

# What??!

## No Hierarchy??!

A Brief Discussion on Leadership  
in the Body of Christ  
- Part 1 -

Throughout the history of the Body of Christ, there has been much discussion and teaching concerning the role model of leadership that is to be followed within the Body of Christ. Up until the time when Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire, the Body of Christ had functioned in a much different way.

As Christianity became the official religion of the Empire it underwent many changes concerning church government, leadership and their functions. It began to take on many aspects of Roman culture, not just in doctrines but also in leadership role model. It began to take on a model of a “hierarchal system” of leadership very similar to the “hierarchy” of the Roman Empire and its ways of governing and overseeing the believers. They formed an “elitist” priesthood which included different positions and titles such as pope, cardinals, etc. Without realizing it, Christianity fell into, and became, the very thing that Jesus came to reprove the religious leaders of His day for falling into.

This “hierarchal” role model has been a mainstay within the Body of Christ to this day in one way or another. Throughout church history from that time until today, this system has caused problems and schisms within the Body of Christ. Denominations have risen up and have come into existence because of this role model of leadership. The term “denomination” itself is a term that comes from the mathematical function called division. Denominational churches and organizations see terms such as “pastor, elder, bishop, presbyter, etc” in the scriptures and take them out of their intended usage by the writers of the New Testament to “prove” that the Body of Christ was meant to have a “hierarchal” system of leadership.

Recently, in the “apostolic” and “prophetic” movements we have seen a move to shift away from such traditional “hierarchal” system to a different “hierarchal” system using such scriptures as Ephesians 4:11 and 1Corinthians 12:28 as a basis for their position. I would like begin our discussion here in Ephesians 4:11 and share some thoughts on this as well as other thoughts concerning the “hierarchal” leadership model. To do this, I believe, that we must take a look at Ephesians 4:11 in the full context in which Paul was writing and begin there.

To begin to fully grasp the context in which Paul is teaching in Ephesians 4:11, we must begin with Ephesians 4:1, *“I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy **of the vocation wherewith ye are called...**”* Paul speaks of the believer’s responsibility to walk *“worthy of their vocation”* or we can also use the term “calling.” What is Paul referring to when he says this? What is the believer’s “vocation” or “calling?” This many times has become a “quandary” for many a believer. We are always asking God to tell us what He is “calling” us to. We hear that many people “hear the call of God” and they enter into ministry in a church or some type of Christian organization. This may be true and has happened for many believers. For those who haven’t “heard this call” it has become for many, a source of angst and frustration.

However, we must realize that what Paul is endeavoring to teach us is that **every** believer has received a “calling” from the Lord. We received our “calling” the moment we received and believed in Jesus as our Lord and Savior and became a “son of God.” The calling He gives to all believers is to walk and live our lives as true disciples of Jesus, as well as, “sons and daughters” of the most high God. We are to live a lifestyle that gives honor and glory to our God in all that we do. By living the lifestyle that Jesus role modeled for us, we actually become a living, breathing witnessing vehicle to the unsaved. Our lifestyles, both individually and as a community, should be such that the lost would see what we have and who we are in Jesus and desire it for themselves. That is the “vocation” and “calling” that every believer has, both individually and collectively as the Body of Christ.

Paul goes on to teach us in Ephesians 4:2 and 3, how that “vocation” should be lived out by every believer, *“...with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”* Again, we can see how this was role modeled by Jesus as He walked this earth. However, notice, that at the conclusion of verse 3, Paul states that one aspect of every believer’s calling is to *“endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”* In this statement, Paul is referring to the fact that every believer’s “call” or “vocation,” no matter what else they may be doing, is to always desire and do whatever it takes to keep the Body of Christ in unity and in “oneness” of the faith. Paul then goes on in verses 4-6 to define what this *“unity of the faith”* and oneness means – *“(There is) one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.”*

Verses 4-6 are fundamental to the thought that Paul is trying to bring forth in this teaching in Ephesians 4. In these verses he is very emphatic and specific about something that is vital to the Body of Christ. You will notice that Paul uses the word “one” six times in these verses. He is emphatically declaring that the Body of Christ is not just to be in unity but they are to be as “one” concerning the basic and fundamental doctrines of the faith - **one** body, **one** Spirit, **one** hope, **one** Lord, **one** faith, **one** baptism, **one** God and Father.

