elders. They should take Paul’s warning, “...I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize” (1 Corinthians 9:27). The next warning is, “So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall” (1 Corinthians 10:12).

The Bible adds, “This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover, it is required of stewards that they may be found trustworthy” (1 Corinthians 4:1, 2). Traveling evangelists know that they have been entrusted with the message of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18-20).

As ministers of the word of God, they have individual responsibility to watch their lives, and bring them into 'subjection' of the Holy Spirit within. Likewise, they have a responsibility of 'submitting' to one another and to a local body of believers and its ministry teams.

They must avoid error, and heresy. They should be beyond reproach so that they can be an example to those they witness Christ to. Like apostle Paul and his

companions, they can confidently say, “For our appeal does not spring from error or uncleanness, nor guile; but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please men, but to please God who tests our hearts” (1 Thessalonians 2:3, 4). They must guard the spiritual things of God in them from interference of the flesh, the devil and the world. Paul charges Timothy “O Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you” (1 Timothy 6:20; 2 Timothy 1:13, 14).

While I applaud evangelists for their passion, vigor and courage when on the pulpit, as men of God, they must know the Scriptures, and use them properly. Much as they should waken and entreat the church to function as God’s people, they must remember this challenge, “Do your best to present yourself to God as approved, a workman who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15).

Those with the ability to do the work of evangelists have noble, and sacred trust. They must be good stewards as they function in the body of the Christ with this divine grace. The Scripture is clear, “As each receives a gift, employ it for one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace; whoever speaks, as one who do utter oracles of God” (1 Peter 4:10,11).

They should be humble, and respect the other gifts in the church. It is important to differentiate between boldness, and arrogance. Sometimes when they preach with passion and vigor, audience rewards them with cheers and clapping of hands. Pride can easily subtly creep into their

hearts. Miracles, and healings can draw people to 'worship' the evangelist.

Others look up to the evangelist and easily forget the healer, Jesus Christ. The truth is that miracles and healings do not confirm or affirm the evangelist, but God's word. The current common obnoxious, self-gratifying behavior and greed displayed by evangelists within evangelistic campaign could ultimately cost any minister the anointing; distract their calling and even their purpose in life.

God mightily used Paul, but he vehemently asserts, "Yet when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach, woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!" (1 Corinthians 9:16).

The true modern-day evangelists are consumed, sold out only to the most important task in the world. They are burdened in their hearts for the lost and will go out of their way to share the truth with them. They are able to overcome the normal fear of rejection and engage those who have not believed in meaningful conversations about Jesus Christ.

Their gift allows them to communicate with all types of people and therefore, they receive a greater response to the message of salvation through Jesus Christ. They continuously seek out relationships with those who don't know Jesus and are open to the leading of the Holy Spirit to approach different people.

Like the early apostles, they love giving free treasures, a way for Jesus and endure afflictions for the sake of the

gospel (2 Corinthians 4:7); it brings great joy knowing that the feet that brings good news are beautiful, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation...” (Isaiah 52:7).

However, the church needs to give room to all the Kingdom spiritual resources. There is a need to seize ascension gifts and the unlimited gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed graciously to empower, and release the body of the Christ to advance the Kingdom of God. It is clear, evangelists are Christ witnesses, “You will be his witness to all men of what you have seen and heard” (Acts 22:15).

An evangelist has a great burden for those who are not part of the kingdom of God. They are great communicators. They know God’s word, and have the ability to relate it to those who have not yet accepted Jesus in a way that is easily understandable and acceptable. They are infectious communicators of the gospel; they recruit others to the cause. They call for a personal response to God’s redemption in Christ, and also draw believers to engage the wider mission, making the church to grow. Without the help of other gifts, evangelists can be so focused on reaching those outside the church and may neglect maturing and strengthening those inside.

CHAPTER 5: PASTORS

The gift of a pastor is a special ability that God gives to certain members of the body of the Christ. The Greek word for pastor is “*poimen*” which means one who tends sheep or cares for the flocks (1 Peter 5:1-4; John 21:15-17). This word is used only in Ephesians 4:11. Elsewhere in the New Testament, other words like shepherd, elder and overseer are used.

The gift of a pastor/shepherd carries many different responsibilities. This is a gift closely related to the spiritual gifts of leadership, and teaching. As one of five ascension gifts, pastor, shepherd, elder and overseer have a special emphasis on relationship, networking in the local church and taking care of the personal needs of the flock. The term pastor today is used to designate all church leaders, this is incorrect.

Pastors nurture, and comfort the flock. They build up the spiritual lives of the sheep in the most holy faith. They tend the wounded, and the sick. They lead the sheep into good pastures that they may eat, and be strong. They also look for the sheep that have wandered away that none is lost.

The pastor has an important role in the church. He is a shepherd who deeply cares for the sheep, ready to sacrifice his comfort for them. Pastors would want to see the sheep fed, grow, and be equipped. They develop their gifts by stepping into the calling, and accomplishing the purposes of God in their lives. Although most people look at the feeding part as main work, this is not true.

Scripturally, the pastor's responsibility is to make sure that the sheep have access to green pasture; this is not the same as himself feeding them. To best feed the sheep, he needs help from a combination of all other members of ascension, spiritual and administrative gifts. Each of these gifts has a different flavor, and all make a balanced diet for the believers.

The pastor cares for the church. He is a shepherd who cares for the sheep, ready to lie down everything for them. In the local church they are the point of contact between the other gifts. The function of the pastor is the one most recognized today of all the five because it is a coveted function or gift and the other four run after to be pastors.

One time a friend of mine invited me to meet a brother with a prophetic anointing. As he narrated his calling to me, he mentioned in our discussion that he used to be an evangelist in his local congregation, and it was only recently when he became a pastor. What I understood from this discussion is that one begins in this denomination as an evangelist, later promoted as a pastor on a pay roll.

While each of our denominations has its own structure and regulations, some create confusion. Appointing servants of God, and forcing them to fit where they are not gifted is misplacing gifting. This is creating unnecessary tension because they cannot meet their flock's needs. Moreover, some servants seek these gifts as a way of identity and promotion in the body of the Christ. They may think that one can begin 'low' as an evangelist, to Pastor, to a

prophet, to an apostle and so on. This is not the way. This is a big error in the ministry.

It is time for the church to allow apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers to be what they are called to be and take their rightful positions in the body of the Christ. Just as it was to the children of Israel; the Bible says, “Then I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will lead you with knowledge and understanding” (Jeremiah 3:15).

Pastoral ministry is evident in the church, Christ gave pastors, “It was He who gave some to be... pastors... (Ephesians 4:11). The difference between a good shepherd and a bad one will clearly be manifested when the wolves show up (John 10:12, 13). When Paul called the elders of Ephesus, he admonished them, “Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood” (Acts 20:28).

Through prophet Ezekiel, God speaks very clearly against imposters. Ezekiel 34:2 is critical to all who are pastors. These words have much to say about the role of shepherds. A true shepherd seeks the scattered or driven away (Lk 15:4), brings them back to comfort of the sheepfold. The clarion call is, “Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, serving as overseers... (1 Pt 5:2).

Peter not only echoes the irritating questions from Jesus’ heart, but clearly shows the three relevant shepherding tasks Jesus gave to Peter; “Feed my lamb...Take care of

my sheep...Feed my sheep (John 21:16, 17). Having been a shepherd in my youth, there were always some persistent threats to the sheep, drought- which resulted in lack of grass and water, wolves and thieves. I spent all the year round, daily taking them far distance places to acquire nourishment, green pasture, natural saltlicks, water, resting and so on.

RESPONSIBILITY TO THE FLOCK.

Pastors must lead the sheep to green pastures, and quiet waters (Psalm 23:1-2). The results will be trust, and relationship that would keep the sheep following the shepherd. The sheep will be familiar to the shepherd's voice to the point that even if they were temporarily with another herd, at mere call of the shepherd they would separate and follow him.

A good shepherd protects sheep from ferocious wolves who subtly mingle with the sheep in sheep's clothing (Matthew 7:15). Paul calls them savage wolves who will not spare the flock (Acts 20:29). Earlier, I called them imposters because they sneak or gatecrash into the sheep's enclosure. These are thieves, and robbers (John 10:1). There are many loopholes in the church today among them is compromise of Biblical tenets. This gives room to wolves to take advantage of the flock.

Wolves are those who pretend to be part of the believers but subtly aim at dragging them as prey. They look and talk like born again, anointed servants of God, but they adversely affect the believers by their false teachings and

prophecies. Jesus did not spare them; He calls them, 'the hired hand'. The hired hand is not the shepherd of the sheep. This hired person has no relationship with the sheep. Jesus adds; "So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away." (John 10:12-13). Some pastors have failed to take stand against sin and as a result, apparent evil is slipping into the church, and makes themselves useless to the Chief Shepherd (1 Peter 5:4). These masqueraders allow abominable practices take a foothold in the church under their watch. Shepherds have a solemn task to guard the believers. This calls for teaching, the sheep must be wise and on the watch for the snares of the world, flesh, false doctrines and devil.

The Bible warns that believers are susceptible to wandering away from the true faith "...some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons" (1 Timothy 4:1, 6:20-21, James 5:19-20; Jude 1: 22, 23). Pastors must demonstrate that they are gifted with pastoral ministry by feeding the lambs with milk of the word (1 Peter 2:2) and for the mature, solid food (1 Corinthians 3:2).

