

Multi-Layered Ministry

The manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all.
1 Cor 12:7

It is time that the church reviewed the matter of ministry; no longer can it avoid the Biblical principle of mutual edification by treating it as an error of fringe groups. Almost all shades of the church are based on the practice of a dormant congregation and an active, gifted leader. This ought to be called sin since it involves a deliberate disregard of many clear prescriptive scriptures, and the instalment of fleshly wisdom and worldly management techniques. The practice of one-man ministry cuts across the whole ethos of the corporate experience of grace in the church. What could be more fundamental?

Reformed churches have resisted the criticism of being preaching centres or being dominated by one man. In condemning plural ministry they often focus on the Charismatic Movement, caricatured as a ministerial 'free-for-all' leading to anarchy; body ministry is thus guilty by association. In fact, although many UK charismatic churches arose from open fellowship house groups in the 1970's, the movement is strongly tyrannical and few charismatic congregations have ever experienced real body ministry. The truth is that all churches tend to focus upon one man. Even the Brethren Movement, created upon the principle of open fellowship, produced some of the worst examples of totalitarian leaders. All churches easily slide into the ministerial domination of one man.

It would be a rare find indeed to stumble across a church whose services do not have a single person dominating events. Most churches of all stripes have:

- A dominant leader (even if there are supposed to be others in a team).
- One man who dominates the meetings, usually the same man.
- Church strategy being largely developed by one man.
- Most of the church finances go to this man.

In the worst cases, which are common, one man:

- is the overall leader,
- has no supporting elders,
- decides all the key strategies,
- represents the church at all conferences,
- chooses all the hymns,
- preaches all the sermons (except when he is on holiday when some stranger takes over),
- leads all the prayers
- and gives out all the notices.

Its is no exaggeration to state that this is a travesty of Biblical teaching on church life and it is a style of gathering that no Biblical apostle would recognise where he to be sent down from heaven on an inspection.

What do the scriptures teach?

The New Testament is as plain as can be about 'body ministry' or open fellowship, there can be no doubt about it. We could look at the many scriptures which talk about mutual encouragement. We could list the 60 or so occurrences of the 'one another' texts. We could examine early church history as outlined in Acts 2 and 4. We could examine the meaning and uses of the word 'edification', or the ministry and church words, to see that they indicate interaction and interdependence not tyranny and despotism. We could look at the example of Paul who worked with teams, who sent delegates with his authority, who described himself as a nursing mother or father to his flocks and who gives us models of interactive ministry where people can question and discuss his teaching. Finally we could read the ministry of the Lord Jesus himself to see that he gave himself to his disciples, teaching them in all sorts of normal circumstances – drawing out lessons from rural life, agriculture, commerce etc – drawing out questions and welcoming discussion. However, here I simply want to look at the crystal clear teaching of one passage to be brief: 1 Corinthians 12.

There can be no clearer indication of the nature of church life than this passage which calls the church 'the body which has Christ as the head'. In unmistakable short sentences, and in the overall teaching by analogy, Paul states categorically that the church meeting together is a place where everyone has a part to play and where no one man should dominate proceedings. No one can deny that this is the case – it is so obvious.

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Firstly: the clear statements

There are diversities of gifts (v4) [*Charisma* – a gift, favour of God's grace.]

There are many types of gifts. The word 'diversity' has the sense of varieties as a result of differing and distinct distributions to different folk. Probably everyone would agree with this, but Paul is directing attention to the use of many gift types within the public meeting. There are many sorts of gifts that can be used for the common good in a service. Christian meetings are not limited to singing, preaching and praying. Neither is it good enough to relegate the key gifts of certain people to making tea or opening the doors. The gifts Paul has in mind are gifts which edify others in the course of fellowship. **There certainly are many types of gifting that should be seen in church meetings.**

There are differences of ministries (v5) [*Diakonia* – service to God.]

The pastor is not the only person with a ministry. There are many types of ministry, and again Paul is talking about the meeting of the gathered church. He does not have in mind the ministry of someone visiting a needy person or someone volunteering to go shopping. He is explaining that a gathered church should experience different ministries from different people during the meeting. **There certainly are different types of ministry, other than the pastor preaching.**

There are diversities of activities (v6) [*Energema* – an operation, a thing wrought.]

The refers to what has been effected by divine energy. There is a variety in the effect or power of the gifts and ministries. One person can preach well, but another can preach powerfully and dramatically change people. God gives different strength to different people; some ministers have more unction than others. In Romans 12 Paul explains this

diversity as the proportion of grace given to each, which differs. **There are definitely different strengths in people's ministry.**

So, at this point we see that there are:

- Varieties of gifts as a result of the way God has distributed them to different people in the church.
- There are different types of ministry or service within the church and within the church meeting.
- There are varying amounts of power reflected in these different types of gifting.

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The manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all. (v7)

The prime purpose of all these varieties of gift, service and power is so that everyone in the church is improved and built up. The source of the gifts and power is the Holy Spirit and the operation of the gifts are simply different reflections or manifestations of the power of the Spirit.

No gift is ever just for the enjoyment of the gifted individual, but gifts are the basis of service. Gifts must be shared and given out so that others are benefited. Edification only occurs when many gifts are being used in service to others. How can someone with poor hearing, or a poor brain, or a clinical problem with concentration, be helped by preaching alone? The varieties of gifts are to ensure that everyone has a good chance of being edified in one way or another.