Paul continues in verse 7 teaching us that every believer has received “the measure” of God’s wonderful grace. Every believer has been given a specific “gift” (*charismata*) in the “measure” as given by the Lord, Jesus. The Greek word (*metron*) used in verse 7 and translated to the English word “measure” not only refers to a specified measurement or amount of something but it also “figuratively” refers to a “standard or rule of judgment.” Therefore, we see that the purpose for Jesus bestowing these gifts to the believers in the Body of Christ is not only for the purpose of unity and oneness, but they are to help keep the Body of Christ on the same “standard or rule” in the fundamentals of the faith. It is Jesus who bestows the specific “gift” to the believer – whatever that “gift” may be, through the Holy Spirit that now dwells within the believer. The main purpose of each gift is to keep the Body “as one” concerning the fundamentals of the faith, being in oneness by loving and caring for each other, as well as, to encourage every believer to live the lifestyle role modeled by Jesus. The term “oneness” is fundamental to the Body of Christ. Jesus declared this fundamental truth as He prayed in John 17:21, *“That they all **may be one**; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may **be one in us...**”*

As Paul continues in verses 9 and 10, he goes into what may seem to be a side thought that has nothing to do with what he is teaching. However, the very opposite is true. He presents a truth that is vital for our understanding of the bestowal of these “gifts” to the believers by Jesus. Paul goes into a small teaching concerning what Jesus actually did for us to be able to bestow these “gifts” to the believer. To put it briefly, when Jesus was crucified and died He *“...descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.”* This is a fundamental doctrine of our faith in Jesus which is a whole discussion in and of itself that will be for another time.

However, as previously stated, Paul injects this into his teaching concerning the “gifts” that Jesus bestows upon every believer for the purpose of making us grasp the depth of His love in and by all that He did for us. It is the basis of the Gospel message. Jesus was victorious and conquered every enemy – especially sin and death. Jesus did what He did so that all who believe would now be able to firstly enter into a restored relationship with the Father and His Son, Jesus, as well as fulfill their “calling” within the Body of Christ. Every believer is a vital member of the Body of Christ and is given a specific function for the purpose of keeping the Body of Christ in “oneness” with each other and in “oneness” concerning the fundamental doctrines of the faith.

Therefore, the context of Paul's teaching in Ephesians 4 concerns "gifts" (Gr - *charisma*) bestowed by Jesus upon believers. He is not referring to a leadership role model or hierarchy. Jesus bestows a particular "gift" upon each believer for the purpose of keeping the Body of Christ in "oneness" concerning the fundamentals of the faith. Paul then proceeds in verse 11 to express some "specific gifts," not positions of leadership, in the Body of Christ. He mentions these "gifts" as such, "*And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers...*"

I used the term "specific gifts" because that is exactly what they are. These are specific gifts Paul mentions here in Ephesians 4. Throughout the New Testament we learn that there are at least 25 or more "gifts" that are bestowed by Jesus to the believers who are now empowered by the Holy Spirit to properly perform the function of each gift within the Body of Christ – for the purpose of maintaining "oneness" within the Body.

In 1Corinthians 12, Paul also teaches on "spiritual gifts." He mentions that no one "gift" is more important than another. Each one is just as vital to entire Body of Christ. He teaches that the gifts are all for the purpose of preventing schisms or divisions from occurring within the Body of Christ – the concept of "oneness." In 1Corinthians 12:28, Paul lists some of the gifts mentioned in Ephesians 4:11. He writes "*first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues.*" Many of us assume that by the use of the terms "first, secondarily, thirdly," etc., Paul is giving us a church hierarchy of leadership. The problem with that assumption is that the lists in Ephesians 4:11 and 1Corinthians 12:28 are not identical. I believe that this again points to the fact that Paul was not referring to a hierarchy of leadership or importance but rather simply stating "gifts" bestowed upon believers by the Lord for the purpose of bringing "oneness" to the Body of Christ.

Below is a list\* of 25 "gifts" mentioned by the writers of the New Testament that are bestowed to individuals by Jesus to be brought forth in the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit within the believer. The "gifts" as found in Ephesians 4:11 are in bold letters.

- Word of wisdom (1 Cor. 12:8; Luke 6:9)
- Word of knowledge (1 Cor. 12:8; Luke 18:22)
- Faith (1 Cor. 12:9; Acts 3:6)
- Gifts of healing (1 Cor. 12:9, 28; Acts 28:1-10)
- Working of miracles (1 Cor. 12:10; Acts 6:8)
- **Prophecy** (1 Cor. 12:10; 1 Thess. 5:20-21; Eph. 4:11)
- Discerning of spirits (1 Cor. 12:10; Luke 8:29)
- Tongues (1 Cor. 12:10; Acts 19:6)
- Interpretation of tongues (1 Cor. 12:10; 14:13-33)
- Helping (1 Cor. 12:28)
- Administration (1 Cor. 12:28; Acts 6:2-3)
- Ministry/service (Rom. 12:7; 2 Tim. 1:16-18)
- **Teaching** (Rom. 12:7; Eph. 4:11-14)
- Encouragement (Rom. 12:8; Heb. 10:24-25)
- Giving (Rom. 12:8; 1 Cor. 13:3; Acts 4:32-35)
- Leadership (Rom. 12:8; Acts 13:12)
- Mercy (Rom. 12:8; Luke 5:12-13)
- **Apostleship** (Eph. 4:11)
- **Evangelism** (Eph. 4:11; 2 Tim. 4:5)
- **Pastoral guidance** (Eph. 4:11)
- Grace (Rom. 12:6; Eph. 3:7; 4:7; 1 Pet. 4:10-11)
- Willingness to face martyrdom (1 Cor. 13:3)
- Intercession (Rom. 8:26-27)
- Hospitality (1 Pet. 4:9)
- Celibacy (1 Cor. 7:8)

\*Source – Charisma Magazine - <http://www.charismamag.com/spirit/supernatural/17428-the-gift-list>

The above list is not definitive nor is it exhaustive. However, it is a good reference for the purpose of our discussion.