The shepherd leads sheep to green pasture, water and makes them stay together. He also goes after the lost ones, and protects them not only in the field but also when in the fold (John 10:1-16). To some today, pastoral work is a way of making a living. Regardless of this, it should be clear that pastors are called, and gifted to care for the spiritual wellbeing of a local body of the believers. Pastors are servants of God, and His bride. They are given

abilities or graces which enable them meet the needs of the flock, they are called to minister the gospel of Jesus Christ. The cardinal goal for them is to reveal the glory of God in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit to the congregation they serve. The primary way they will do this is by teaching the word of God to the church.

The ability to teach the scriptures is one of the requirements of being an overseer (1Timothy 3:1-7, Titus 1:6-9). By teaching the word of God to the church, the pastor would be feeding the sheep (John 21:15-17). The pastor must love, obey the gospel of Jesus Christ and put it at the center of his life and ministry.

Jesus commands: "...and teaching them to obey what I have commanded you..." (Matthew 28:20). They do not seek fame or recognition for themselves, but they are placed in a position of authority by the Holy Spirit to discharge their responsibilities faithfully. The role of a pastor is one that depicts humility, and service as he is reminded daily of his overwhelming need of God's grace for the task at hand. (Ephesians 4:11; Jeremiah 3:15; Acts 20:28; John 10:11-18).

They must always recognize the fact that Christ Jesus, the Chief Shepherd, has authority over them. They are not vested with authority in themselves. Therefore, they must provide firm leadership in the church, and lead in the way of Christ. Paul in Romans 12:8 reminds pastors of the need of diligence in ministry. Laboring, and leading requires seriousness of purpose.

To some, if a pastor possesses appropriate skills as well as a wealth of experience, his leadership is less likely to be challenged. Skills and experience are both important and should not be minimized, but being Spirit-filled and led are essential and important qualities for pastoral leadership.

The pastor of a local church must realize that the spiritual life of the church is closely geared to that of its pastor. No doubt, you remember hearing the statement, “Everything rises and falls on leadership.” This is especially true in a relationship to the spiritual life of the church.

The pastor serves Christ; therefore, the ministry should center in the person, and work of Christ whose character he must demonstrate. The shepherd or pastor of a local church is to be an example to the flock which God has given him. He should restrain using his personality, and ability to manipulate the church. His life should command as his tongue persuades.

The pastor must always lead with love. There is no room for cruelty or force. He must not perform his duties in an arrogant manner nor rule the church with tyranny. He should also avoid high handedness, autocratic rule; yet he must be the leader. The pastor is to supply spiritual organization, leadership, and divine power in the church. He should never appeal to pity, eliciting concern for his own welfare. He must rather demonstrate true spiritual concern for others.

In Acts 20:28, we find Biblical exhortation; “Keep watch”, - no one can keep watch of others until he has first

kept watch of himself. A pastor can lead others in spiritual things only in proportion to his own understanding and experience with Jesus, the good shepherd.

No calling requires more wisdom, and grace than that of a pastor. He must work with people of different temperaments, and do so under varied circumstances. Both theoretically and practically, the situation in areas of pastoral functions is often uncertain. Much of what is written on general subject of pastoral work assumes that everyone knows what it means to be a spiritual leader.

It assumes that such a person always exercises appropriate control of his own thinking, and feeling. It must be established, however, that a pastor is not simply a 'hired man'. The pastor and people must recognize that position and functions come from God and must be used for His glory. The source of his authority is God Himself; therefore, the pastor ought to receive appropriate respect from the flock. There is a sensitiveness which lies at the heart of a spiritual leader; he must influence the wellbeing of the believers. Therefore, the pastor must possess a burning concern for the needs of God's people. God gives unusual wisdom, and grace to those who live with pure motives.

There is a need to reveal the importance of understanding the relationship between pastor and believers, "Now we ask you brothers, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you." (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13). Those who were to be regarded with warm affection were those who exercised

proper leadership. A person becomes a leader long before he occupies a position or a place of influence. Men or women in the church are leaders by virtue of their performance rather than position. But when they function as leaders, their leadership ability should grow, and increase to impact the believers.

In essence, the purpose and the desire of our Lord for giving the church gifted persons lies not in their gifting but the character and the love of Christ in preparing God's people for the work of service. The leadership gifts, and other spiritual gifts are not limited to a sub-group of believers; they are distributed by Christ, and the Spirit to all believers (Matthew 25:15; 1 Corinthians 12:11).

Each believer has a spiritual gift. Because there are such a variety of gifts, every believer needs to be nurtured, and empowered to release their God given potential for the benefit of the Church.

God has deliberately given us different gifts: We need each other. As each of us responds to his or her particular spiritual gift, God will allow us to serve Him in various roles of spiritual service. As a result, the body of the Christ will experience the fullness of God's love through us.

We must mature in our understanding of spiritual gifts, and learn to be a channel of God's power. As God works through us, we will be equipped to bear abundant fruits in the kingdom of God. Our God given spiritual gifts are keys to hold together secret that makes up our ministry profile. It helps determine the direction and effect our

ministry which is based on God's special divine empowerment given for us to serve (1 Corinthians 12:7-11; Romans 12:3,6-9; Ephesians 4:7).

A single leader in a local church can accomplish very little. But when we recognize and give room to individuals to maximize their gifts; with willingness to delegate responsibilities, we will do exploit in God's kingdom. Every gift in a believer's life is a valuable tool in the hands of God. Members should be nurtured to contribute their best in whatever areas God is placing them in the church or place of work.

PASTORS WITH MORE GIFTS.

In reality, not all in the pastoral ministry have the gift of a pastor. Some have a gift of leadership. There are others on the cutting edge who constantly develop new means of ministry than attending to daily and routine needs of the sheep, they are busy mapping out ways to take the sheep to greener pastures. Some in the pastoral work have a gift of evangelism. Others are seeker-oriented, instead of building up believers they are in the business of rescuing the lost sheep.

Some have the gift of administration. There are pastors who tend to emphasize smooth running of programs and schedules, more than relating with the sheep, they tend to look after the pasture itself, water and fence to make sure everything is in good condition for the proper care of the sheep. Some have the gift of teaching or prophecy.

There are pastors who concentrate on preaching, more than caring for the sheep's total well-being; they focus on feeding. The dilemma for these pastors is that by gifting they do not have the ability to fulfill the complete ministry description of a shepherd yet they are called pastors. With that title often comes the expectation of many within the body that this person can work as a shepherd. The congregations must understand the spiritual gifting of the person(s) they call pastors.

Sometimes the total gifts mixed to the person in the position of pastor will enable them to do some of the shepherding work, but no one person has all gifts. Consequently, if the church is not careful to put others in place to help accomplish the full work involving shepherding ministry, the church will tend to be out of balance, fashioning itself according to the gifting of one person, the one they call pastor. The effects soon become evident in the conditions of the sheep. It has been said, when the sheep is moved to greener pastures with little shepherding, they become anxious.

When everything is built around rescue efforts, the sheep already in the fold may feel abandoned. When they are not fed sufficiently, the sheep may become anaemic. When constantly warned and corrected with little nurturing, the sheep become afraid. There is a tremendous difference between preaching in the church, and serving as a pastor. As the pastor he must shepherd the flock God has given him, he must pay attention to the following six (6) basic functions:

1. Feed the flock.

The primary function of a pastor is to feed the flock with the word of God. A pastor can be busy with many different ministry activities throughout the week, but if he does not have a message from God when he stands to speak, he has failed in his most important responsibility.

Studying the word of God is demanding work but it is essential to feeding the flock. Just any sermon will not do. It must be a message from God's word that is needed by the congregation at that time. To stay fresh, current, and Biblical is a major challenge to many pastors. It is the duty of pastors to exercise their gifts to the best of their ability.

2. Love the flock.

No congregation will follow a pastor very far until they are convinced that he loves them, and that they can trust him. It is one thing to be given the title of a pastor, and it is another thing to receive the trust of the people. Jesus warned against the hireling who did not really care about the sheep. He said the good shepherd gives his life for the sheep.

Jesus loves the church, and so much the pastor. We cannot fake real love for the congregation. Some churches have been hurt by, and disappointed with the actions of some pastors. The first step to lead is love.

3. Lead the flock.

A congregation that is not being led will wander, and scatter. It is the responsibility of the pastor to seek, and share the plan or vision from God to the church. The writer of Proverbs tells us that, “Where there is no vision the people perish.” Poor pastoral leadership will cause a church to demonstrate a modern day form of 'wilderness wandering'. A church with a good leadership will be excited about where it is going. The pastors are to take the oversight, and lead by example.

4. Keep the flock together.

One of the most challenging functions of a pastor is to keep the flock together. Resolving conflicts and uniting various personalities under one goal consumes vast amount of energy and time. Facing multiple forms of conflict causes many pastors want to flee instead of staying, and solving the problems. To be a part of a significant work of God, one will have to go through many storms and trials.

5. Tend the flock.

The Lord is our shepherd. His work in our lives is pictured in Psalms 23; this is a good example of tending the flock. God is very concerned about the flock that has been neglected (Jeremiah 23:1-4, Ezekiel 34:1-6).

Tending the flock includes providing general oversight, visiting the sick, counseling those with special needs,

performing weddings, funerals and other church ordinances. This is where a mentorship can prove very helpful.

6. Protect the flock.

A pastor not only deals with the sheep, he must deal with the wolves. Paul warned the leaders at Ephesus about the wolves that would seek to destroy the flock. A pastor must not only preach the truth but also must expose error. This is why he must reprove, and rebuke.

One day pastors will give an account to God on how they cared for His sheep. Only those who observe from a distance make jokes about the easy role of a pastor. After reviewing all the responsibilities of a pastor, one is prone to ask, who is competent or sufficient for such things? The answer must be one of faith “our competence comes from God” (2 Corinthians 3:5).

PASTORAL LEADERSHIP.

It is always important for the church leadership to discover their gifts, and free each other to do what they are Biblically called to do, whether to shepherd or do administration work in the church. They should seek out those who are gifted in pastoral, then strategically and purposefully involve them in shepherding members of the body. They also must identify those with complimentary gifts to come alongside the person functioning in pastoral gifting.

The effective care for the church is too much for one person. The elders, and others with appropriate gifts need to be involved in shepherding the flock. The key thing is for the needs of the congregation to be fulfilled and this cannot be done by the pastor alone. The pastor, who is one of the elders, must work cooperatively with the team of elders to keep up with the varying aspects of the flock's condition.

The elders may need the pastor to guide them in seeing needs unknown to them. The pastor may need the elders in sensitive areas that are not within his strengths. Knowing the condition of the flock does not require that the pastor attend to all the issues. It may, however, mean locating a network of shepherds who will meet the needs of the believers. The pastor should not be required to do all the work, they need to communicate, delegate, and release others to exercise their gifts to serve the congregation freely.

In the actual sense of body functions, pastors are also sheep; they are just leading sheep who are members of the body. They are only endowed with responsibilities different from the rest of the sheep. They are not the heads of the body.

The word 'pastor' comes out of the imagery of keeping sheep. It can be interchanged with the word shepherd. Shepherds nurture, and protect. They are caregivers of the community and they focus on the protection and spiritual maturity of God's flock. They also cultivate loving, and spiritual mature network of relationships; making

disciples. When other ascension gifts are not involved in the local church, shepherds can value stability to the detriment of missions, and members reaching out. This may also foster an unhealthy dependency by the believers on the pastor.

A pastor must know how to work with people, work through people, minister to people, and lead people. A good pastoral leader cannot be constantly passive, and non-directive. In any group, if tasks are to be accomplished, someone of necessity must assume some degree of leadership.

On the other hand, a good pastoral leader does not always have to do everything by himself. He should not think that his way is always the correct way. A good leader does not have to act like a slave or a martyr; he must be actively involved in the planning process as well as the implementation process through other leaders. A good pastoral leader is able to provide direction, supervision and still have an appreciation for the group dynamics.

In the body of Christ, there are different kinds of gifts but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service but the same Lord. There are kinds of working but the same God works all of them in all men” (1 Corinthians 12:4-6).

CHAPTER 6: TEACHERS

The gift of teaching is a special ability that God gives to certain members of the body of Christ to communicate information relevant to the health, and ministry of the Church in such a way that others can learn. The Greek word for those with the gift of teaching is *didaskalos*. From the root of this word we get our English word, 'didactic' which means to teach, instruct, instill, explain or expound.

The gift of teaching is one that carries a heavy responsibility in the church. We mostly think of teaching as transfer of information, and skills. Teaching in the New Testament is more of discipleship. It includes the formation of character. We can see this in the way Jesus taught his twelve disciples. He did not just impart information in them, but by living in close proximity with them for three years, he developed a strong relationship with them.

They submitted to Jesus and carried out all His instructions. In this way, he formed their lives in likeness of His own. And throughout the New Testament, teaching takes place within a similar teacher, learner relationship.

Although there is a general sense in which believers should mature to teach others (Hebrew 5:12), not all Christians are teachers in the normal sense. Paul asks, "Are all teachers?" (1 Corinthians 12:29). In fact, James 3:1 warns, "Not many of you should become teachers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness."

Paul emphatically warns Timothy about certain persons who had wandered into vain discussion, “Desiring to be teachers of the law without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make assertions” (1 Timothy 1:6, 7). Be cautioned, in the church today, there are teachers who teach a different gospel, “Which is really no gospel at all” (Galatians 1:6-7).

Peter warns, “...just as false teachers among you, they will introduce destructive heresies...” (1 Peter 2:1). However, in mutual ministry according to the Scriptures, each member serves according to his or her own ability in building up the church (Ephesians 4:16).

Those with the ascension gift of teaching love to study the word of God for extended period of time. A gifted teacher is a gift from God to the church. God equips them with discernment of His word, and the ability to apply it into everyday life. They dissect facts from the Holy Scripture, and then bridge their relevance into contemporary society. This requires prayerful preparation.

Biblical facts without application become dry, dusty and boring indeed. Factual information without individual life change will only serve to facilitate pride. Mature congregations consume Scriptures as food, for their hearts, souls and minds with expressed purpose of knowing Jesus and making Him known to others. They want to know what God has revealed in His word, and what He requires of them as people created to fulfill His purpose.

Teachers take great joy and satisfaction in seeing others learn and apply the truth of God's word to their lives. A teacher is an instructor, and subject-master. Alan Wong observes, "Without the mastery and clarity of thought, it would be difficult for you to explain clearly to your students."

The teachers show the fundamentals or skills of something, causing others to know the facts, and consequences of a matter. He or she imparts knowledge, sometimes through special revelation or inspiration.

Teachers minister in the word of God, and remind others of the priorities and foundations that will keep the believers stable in their lives. They instill the ways of God in believer's life. They teach and edify the church, imparting divine anointing to the believers who are hungry for the truth from the word of God.

Jesus gave teachers to the church so that they would help the church fulfill her functions to the world as "pillars and foundation of truth" (1 Tim 3:15). Teachers are disgusted when the Scripture is abused, and used out of context or with ill intent. Therefore, they dispel heresy in the church. They love the truth, and they speak the truth in love. They will never hide or withhold it. Like Paul, a teacher will always dare say to the church, "For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God." (Acts 20:27).

They desire to follow the footsteps of Jesus who taught in synagogue, and in the temple as well as anywhere people gathered. The effect of a teacher is the upholding of God's word, the growth and the maturity of His bride until the

day of His return (Ephesians 4:11; 1 Corinthians 12:28, Romans 12:7; James 3:1).

Effective teachers understand that the spiritual transformation is not a crisis event; it takes place over time. They don't expect a single lesson to accomplish all that God desires in the lives of believers. They are aware that Christian maturity is a lifelong process; they exercise patience and faithfulness in ministry in order to see lives formed in the image of Christ.

Often times, the teacher attempts to shoulder the weight of communicating God's truth alone. But the Bible tells us that the Holy Spirit works through the teacher (1Corinthian 12:4-11; 1Peter 4:10-11). "Dr. Gary Bredfelt once said, "Teaching is a dual effort. This means while the teacher may be teaching in an external sense, the Holy Spirit is often teaching in the internal sense."

This should be understood by those who feel the urging ability of teaching others. The Bible is clear in the role of the Holy Spirit in teaching. The Holy Spirit illuminate (John 14:17; Romans 5:5; 8:9; Ephesians 1:13-14), and instructs the learner (John 14:26-27, 16:7-15). These principles apply both to the teacher, and the learner.

It is important for every believer to rely on the anointing within, listen and obey the teachings of the Holy Spirit. For the learners who are seeking, the Holy Spirit often draws them to Himself through teaching (2 Corinthians 4:1-6). This can be illustrated simply by understanding that the Holy Spirit guides the whole learning process, whether it is an auditorium, a class room, or a small group.

The Holy Spirit enables the teacher to identify central concepts of the materials, and questions from the learner's perspective that may be beneficial to the other learners or even the teacher.

THE TEACHER'S RESPONSIBILITIES.

Teacher's responsibilities are great. In the first place, he must know the portion of the word of God he is attempting to proclaim or teach. He has to be aware of his listeners' needs and their level of comprehension. He must never inject his own whims or opinion into the message. He must proclaim the 'whole counsel of God' (Acts 20:27).

No teacher of the word should delight in mishandling any portion of the Scripture, no addition to it. The teacher should keep in mind the stern warning in (Revelation 22:18-19). The Bible shows that teachers of the word of God are likely tempted to please people with tickling of their 'itching ears' (2 Timothy 4:1-4). They are always lured towards speaking those things people want to hear, and not the things they need to hear from the Word of God.

The word of God must be applied equally, and evenly to all with no partiality to any one at any time (2 Timothy 5:21). The best advice is, "Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers" (1 Timothy 4:16).

The one who teaches must first apply the word to themselves. The Scriptural challenge for teachers is,

“...you, then, who teach others, do you not teach yourself? You who preach against stealing, do you steal...?” (Romans 2:21-22).

The goal of teaching is always life changing. In preparing a lesson therefore, the teacher should never approach the material with the goal of “what do I want to teach the learners?” The goal should always be, “what do I want the learners to do?” Often, teachers are fascinated to concentrate on the simple goal of information transfer rather than life transformation.

The old adage is relevant, “Wisdom is knowledge applied to everyday life.” This is true because the Bible says, “Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know” (1Corinthians 8:1-2). The sure indication that you know the word of God is when you apply for the common good of oneself, and others.

The other extreme is a Bible teacher who attempts to apply the Scripture without proper Biblical context. In this, the teacher will run the risk of sharing opinion rather than absolutes and Scriptural principles. Biblical truth needs to be released in its context, not watered down or overemphasized.

The challenge from Paul to Timothy which is for all teachers of the word of God is, “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15, NKJV).

The teacher's role is to study the word, digest God's truth and humbly deliver to God's flock. The teacher must consider this concept when preparing teaching materials. The question is always, 'what will the learners do with this information' in order to facilitate the process of applying knowledge in a practical way?

Thus, teachers must be able to think through the materials, and process how the information can be implemented in everyday life. A Bible teacher is not a lecturer standing in front of a podium, using big words or complicated ideas to impress his audience.