We must realize that nowhere does Paul or any of the other writers of the New Testament refer to any of these gifts or functions as leadership positions nor are they to be used as a pattern for a hierarchy of leadership within the Body of Christ. There is only one exception to this which we will discuss at length as we continue in Part 2 of our discussion. If we notice in Ephesians 4:11 none of these "gifts" along with the other gifts mentioned in our list are capitalized in scripture. This means that the writers are not referring to

any of these as a specific title or position. These “gifts” or functions are all meant to be expressed and manifested for one purpose – to keep the Body of Christ in “oneness” with Jesus and the Father, as well as “oneness” with each other and a oneness in the basic fundamental doctrines of the faith.

As mentioned previously, all of the gifts mentioned and found in the New Testament are of the same importance to the Body of Christ. There is none greater than the other. As we have tediously and repeatedly discussed, Paul teaches that the main purpose of each of the “gifts” is for the purpose of keeping the Body of Christ, not just in unity, but as “one” Body with Jesus as the head.

Immediately following Ephesians 4:11, Paul, himself reiterates this very idea in verses 12-16. The following is Ephesians 4:12-16 as found in the Amplified Version. I believe it solidifies to us, in an “amplified” manner, the point of Paul’s teaching concerning the purpose of the “gifts” found in verse 11 as well as all the “gifts” found within the scriptures.

*“...[and He did this] to fully equip and perfect the saints (God’s people) for works of service, to build up the body of Christ [the church];<sup>13</sup> until we all reach oneness in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God, [growing spiritually] to become a mature believer, reaching to the measure of the fullness of Christ [manifesting His spiritual completeness and exercising our spiritual gifts in unity].<sup>14</sup> So that we are no longer children [spiritually immature], tossed back and forth [like ships on a stormy sea] and carried about by every wind of [shifting] doctrine, by the cunning and trickery of [unscrupulous] men, by the deceitful scheming of people ready to do anything [for personal profit].<sup>15</sup> But speaking the truth in love [in all things—both our speech and our lives expressing His truth], let us grow up in all things into Him [following His example] who is the Head—Christ.<sup>16</sup> From Him the whole body [the church, in all its various parts], joined and knitted firmly together by what every joint supplies, when each part is working properly, causes the body to grow and mature, building itself up in [unselfish] love...”* – Ephesians 4:12-16

There it is again. Paul is speaking about “oneness in the faith” along with being one with the Father, Jesus and with each other. Everything within the Kingdom of God and the Body of Christ is about “oneness.” Paul was not speaking about one big worldwide church with someone crowned to be the “grand high exalted mystic poohbah” apostle or prophet or evangelist, etc. Actually, we see that what I just wrote describes what we read in Revelations concerning the “anti-Christ” and what he will establish just before Jesus returns –a worldwide church under his ultimate rule and authority. Hmmm!!!

The greatest evangelistic tool that Jesus gave His disciples was that they were to be as “one.” This “oneness” within the Body of Christ was meant to be the greatest witnessing tool to the lost in this world. Unfortunately, the church has not been too successful in this these days. Man has gotten in the way. The devil has been allowed to bring in “doctrines of devils” as well as false concepts of church leadership to the point that many believers have been hurt and abused because of these faulty models. Many believers choose not to attend local assemblies because of this. It has also caused many to fall away from the faith. The hierarchy model of leadership can tend to lean towards those in leadership becoming prideful and arrogant as being the “final authority” and becoming actually abusive to the flock that they were meant to be caring for and bringing into “oneness.” This was exactly what Jesus reproved and rebuked the religious leadership of His day of doing to the people. Hmmm!!!

This “hierarchy” of leadership not only affects people in the congregation. Unfortunately, we hear of the tremendous numbers of church leaders who experience “burn out” and leave the ministry. Many leaders experience a great amount of stress and pressure for, both themselves and their families, caused by these incorrect leadership role models. Many leaders become so stressful that they fall into such things as pornography, sexual discrepancies or other similar paths the devil will lead them down. Now, I am not laying the fault totally upon leaders and leadership within the Body of Christ these days. I am suggesting

that these problems and schism in the Body of Christ could be caused in a large part by the faulty leadership model that was allowed to enter the Body of Christ.

In Part 2 of this discussion, we will briefly discuss the functions of the “gifts” found in Ephesians 4:11 – “apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor-teacher.” We will reiterate the main purpose of all of these gifts bestowed by Jesus – to keep and maintain the Body of Christ in “oneness” in relationship with the Father, Jesus and with each other as fellow sons and daughters of the Most High God. The other important aspect and use of the gifts is to keep and maintain a “oneness” of the basic and fundamental doctrines of our faith.

End of Part 1