A teacher of the word of God is likened with a tour guide who shares life experiences of the learners, while walking through life on the same level as the learners. A tour guide is able to communicate for life change, because the learner sees the tour guide as one who wrestles with life challenges in the same way.

Bible teachers build bridges to the learners. The best Bible teachers are those who perceive themselves as growing in the process of their own Christian maturity. For effective teaching to be realized, teaching must be transferable. The teachers have not done their job unless the learners can walk away with the important ideas, main points, the insight or the principles that they can implement into their lives.

Paul is fairly clear; teaching for the sake of information itself is very dangerous. The influential apostle asserts, "Knowledge puffs up but love builds up" (1Corinthians 8:1). Teachers should think, and focus on

transformational teachings. Involving learners is key to transformation teaching.

When the teacher factors the experiences of the learners, they become valuable resources to the lessons. Teachers will find that people tend to learn more when they are involved in the process.

The Bible shows that the disciples were more than learners, but apprentices-learning in the job. As Jesus engaged in His ministry, they were with Him, they listened and watched Him doing.

Jesus taught with questions and parables. He rarely lectured; He always pushed and challenged His learners. When teaching, teachers must know that the people listening to them are intelligent, and can think for themselves. If teachers keep talking too much without involving them, the listeners, often think on something else rather than the lesson.

THE INSTRUCTIONS IN THE WORD OF GOD.

In speaking of the one who is 'blessed', Psalms 1:1-3 says “Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, or stands in the way of sinners, or sit in the seat of mockers. But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day, and night. He is like a tree planted by the streams of water, which yields its fruit in season, and whose leaves do not wither. Whatever he does prospers.”

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus described such a person as one who, "Hunger and thirst for righteousness in a desire to be filled," (Matthew 5:6).

The greatest blessing of a teacher of God's word is to receive, and share Biblical instructions to the listeners. Learning and teaching God's word are activities a believer anticipates and thoroughly enjoys. Therefore, teachers value those times when saints assemble for study and worship because he knows he will be with people who are like him, who respect and obey God's word.

As seen in the New Testament, proclamation of the word of God was an act of worship in the early church. In Acts 20:7, the church at Troas assembled for worship, and apostle Paul taught them the word of God. Instructions in God's word was a central part of their meetings.

As with other expressions of worship, teaching God's word must be given, and received in 'Spirit and truth' (John 4:24). To receive or give instruction in truth, one must have God's word as the only source, the only truth (John 17:17). The one who proclaims a message must 'speak as the oracles of God'. That means the teacher must allow his message to rest upon, and be in accordance with the revealed will of God in the Scriptures.

There is no room in any platform for a teacher of the word to teach speculations, own ideas and philosophies of men, such would make worship futile (Matthew 15:9). For worshipers to receive instruction and worship in Spirit and truth, they must have the same noble attitude of the Bereans, Acts 17:10-11. They examined the Scriptures to

see whether or not the message spoken by the apostle Paul was true.

The believers must be discerning hearers, alert to anyone who would teach anything other than the oracles of God. A believer has no excuse for following teachings blindly. Jesus said, "...if the blind leads the blind, both will fall into a ditch," (Matthew 15:14).

It is equally important to note that the Scripture calls the hearers of the word of God to greater accountability; Jesus called out His listeners, "He who has ears, let him hear" (Matthew 11:15; Luke 8:8). It is different to hear or listen to the word of God and to do it. Listeners must act as wise builders (Matthew 7:24). The call to all believers is, "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Be a doer" (James 1:22).

If teachers set a good example by being faithful to what they teach, then they will be trusted, they will also get reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others (2 Timothy 2:2). No one should desire to teach unless he or she is striving to be faithful in all aspects of life.

These are the last days where some believers, "...will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. Such teachings come through hypocritical liars whose conscience has been seared as with a hot iron," (1 Timothy 4:1-2). These hypocritical agents of the enemy cunningly propagate falsehood instead of the truth. Their conscience is so hardened that they have ceased to distinguish truth, and lies.

The teacher is one who holds forth the truth. They look for ways to enlighten, explain, and apply God's truth. While prophets reveal the heart of God, teachers reveal His mind. A combination of prophets and teachers, balance each other in the church. Communicators of God's truth, and wisdom help believers remain Biblically grounded.

Teachers understand, explain, and enhance God's will; they guide believers towards wisdom; helping them stay faithful to Christ's word, and raising a transferable doctrine. Without input of other gifts, teachers can fall into dogmatism or dry intellectualism. They may also fail to see the personal aspect of the church's ministry.

CHAPTER 7: JESUS THE GIVER OF THE GIFTS

Jesus is not only the giver of the ascension gifts, but He is the head of His Church. He is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything He might have the supremacy (Col 1:18). If these ascension gifts in the body of the Christ have to function properly, each must recognize the headship, and lordship of the Christ.

Throughout the New Testament, there is a distinction between the headship of Christ and the Lordship of Jesus. The headship of Christ virtually always has in view Christ's relationship with His body (Ephesians 1:22-23; 4:15; 5:23; Col 1:18; 2:19). If we understand the relationship between Christ and the church, it will enhance the gifts to function with greater results. Lordship is to the individual; headship is to the church.

Headship, and lordship are two dimensions of the same thing. Headship is the lordship worked out in the corporate life of God's people. Jesus is the head of the church in the following ways:

1.He is the head in authority.

After His resurrection from the dead and ascending to heaven, Christ was seated at God's right hand in the heavenly places; "Far above all rulers and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come" (Ephesians 1:21-22).

God has highly exalted Jesus, and given Him a name which is above every name, "That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord," (Philippians 2:10, 11).

The five ascension gifts can only function within the purposes and the authority of God and in the name of Jesus. The church must always be submissive to His authority, and leadership.

When Jesus was ascending to heaven, he said to His disciples, "All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me" (Matthew 28:18). The Scriptures assure us that Christ will reign as head of the church or king of the kingdom until the end of time, and then, when all rule, authority and power are abolished, He will deliver the kingdom to God the Father (1 Corinthians 15:23, 24).

2. He is the head in example.

Jesus is our perfect pattern in obedience to God. His sinless life motivates us to emulate him. Peter said that Christ committed no sin, and no deceit was found in His mouth, "To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in His steps. He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in His mouth. When they hurled insult to Him, He did not retaliate; when He suffered, He made no threats. Instead, He entrusted Himself to Him who judges justly," (1 Peter 2:21-23).

The head of the church is perfect in character, and authority. He leads His church with His own life. As His church, we are to heed His commands, and imitate His life. John wrote, “Whoever claims to live in Him must walk as Jesus did” (1 John 2:6). The five-leadership team in the body of the Christ must be examples to the flock and serve with humility and their diverse gifts.

Because of His unique leadership Jesus gave to the church, Paul lived an exemplary life to the point of charging the believers, “Follow my example as I follow the example of Christ” (1Corinthians 11:1). Christ is our perfect Savior. By living a perfect life before God, He became perfectly qualified to be our Savior and could offer a sinless life for atonement for sins (Hebrews 5:8, 9).

Believers reflects His glory, and we are being transformed into his likeness (2 Corinthians 3:18). The church looks to His life as a model of how to live. He is our head, and example. Not only do we look at Him, but we look unto Him as He ever lead us with His perfect life (Hebrews 2:2-3).

3. He is the head in love.

Christ is the head of the church in love. He leads, and commands us with His compelling love. Jesus told His disciples, “A new command I give you, love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 14:34-35).

4. Christ love motivates us in three directions.

First, it motivates us to love Him (1 John 4:19). Secondly, His love inspires us to love each other (1 John 3:16). Thirdly, His love moves us to do His will (John 14:15).

As the head of the church, He lovingly serves us with His power as He used His position as Lord to serve His disciples, and inspire in them the spirit of service. After washing the feet of His disciples, He challenged them with the very example, “You call me ‘teacher’ and ‘Lord’, and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I the Lord and teacher have washed your feet, I have set you an example...” (John 13:13-15).

With many examples in the Scriptures, Jesus has portrayed in the highest possible way what love is, and how true love is manifested. He leads His church with His true, and perfect love. As believers how do we understand this Scripture? “Friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love,” (1 John 3:7-8).

To be a subject to the lordship of Jesus is to respond to His will regarding life, and the practice of the church. Submission to the headship of Christ includes obtaining God’s mind through mutual ministry, and sharing. The five leadership gifted persons must obey the Holy Spirit through mutual subjection and servant-hood, as they testify Jesus Christ collectively through sharing, and corporate witness.

Submission to the headship of Christ incarnates the New Testament reality that Jesus is not only Lord of the lives of women and men who believes in Him, but also the Master of the life of the church. Christ is the lifeline, and living example for us to emulate in all areas of our lives.

Therefore, the church leadership must recognize Christ's headship which is established in His body. Alfred Gibbs (1935) has appropriately stated, "Each local assembly should have Christ as the head, the word of God as guide, the Holy Spirit as God's power and the glory of Christ as its aim." Jesus will remain the head over all things in the universe, "And He is the head of the body, the church; He is the beginning and first-born from among the dead, so that in everything He might have the supremacy," (Colossians 1:16-18).

ASPECTS OF CHRIST'S HEADSHIP.

The five ascension gifts, must look up to Christ not only as the giver of the gifts but the Chief shepherd of His church. The following are five aspects of Christ's headship in the church;

1. As the head, Jesus seeks to express His character, and nature through His body.

The purpose of a physical body is to express the life that is in it. It is the same with the body of Christ. It exists so that Jesus can express His personality in a visible way. The local body of Christ is called to gather together

regularly to display God's life through the ministry of every believer.

2. As the head, Jesus continues His earthly ministry.

Luke began the book of Acts with this remark; "In my former book, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and teach until the day He was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles He had chosen" (Acts 1:1-2; Luke 1:1-2). The first 'account' Luke was referring to is the gospel of Luke.

The implication of this sentence is that Luke's new volume, Acts is a record of what Jesus continued to do, and teach from His ascension onwards. The theme of Acts is Christ's continued presence, found in the name Emmanuel, 'God with us'. Although he is no longer visible to the human eye, Jesus is still at work with His people. (1 Peter 1:8).

3. As the head, Jesus directs both the church and the work.

Jesus is the commander-in-chief of His church, and work. The Spirit of Jesus led Philip to join a chariot where a man was reading a Scripture (Acts 8:29). God appeared to Paul, and called Him into apostolic ministry (Acts 9:1-10). Jesus worked with the members of His church, confirming their message with signs (Mark 16:20).

In the book of Acts, we find the phrase, "Get up and go," repeated several times. Jesus said it to Ananias (Acts

9:11), and Peter (Acts 10:20). Ananias went, and so did Peter. As Head of the church, Jesus still says, “Get up and go,” and make disciples to Him today (Matthew 28:19).

4. As the head, Jesus nourishes His Body.

The way we feed our bodies is through our mouths. Jesus does the same with His body, of which we are a part, for He's our Caretaker. He nourishes, and cherishes His body. “...no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church,” (Ephesians 5:29).

Christ the head feeds His body through the ministry of each member (Ephesians 5:19-20), and the five ascension gifts (Eph 4:16). For this reason therefore, it is important to be hooked on to the body of the Christ allowing “every joint” to supply its portion to us. In like manner, it is critical that we feed all the sheep in the Lord's fold without fail.

5. As the head, Jesus is the source of the church's life.

Jesus supplies all that His body needs, and we derive our life and being from Him. “Christ is our life,” Colossians 3:4. The head in heaven dispenses His life through His Spirit who empowers the members of His Body on earth. The Jesus of the good news may appear remote and unavailable, but He lives inside every believer by faith and is as close to us as in the breath of our mouths (Romans 10:6, Galatians 2:20).

THE CORPORATE BODY OF THE CHRIST.

Understanding your spiritual gifts will enable you to find your place of ministry in the local church. There are three significant 'body' passages in the New Testament (Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4). The Bible reveals the importance of every member of the Church, and in that sense the equality of all believers, it also lays emphasis on the role of ascension gifts; apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers (Ephesians 4:11, 12).

The New Testament shows that there is grace of 'apostleship' which carries special responsibilities in church planting, and leadership. We must not overlook this fact. However, the Bible warns against false claims to apostleship (2 Corinthians 11:4-15; Rev 2:2).

We need to see the big vision of the body of the Christ. The body is a supernatural corporate entity composed of all the redeemed, regenerated, and transformed human beings who are united, mingled, and incorporated with, and in the family of the triune God.

Christ Himself is the head of the body, and all the genuine believers in Christ are the many members of the body (1 Corinthians 12:27). The body of Christ is the means for which God carries out His administration. We have been regenerated and are members of the body of Christ, so that together with all the members of the body, would be one under Him to accomplish what Christ the head of the church desires. We have been saved and we are constantly

being saved in the divine life, that we may be one with other believers under Christ as He carries out His administration.

In our daily living, we need to train our spirit to be one with the Lord with other members of the body. We are to express Christ in everything we do. God requires that those in any measure of responsibility do everything possible to create harmony, understanding, and unity among all who have found Jesus as Savior and Lord.

This body of the Christ is composed of all the genuine believers in Christ who are in the process of sanctification, renewing, transformation, conformation and glorification to be built up together in Christ. As long as all the members of the body of Christ are one, the ascension gifts serve in empowering and releasing believers to serve Christ.

Christ has a way to carry out God's administration through His Body, the Church. Satan knows this, so, he works in subtle and cunning way to divide the body and separate the members.

Gerald Coates (1983) asks a pertinent question, "Where are the men and women who will break out of divisive attitudes, fearful spirits and restricting structures and live out the high – priestly prayer of Jesus, 'that they may be one?' (John 17:11)." When there is no oneness in the divine life under the head, the carrying out of God's administration is frustrated.

The church is likened to a body, made up of many parts; and though all the parts are many, they form one body. So

it is with Christ. (1 Corinthians 12:12). The corporate Christ is composed of Christ Himself as the head and the church as His body, all the believers as His members (Acts 9:4). We are redeemed members of the body of Christ, "...so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belong to all the others" (Romans 12:5), even one spirit with Him (1 Corinthians 6:17).

We are being constituted with Christ's life, His very element, and Christ Himself is our life (Colossians 3:4, 11). Corporately, we are His Body; Christ is giving life to the Church and expresses Himself through the five ascension gifts, and all the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

KNOWING YOUR SPIRITUAL GIFTS.

The first requirement before knowing your spiritual gift is that you have to accept Jesus as your Savior, and Lord. Then, follow the following guidance:

- Accept that you have spiritual gifts.
- You have to be willing do the work in accordance to your gifts.
- Pray for God's guidance.
- Explore those possibilities by studying what the Bible says about spiritual gifts.
- Learn your church's position on spiritual gifts, and how to use them in the ministry.
- Read what Christian authors have to say on the subject.
- Talk to people who are really using their spiritual gifts.

- Discuss with friends, and family what they think your gift might be.
- Experiment with as many gifts as you can by looking for needs in your church, and trying to meet them.

As a summary, it is my desire that you open yourself to God as a channel for His use, and examine your aspirations for Christian service in ministry. Identify the needs you believe to be most crucial in the life of the church and evaluate the results of your efforts to serve and minister. Continually follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit, as He leads you into obedience to Christ, and remain alert to responses of other Christians.

THE IMPORTANCE OF KNOWING YOUR SPIRITUAL GIFTS.

1. Knowing your spiritual gifts will enable you to find your place of ministry in the local church.

Every Christian has a particular function in the body of Christ, and since your spiritual gifts equip you to carry out this function, knowing your gifts will help you to engage in the ministry.

2. Knowing your spiritual gifts will enable you determine your priorities.

Knowing your spiritual gifts will help you to set things in order of priorities. One of the most common problem we

all face is having more things to do than we have time to do. Paul says in Romans 12:6 -8, that we should make the use of our spiritual gifts a priority in our lives. In simple terms, when we have too many things, we may fail to choose a function in the areas of our spiritual gifts.

3. Knowing your spiritual gifts will be of great help in discerning God's will.

The choice of our occupation whether 'secular' or 'religious' should take into account whether or not it will help or hinder the exercise, and development of your spiritual gift.

4. Knowing your spiritual gifts determines your purpose in Christ's body.

Spiritual gifts are special attributes by the Holy Spirit to every member of the body of the Christ. A spiritual gift is not a natural talent. Everyone has natural talents, but only believers have spiritual gifts. Identifying your spiritual gift will help you position yourself to serve the Lord effectively in your local fellowship.

5. Knowing your spiritual gifts helps you recognize that many people have a mix of spiritual gifts.

Realize that you may likely have more than one spiritual gift. God reveals to you as you serve Him.

STEWARDS OF THE GIFTS.

When Peter spoke of spiritual gifts in his first epistle (1 Peter 4:10-11), he considered them as a matter of personal stewardship. Peter wrote, “Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms.” In all duties and service of life, we should aim at glorifying God with our gifts.

Todd Wilson has said, “Whoever you are, wherever you’ve come from, your reasons for existence on planet earth is the same. You have been created to glorify God. To take all that you are and all that you have and use it to magnify God. In order to glorify God with these gifts, you got to use them to serve God’s people, with God’s strength.” Just as we must give an account of our use of the material things which God has placed under our control, we shall give an account of the use of our time, and also our spiritual gifts.

What have you denied yourself and others in terms of utilization of what God has put in you? Do you do what the Lord has called you to do? Do you use your gift or you are watching others doing exploits for God’s Kingdom and wishing you would be like so and so in your local church or within the wider body of the Christ?

Let us not chain people’s energies in activities for which they are not gifted. Instead, we should concentrate on people’s strengths in order to give the Holy Spirit free reign to hold people accountable, knowing that each one

of us has gifts that are valuable and needed in the body of the Christ.

As we demonstrate the love of God through these gifts which He has given us, we can experience personal fulfillment and great joy; we can experience purpose in life. If one Christian possesses all of the spiritual gifts, he would be self-sufficient and have no need of the other members.

The Bible says, "Each of us will give an account of himself to God" (Romans 14:12). The day of judgment will shed light on each person's work (1 Corinthians 3:13). While we may each discover our gifts, our attitudes towards these gifts matters. Do you wish you were like one of the church leaders, say your pastor or others with spectacular spiritual gifts?

Jesus is clear on the utilization of our gifts. "Again, the Kingdom of God is like a man going on a journey, he called his servants and entrusted his property with them.... each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. After a long time, the master of those servants returned and settled account with them," Matthew 25.

The parable shows that Christ wants us to use the talents and gifts He has given us no matter how insignificant they may seem to be to us or others. No excuse, no burying. Jesus is asking you today, "Why hide my talent?" Little it may be, invest in someone who can invest in another person, multiplying God's gifts. Before you covet other people's gifts, use the little you have by investing on someone's life.

God is ready to multiply it and get some interest from one person you reach and disciple for Jesus. Does the statement made by the master on the face of the wicked, and lazy servant make sense to you now? “You ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest.”

ABUSE OF GIFTS.

I think of untold inner and psychological trauma inflicted to the innocent believers by those who have treated the gifts of God in them as power to gain advantage over those they are serving. I have seen those operating in five ascension gifts use authoritarian and manipulative teachings and practices to control both their member's thoughts and behavior.

I have associated myself with some of them at some point and disassociate myself. They demanded total compliance with their shrewd domination. They induce fear, and threats to advance their agenda. They misused their gifts by putting monetary demands upon people they were serving in order to allow them to benefit from the gifts. This is a breach of character at best. It is manipulation, and witchcraft at worst. Make no mistake, abuse of power do happen in movements or churches led by apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. What is more tragic and shocking is their un-Biblical shrewdness usurping of power, and blind submission from their members.

At first, these leaders display their power as for the good of these innocent members. I have observed some of these leaders subtly issuing devastating instructions to believers which cause some confusion in order to access into deepest parts of their hearts, souls and minds. Later, they manipulate believers to do things against their will.

They abuse their authority, and plunder the church with their cunning teachings. These false teachers must know that they will each give account of damage they cause to the body of the Christ. This calls for every believer to be sober, and vigilant. A prerequisite to spiritual maturity is to grow and develop the fruits of the Spirit in order to discern what is from God, man and the devil. Some of the most dangerous gifted persons in the church are those who attempt to operate falsely in the gifts of leadership, and the Holy Spirit. The problem is that, they function without first developing the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22).

That is why the gift of discernment that upholds truth and exposes error as well as providing pastoral admonition and prophetic confrontation is so vital in the church today. Unfortunately, it seems discernment is low in the church and consequently abuse of God's gifts is on the rise.

The following are red alerts that each believer must watch out:

- Be warned when spiritual gifts are used as a means of manipulation, power, or controlling personal or church relationships (1 Corinthians 12:29-31).

- Be warned when anyone claims to have the ability to give or bestow, any particular gift, apostle Peter overcame this temptation (Acts 8:19).
- Be warned when any particular gift is made common evidence of spirituality, salvation, or other spiritual blessings.
- Be warned when the focus of a church service ministry or religious event is on spiritual gifts and their manifestation, rather than on the giver of the gifts-Jesus Christ, and His agenda for the church (Acts 3:16).
- Be warned when gifts are compared with another gift which leads to carnality.

God's field is so wide. There is no need of feeling jealous of others who are excelling in ministry more than us. Remember, when God calls us to ministry, we are not in the Kingdom contest. Jesus told His disciples, "...I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields. They are ripe for the harvest. Even now the reaper draws his wages and harvests the crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together" (John 4:35-37).

Paul had the same attitude when a party spirit arose in Corinthians Church. He reprimanded them with these questions, "What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants ...I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. The man who plants and the man who waters have one

purpose and each will be rewarded according to his own labor” (1 Corinthians 3:5-8).

CHAPTER 8: UNITY BRINGING GIFTS

All ascension gifted leaders have different functions and ways of doing things, so, there will be always tension between them. Their diversity of gifting can easily cause disunity in the church, undermining the unity of the spirit in the church. According to the New Testament, unity in Christ is not only good and pleasant to believers; but, even more importantly, it is good and pleasing to God.

Before Jesus was betrayed into the hands of lawless men. He prayed for the unity of those who would believe in Him even in the future (John 17:20, 21). Looking at this priestly prayer, T.B. Larimore observes, “The unity of believers had to be the dearest and most important longing in the heart of Jesus”. Do you see how Christ valued unity as you read His prayer?

A deeper understanding for this unity provides practical help in our daily living, and fosters our appreciation of the church as the body of the Christ. This unity occurs by the grace of God when one receives Christ, and becomes part of His body. Indeed, the absolute unity of the body, the Church, would be supreme miracle of the Church age.

If the five ascension gifted persons together with other leaders with different spiritual gifts team up as they minister, the believers will grow spiritually. This will also overcome human division, malice, and wickedness which is the hallmark of the fall. Jesus clearly said working in unity is the most convincing testimony to the world that God has come to reach humanity. “I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of

them may be one, Father, just as you are in Me and I am in You. May they also be in Us so that the world may believe that You have sent Me” (John 17:21-23).

It is important to understand that anyone who has genuinely become a member of the body of the Christ has received this unity (Ephesians 2:14-16). The body of the Christ is a living 'organism'. Organism is a term which indicates that the thing specified is permeated throughout all its parts with one common life. The life is the same in its roots, and all the structure.

The body of the Christ is living, and cannot be reduced to a mere humanly organized society of men. Unlike human organizations, the body of Jesus Christ is operated from within and not from without. Every human body is not only organized but is sustained by outward influences, regulations, and rules, but the body of Jesus Christ is living, vitalized spiritual body of the Lord.

To view the church as a mere human organization is to put the church on a level with all other human organizations. The body of Jesus Christ is a centralized organism. Therefore, unity among believers is secured not by a centralized authority. The church central authority is not in some given place on earth, but it is in Jesus Christ who sits at the right hand of the Father.

The assigned business of the church is to manifest the living Christ. In Colossians 3:12, Paul explains how

elders and believers with different personalities and gifts can achieve unity when they remain humble and gentle. Put on love ahead of personal preferences about the way things should be done.

Through Christ's death on the cross, we were made one people regardless of our background, gender, status and race. In this divine oneness, all national, racial, social and family distinctions are removed. First, we are reconciled to God. Second, through this reconciliation, we are reconciled to one another (Ephesians 2:16, 22). In this, human divisions and barriers are broken down in Christ; believers are now new, and one body of people created by God's marvelous grace.

Christ's purpose is to create in Himself one new man..." (Ephesians 2:15). There is no rank, division or cliques that organically exist in the Christ's body. The believers are not supposed to live in classes, and status. It is then appropriate to mention here that, as believers, we are now members of His body. We have become one with Christ and one with each other. Often, we witness some church leaders handle each other with reservation on nonessential petty doctrinal divisions.

Let us understand that our unity must be maintained by our adherence to teachings of Scriptures. Eddie Cloer (2001) writes, "Christ's body is not a collection of people guided by groundless beliefs about God, and dreamy speculations about life. The members of the body are united upon God's divine revelation of truth."

The Bible says, “There is one body and one-Spirit-just as you were called in one hope, called-one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all”, (Ephesians 4:4-6);

1. One body.

The body which Paul wrote is the spiritual body of Christ, the church (Ephesians 1:22, 23).

2. One-Spirit.

The Spirit is the third member of the Godhead who gave us the revelation of the Scriptures (2 Peter 2:20).

3. One hope.

The eternal hope which girds the heart of every believer through the gospel (Colossians 1:23).

4. One Lord.

Christ the Son of the living God, the one who died for our sins and was raised for our justification (Romans 5:1).

5. One faith.

The faith is the belief in Christ, and His Word which is prompted by the testimony of the Scriptures (Romans 10:17).

6. One baptism.

The one Christ commanded in the great commission, and which will be in effect until the end of the age (Matthew 28:19-20; Romans 6:4).

7. One God.

The eternal God who is the Creator and sustainer of the earth, the only true and living God (Romans 16:25-26). Therefore, “Make every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.” (Ephesians 4:6).

D.M. Lloyd Jones (1980) writes, “Whatever be the unity of which the apostle speaks, it is a unity that results directly from all he has been saying in the first three chapters of the epistle. In other words, you cannot have Christian unity unless it is based upon the great doctrines outlined in Ephesians 1-3.”

Paul reiterates on the same unity in 1 Corinthians 1:10 where he clearly specified the kind of unity for which he pleaded; a unity of agreement, without divisions, complete in mind and judgment. This kind of unity is brought about by a submission to Christ’s will (Acts 2:42-44) is an example of doctrinal unity.

Both believers, and church leadership cannot afford to live devoid of the unity which we have attained in Christ Jesus. For practical unity, all the five gifts, elders, and congregation must approach this unity by living with each other in one accord in Christ. The Bible admonishes all

believers to stay in love which enhance an attitude of togetherness, “Live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God” (Ephesians 5:2).

Because the elders are committed to unity with each other despite their different personality traits and gifting, they are able to teach the rest of the flock in their care to live in unity regardless of their differences and diversity. This is the call and ultimate objective of the church “Until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God...” (Ephesians 4:13, 16).

This unity of faith must be understood in the context of coming to a common understanding and practice of the core truths of the faith as taught to us in the Bible through Jesus Christ. We already have the unity of the Spirit when we believed, and were born again of the Holy Spirit.

Those who are entrusted with diverse gifts of overseeing the church of Jesus have a God-given responsibility to bring the flock into unity with the core doctrine of faith. If they fail to do so, but instead bringing winds of doctrines to the flock, they cause disunity of faith. Those who do this are called 'heretics' or 'divisive ones'. True unity of faith can only be put into practice by understanding what the Bible is teaching, in context, and living that out in real life. So, what you believe matters.

When true believers come together in unity of the Spirit, they will always be working toward unity of the faith. In a nutshell, when the body of the Christ is brought to the 'unity of the faith and knowledge of the Son of God', it

will also be 'mature' with Christ filling the whole body (Ephesians 4:13). In this condition, we will not waver in our faith, but will be solid in our relationship with Christ and with one another, unmoved by strange doctrines or unspiritual men.

When elders with different gifting do their part while bound together by love, the flock in their care grows to unity of faith. In order to come to unity of faith, we need a controlling revelation of Christ as God's full purpose and provision. With 'the knowledge of the Son of God' laid as the solid foundation in gathering of God's people, and those fellowshiping walk in the revelation, there will be a manifestation and an expression of 'the fullness of Christ' in their midst (Ephesians 4:13).

The unity of faith can be a tool to test any denomination, organization, or individual who claims to be following the Lord. Are they bringing the body of Christ to unity of faith, or are their doctrines causing division? Regardless of diversity of gifting, a church can be one, not because one person is in control, but because all grasp the knowledge of the Son of God. When they operate in the revelation of the knowledge of Christ, they will easily lay down their preferred way of working for the sake of unity of the body.

Other challenges facing our church leaders in working together appear to be endless ego, pride, selfishness, lack of vision, personality, tension and church politics. In short, it is a failure not to plug into a focused priority of

Jesus' love for the church to the point of setting a side personal agenda.

The oneness of the body of the Christ demonstrates the Kingdom gospel. Gerald Coates sums up by saying, "The greatest proclamation of the gospel will be the oneness of God's people. Where else on earth can you expect to see men of every cultural background, theological persuasion and colour living in harmony? Learning to live with their differences and resolve their problems?"

True leaders must be of "...one heart and mouth" (Romans 15:5) as they glorify God in their service to Him. The offenses, and wounds some five ascension gifted leaders have caused in local churches and among each other is great and have had a negative impact in the body. We should value working together; this begins with a heart for God and His Kingdom; maintaining the unity of the Spirit and faith.

Ephesians 4:2-3, tells us how to maintain spiritual unity; with all lowliness and meekness, longsuffering, and forbearing one another in love; we are told to attain unity. In verse three, this is a reality to be maintained; endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. This kind of unity will bring honor, and credit to our high calling.

Verse 13, speaks of a "unity of...the knowledge of the Son of God," our common conviction about Christ. Same verse also speaks of a 'unity of faith', our common confidence in Christ. Ephesians 2:14 speaks of the end of hostility. When hostility is replaced with love, we have a

common care for each other. In a nutshell, Christian unity from Ephesians 2-4 is having a common conviction about Christ, common confidence in Him, and common care for each other.

The truth in this context is, our unity flows from Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit sets free our hearts from irrational self-defensive prejudices so that we are willing to own up to true conviction about Christ. So, our common convictions, confidence, and care are all from the Holy Spirit.

According to Ephesians 4:2 we see three stages of love on the way to unity in the body of the Christ;

1. Be completely humble, and gentle.

The first stage of love which leads to unity is humility, and gentleness. The knowledge of our high calling should make us feel very humble.

2. Be patient.

The second stage of love results from the first. It is called patience or long-suffering. Proud people are not patient. The more highly one thinks of himself the more quickly he will think of his interest first. If we have seen the significance of God's grace, then we must trust Him to give the strength to wait until our delays are turned into strategic maneuvers of victory.

3. Bearing with one another in love.

In preserving our common care in verses 2-3, the focus is on how a group of imperfect people in the body of the Christ can preserve a common care for each other.

How can you keep on caring for a person who does not love you? Or a person who opposes you, and wants to frustrate your dreams? How can you maintain the unity of the Spirit with them instead of becoming hostile, and cold?

The Bible says have a humble spirit so that you can patiently endure their differences, and shortcomings in love. Unity is found in knowing Christ, being found in Him and being known by Him.

THE PATTERN OF GIFTS.

If you step aside, and look at the church you can see a pattern of ministry gifts. Our services have a structure guided by the dominant grace of the main leader of that local church. It is apparent that every local church has a dominant gift that leads, and influences its direction.

If we are a pastoral church we focus on caring, counseling, and nurturing our members. There is nothing wrong with that. If we have a teacher as the main leader of the congregation then we should be versed in the word of God. If the main leader is a prophet, then we should be more open to prophetic words, deliverance ministry, stronger prayer, and spiritual warfare.

If it is an apostle, the predominant grace will be of pioneering new fellowships, and setting new leadership in place. Their leadership reflects the character of Christ, spiritual maturity, and ability to equip the saints for the work of service. Ron Cotte sums up, “They have the grace of networking key leaders together and placing people where they can maximize their gifts and calling. They are characterized by a burden for unifying the body of the Christ and creating horizontal networking or association of leaders in their regions either for fellowship or to fulfill a joint mission.” This should be understood by the church, the synergy through networking of apostolic work to raise emerging leadership and ministries to accomplish the task of multiplication of disciples, and planting new fellowships.

On the other hand, the grace operating in the lives of evangelists differs from the rest of the other ascension gifts. The unique grace released by the Holy Spirit is clearly, and effectively to communicate the gospel of Jesus Christ to others. The burden in their hearts is for the lost, and will go out to share the truth with them. They push the believers to continually seek relationship with those who have not given their lives to Jesus.

They encourage the believers to be open to the leading of Holy Spirit, and preach to different people. Evangelists display a pattern or rhythm of love-giving free treasures a way for Jesus (2 Corinthians 4:7). The grace to emotionally show passion for missions of winning souls,

and reviving the churches at any sacrifice is experienced by believers whenever evangelists minister.

They motivate the believers to proclaim the gospel and salvation of Christ both within and outside the church. Indeed, they long to see those who are lost, found, saved, convicted and transformed to do greater work of evangelism. They agree that it is good to preach, and teach believers. However, they also know that Christ longs to equip the believers for Spirit-led living.

Therefore, the five ascension equipping teams must shift from 'one hour of power' model of ministry on Sunday mornings to training people to do what they are called to do. So that, "Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in various forms"(1 Peter 4:10).

In order to bring the full complement of Christ's ministry to the body, all five ascension gifted persons must combine forces, and operate together. The teacher needs to be inspired by the prophet, and the prophet needs to be strengthened by the pastor. The evangelist needs to be assisted by the teacher, and the apostle needs the partnership of all the rest to fulfill the total call of apostleship.

If they fail on this, churches can get over-developed in one area, and remain undeveloped in another area. The result is lack of balance. One can be known for teaching and another for evangelism, but God's plan is for us to be strong in every area. Otherwise, the members of the body will not be equipped, and released to function properly.

What is the point of a church being taught the gospel well if it never goes, and evangelizes with it? What is the point of a church that is enthusiastic in evangelism without learning on discipling new believers to grow in faith?

Each gift has its place and aspect of functions according to the portion of grace given (Romans 12:6). No one can appoint himself or herself apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor or teacher. Every gift comes by the grace of God; it is as a result of the work of Christ in us, and not from human choice or effort. You have to be aware that God has called, and given you a gift in order to serve Him.

It is not the prerogative of the church leadership or one among the ascension gifts leaders to allocate believers places of service just for the sake or make the church look like apostolic or prophetic fellowship (1 Corinthians 12:28).

Paul and Timothy knew their calling, and moved in the direction of that higher calling. It was not accomplished overnight. A ministry may take a lifetime for every aspect of it to blossom, and flourish. It must be cultivated, and brought to maturity before it is released to function and bear fruit.

When this happens, the believers will be equipped and released to be God's agents in the world and complete the mandate of God. What we see today is elevation of one gift to the detriment of the others. We often witness a lot of struggles in the Body of Christ as a result of this misplacement of gifts.

Think of the consequence of having an evangelist as a pastor. Imagine a prophet being forced to be a pastor, and so forth. You must be willing to submit your giftedness to others who can guide or mentor you so that you are led to operate in your area of gifting.

Ascension gift leaders are different types of people who operate in different ways as led by the Holy Spirit. Their role is of overseeing, and strengthening the body of Jesus. Their primary task is building relationship, help the body to grow, and so the priesthood of all believers is safeguarded, that is why they have to be of a good character, and prove themselves in the running of their households.

It is possible for a person to neglect a spiritual gift. Paul warns Timothy not to neglect his gift (1Timothy 4:14), and he also encouraged him to “...fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of hands” (2 Timothy 1:6). Therefore, it is a Biblical necessity that leaders discover, and move in the arena of their gifting. If the Holy Spirit distributes spiritual gifts, then their discovery must by nature be a spiritual experience. When we walk in obedience, we must trust that the Holy Spirit will respond with the revelation of His gifts in our lives.

If we do not accept and obediently use our spiritual gifts, which are expressions of the diverse grace of God (1 Peter 4:10), we neglect God’s work of grace in our lives. We will ‘fail’ God’s grace apportioned in our lives (Hebrews 12:15). God forbid that we make that choice.

If you fail to shine with the gift God has given you because you think it is not needed by the body, you don't automatically stop being an integral part of the body. However, you cease to be useful to your fullest potential. If you are dissatisfied with the gifts in you and decide not use them, you'll still have the same gifts and the same role in the body, but you will have refused to function. God will still accomplish His purposes on earth, and in the hearts of men (Philippians 1:6).

For God's Kingdom to advance greatly, concerted effort is required of each ascension gift. Paul was passionate for Church planting while the daughters of Philip were prophets. Philip their father, who was fired up to share the gospel, was an evangelist, while Barnabas was a shepherd with compassionate heart of encouragement. Pricilla on the other hand was a teacher who taught Apollos. Together as a team complemented each other and brought balance, health, maturity, production, and edification of the body of the Christ (Romans 12:5-8; Ephesians 4:11-13; 1 Corinthians 12; 11-31). What lesson do we get when we read Paul's personal greetings to persons in Romans 16:1-24? In recognizing each person's little contributions to him, his co-workers, Paul makes appeals as he unequivocally enumerates individual's gifts to the body of the Christ in Rome.

These mentioned persons were in his team or network. His humility in Romans 1:11 challenges me, "I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make

you strong-that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith."

It is important for each of these ascension leadership team to discern from the Holy Spirit on formation of the team structure. This will allow each person to operate in the area of grace or gifting. We have seen that conflicting agendas and motivations of these five gifts leaders may tend to pull them and the church in different directions. But if the five leaders could properly develop, focus and coordinate together, they would create a very potent leadership team.

All the gifted persons, and those endowed with other gifts of the Holy Spirit should serve with humility recognizing each other's graces. The ascension gifts complement each other in empowering the body. John Maxwell has said, "Teamwork makes the dream work." This is true because, they restore the body to its true foundation.

We should not be fascinated with the gifts, skills or abilities. We do not find our identity in what we do for Christ, but in Christ alone. Let us not seek praise from men. Like Paul, we can daily assert, "What after all is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe as the Lord has assigned to each his task" (1 Corinthians 3:5).

Paul recognized teamwork, and said, "By the grace of God that He has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder and someone else is building on it. But each should be careful how he builds" (1 Corinthians 3:10).

BENEFITS OF A TEAM STRUCTURE.

The following are benefits of a team structure in apostolic, and prophetic movements:

1. A total ministry.

There is a total ministry in a team work. The body of the Christ benefits immensely. When equipping gifts mentioned in Ephesians 4:11 are operative in the church, perfecting of the saints is easily attained. A congregation that receives only the ministry of one person experiences lopsided growth. One performer every Sunday (one man show) is incomplete and of great disadvantage to the body of Christ and this can lead to spiritual malnutrition.

The Lord's intention is that, "We all reach the unity in the faith and knowledge of the Son of God, and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13). We should be growing, maturing as the body of the Christ (every fellowship) ministers to each other.

2. Mutual accountability.

As a team, each ministry provides mutual accountability, and diversity. Apart from diversity of gifts, plurality (team ministry) in the ascension gifts is healthier and stronger. Individual championship, lone ranger kind of ministry, which is common today is of no good to the body of the Christ. In a teamwork, pooling of resources and sharing of responsibilities is easily achieved.

3. Accelerating productivity.

Through teamwork, more work can be done; combined labor with different giftings than by one person trying to do everything alone. This can be enhanced when the ascension gifted persons deal with the fear of losing control. We should stop seeing emerging ascension gifts in the church as competition. This leads to controlling, and overshadowing other gifts in the church.

This insecurity cripples team spirit acceleration within the apostolic, and prophetic teams. For more sustainability and productivity in the ministry teams, individual growth should be encouraged and nurtured. Submission, and respect to each other's graces are the best teamwork attitudes. Each gift should be given a room to function in the body within the context of the broader intention of our Lord Jesus Christ for each person.

4. Checks, and balances.

Teamwork will dispel the proliferation of personality cults or concentration on one individual gift. The misuse of the gifts, and finances is easily detected when all gifts work together in the body of the Christ. Counterfeiting of the supernatural gifts of the Holy Spirit will be detected if those with ascension, and other gifts of the Holy Spirit work together as a team in the church.

The ascension gifts should provide example of team leadership for other emerging gifts in the body of the Christ. They should aim at giving a balanced training to

the leadership of relating clusters of churches. On the other hand, when handling problems among the believers, each gift will share the knowledge and wisdom from the Holy Spirit contrary to one sided solution from one gift.

For a team to be effective, it is important to understand and connect the overall picture of the church. They should have a lead elder who maintains the focus on the vision, create a conducive environment, healthy relationships and flow of communication

A successful team must observe the following tenets:

a). There is a need to be sensitive to needs.

The Bible exhorts, “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than you. Each of you should look not only to your own interest, but also the interest of others” (Philippians 2: 3-4). For teamwork to succeed, selflessness should be the rule of functioning. Being sensitive to the needs of others means to have an ability to esteem other brethren with different gifts as significant, and equal.

b) There is a need to trust one another.

It is always important to remember, “The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose and each will be rewarded according to their own labour” (1 Corinthians 3:8). The Fruit is earned by hard labour, just like having a fruitful tree starts with planting a seed, watering, maturing, and protecting it until it becomes fruit bearing.

“...the sower and the reaper may be glad together” (John 4:36).

Similarly, we have been given free gifts to go, and bring forth abundant mature fruit. We have to trust one another as a team in order for individual gift to excel-to bear fruits in the body and among the teams. Let us understand these, we will not be judged on the basis of our gifts but of our fruits (John 15:8, 16; Matthew 7:16, 20).

c) There is a need to maintain the unity of the Spirit.

As I have mentioned before, every team member in the five ascension gifts network must heed the following exhortation; “Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:2-3, 13).

It is crucial and critical for all the teams to understand that, 'keeping the unity of the Spirit and faith' is not the absence of diversity. It does not mean uniformity, and conformity. This profound unity of the Spirit is already there in the body of Christ, it is our responsibility to practice agape love (the unconditional love of Christ) among the team in five ascension gifts.

Ministering in love, and peace is conducive in handling, and resolving sensitive matters. We must distinguish between essential, and non-essential matters of faith. John Calvin wrote, “On such matters we ought not to divide but try to help each other.” Paul is clear on contentious

matters which depend on the level of our understanding or lack of understanding, “And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. Only let us live up to what we have already attained” (Philippians 3:15-16).

The true Church is united in all beliefs necessary for salvation. The incredible and marvelous thing about the Christian faith is this; Jesus is the author, and founder of our faith, is alive. (Philippians 1:6; Hebrews 12:2).

He is everywhere and at work all over the world, and specifically seen among His people. To demonstrate the reality of His saving grace to the world, He is seeking to save. Therefore, let us focus on glorifying God and the Lord Jesus Christ as we fellowship with those with different views lest we be guilty of schism and begin to rend the Church.

CONCLUSION

God gives His people the ability to excel in particular areas of ministry in order to serve others, and further His kingdom. "I am motivated by the captivating parable of the talents in Matthew 25:14-30 which says, "To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability." Then comes the day of reckoning, "After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them."

All the five ascension equipping and the spiritual gifts are all given to prepare God's people for the 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 (Ephesians 4:12-13).

At times when we speak about the church, we must be careful in the context of using phrases like 'my church' or 'my members'. It is not our church. The sheep are not our flock. All belongs to the Jesus. Pastors are elders, and are under-shepherds (1 Peter 5:4). The Scriptures designates only Jesus Christ as the head of the church.

Churches throughout ages have had divisions because people take positions, authority and possession of that which only belongs to Christ. The Corinthian church was called worldly by Paul because of such attitude (1 Corinthian 3:1-11). The modern structure finds its origin in the world, not in God's design for the body.

Jesus, the head of the church warned in Matthew 20:25; 28. I am not citing this scripture to insinuate that the church is devoid of 'organization or structure'. However, we must understand that the church is organic, alive, and receives life from Jesus. What I insist here is, gifting within the members of the body must function in a healthy manner.

I support that the church should have people with the responsibility of leadership. Effective functioning requires knowing who is responsible for the accomplishment of various tasks; elders, and the flock must equally be held accountable for doing their part.

Leaders must serve and not control. Remember, it is only the man who is truly under authority who is in authority. Power corrupts. Serving brings life. Leaders should display authority, being authoritative is not the same as being dictatorial.

Leadership is an essential dimension of pastoral ministry; it should not be treated lightly. We must keep in mind that the over-management will bring problems; It obscures the central mission of the church, and leads to dictatorial rules which are inconsistent with Biblical position God has given to the pastors. All the five ascension gifts in the church must together discern the overall vision, and mission of the church. Leadership is influence, spirit led leadership will not only transform individuals but cities and communities.

The ascension equipping leadership teams must not complicate the gospel and portray the church as a complex

organization. God made the church simple, but man tends to make it complex. The question is; why rampant conflicts and tensions? Some of the conflicts embroil apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. It is simply because we either don't understand or neglect our call of equipping the saints for the work of service. It is also failing to submit ourselves to the ultimate central authority, in this context, the guidance of the word of God in leading the church.

It should also be clear; God did not appoint these leaders to do the work on behalf of their brethren. God intended that every Christian should be a 'Christian worker', and He appointed some to take the oversight of the work so that it might be carried on efficiently. It was never God's thought that the majority of the believers should devote themselves exclusively to secular affairs and leave the church matters to a group of spiritual specialists. This point cannot be over-emphasized. The five ascension gifts leadership or church elders are not a group of men and women who are in contract to do the work on behalf of members; they are only lead elders (men and women) who oversee the affairs of church. It is their business to encourage the backward and restrained the forward ones, never doing the work instead of them, but simply directing them in the doing of the ministry. For the believers to be released to function in building each other in their integral priesthood, their maturity is critical and urgent (Hebrews 5:11-12).

This has enormous implications for how Christians live their lives daily. If we teach the congregation that working in business, communications, politics, or any other profession is

just as impactful as working directly in the ministry, it will allow Christians to connect their beliefs or faith to their everyday actions. Hans-Ruedi Wember (1978) has noted that, “Every Christian needs two conversions. First, he needs conversion from the world to Christ. Second, he needs conversion to serve Christ in the world.”

It is too easy for us to find ourselves after receiving Christ, and be too busy in the affairs of the church in the expense of those outside the church who need us to reach them. On the other hand, we need to review our teaching on the Greek world view of dichotomizing between 'sacred' and 'secular', insisting that the church ministry is higher calling than other professionals.

The statement of Jesus is still relevant, “You are the salt of the earth...you are the light of the world” (Matthew 5:13, 14). There is a need to give all believers purpose in pursued jobs, careers or aptitudes and equip them to serve others and improve society through their daily work. The priesthood of believers is based on the clear teachings of the Scriptures; preparing God’s people for the work of service.

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