To one is given ... through the Spirit, to another... . (v8-10)

To emphasise his point, Paul begins to list certain gifts of the Spirit which the Corinthians would have been familiar with (even if we are not). One is given this gift, another is given that gift. The important point is not focus on the list of gifts, but to see that the body is given many gifts distributed through various people. There is not a hint of an idea that one man has lots of gifts and everyone else should do nothing.

But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills. (v11)

It is vitally important to understand that it is the Holy Spirit who apportions these gifts. The distribution of one gift or another is sovereignly up to God. When a church bewails that they have few gifts they should pause to consider that the gifts they have, however few, were sovereignly granted by God himself. If they feel in need, the church should pray for more, not moan and bewail their situation.

Also, it is important to note that it is God who distributes gifts, not man. A member cannot work up the necessary gifts to edify the church by anything he does. That includes going to Bible college. A gifted teacher may well enhance his gift by college, indeed disciplined study is vital for developing a gift of teaching, but a non-gifted person will never be a teacher without the gift. This is why the prime goal of the pastor is to identify those with edifying gifts and nurture them with good teaching and pastoral training.

The body is not one member but many. (v14)

Can it be plainer? The church, as a body, comprises of many members. Each of the parts of the body has a vital function (a theme Paul develops in the analogy). The church is not

one member. The church is not represented by the minister or the pastor - who is only one member of many. The health of a church is not evidenced by how good the preacher is or how famous the pastor is.

But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased. (v18)

Paul again emphasises that the placing of the members in a church and the gifting of those members is an act of God's sovereignty. He gifts people as he pleases. We do well to recognise this.

God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? (v28-30)

Paul then actually itemises the respective benefits of the main edifying leadership gifts. [This is different from the earlier list of various gifts that anyone could use.] There is no getting round this. We cannot dismiss this text as only representative of Corinth or several chapters of the Bible (11-14) have no value to the historic church at all. Neither is this descriptive of wrong practice as some foolishly ascribe this and chapter 14. Paul definitively states that his teaching in these chapters is the practice of all the churches (1 Cor 11:16, 14:33) and the commandment of the Lord (1 Cor 14:37).

Let's list these items:¹

1. *Apostles*: those sent by God to plant churches i.e. missionaries.
2. *Prophets*: those who speak for God to edify the church.
3. *Teachers*: those who expound the truth of the Bible to build up believers. Mere exhortation and homilies are not enough to produce solid growth. Anyone can give an encouragement or an exhortation which may benefit an individual in a given perplexity, but only solid, systematic, dogmatic and expositional teaching can build solid believers who know the truth.
4. *Gifts of miracles*: wonder working, not just healing e.g striking blind.
5. *Gifts of healings*: immediate healing wrought by faith.
6. *Gifts of helps*: probably a reference to the work of deacons – those responsible for service in the church to assist the poor and needy or to deal with administrative work.
7. *Gifts of administrations*: [*Kubernesis* – better: 'governments'.] The word means those who take the lead and probably refers to the gift of eldership in the church.
8. *Varieties of tongues*: kinds of ecstatic speech.

¹ Compare the other lists Paul gives elsewhere: Eph 4:11-12: *And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ. Rm 12:6-8: Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness. See appendix one.*

Then notice that Paul specifically points out that these gifts require a plurality of ministry. His whole point is to show that single ministry is wrong – the body needs various gifts from a variety of ministers according to differing levels of power.

[This paper is not concerned with the argument about the present day validity of supernatural gifts. These gifts are mentioned by Paul as important, and are used to bolster his argument for plurality of ministry – that is my concern here. What gifts are still available today is an argument for another place. The fact that Paul states that these gifts are vital for healthy churches and edifying believers, and that he nowhere clearly states that they cease before the second coming (with the exception of tongues) ought to give us pause for thought before we speak rashly. But neither should a wise person believe the wild claims made within movements that are clearly disreputable or heretical.]

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Secondly: the analogy of the body

After his clear didactic statements Paul illustrates his point by referring to the analogy of the human body.

12 For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ.

Christ is the head of the body, the church (Col 1:18,24; Eph 5:23,30). As head of the church, his body on earth is the human members with various gifts and functions who are vitally connected to Christ, the head.

13-14 For by one Spirit we were all baptised into one body -- whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free -- and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. For in fact the body is not one member but many.

Although Paul uses an analogy to make his point about varieties of gifts, it is more than an analogy since the Spirit actually did baptise us all into Christ as a definite past event (aorist tense). Becoming a Christian means that you are united to every other believer and all are united to Christ, the head.

15-16 If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body?

Just because a believer feels his gift is poor, that does not make him any less a part of the body. It is not just pastors that are important in the church.

17 If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling?

Although the eye is a wonderful organ, and vital to sound health, without the other organs the eye is useless. It is part of a team and all are interdependent. The relationships of all the organs together make the human body effective.

18 But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased.

God has placed the organs of the body in a way that seemed right to him, and the result is a functioning, effective human being. All play a vital role and no organ can say that it is less important or more important than another. The same is true in the church.

19 And if they were all one member, where would the body be?

See v17.

20 But now indeed there are many members, yet one body.

Paul's argument summed up. The church is a team of equals.

21 And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you."

Just as one organ cannot dismiss another one in the human body, neither can any church officer disparage another person in the body of Christ. In God's plan, every person is needed and exactly fitted to where they should be. God is in control of the distribution.

22-25 No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary. And those members of the body which we think to be less honourable, on these we bestow greater honour; and our unpresentable parts have greater modesty, but our presentable parts have no need. But God composed the body, having given greater honour to that part which lacks it, that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another.

Eyes need feet to get anywhere or hands to put food into mouths. Paul emphasises his point: weaker members of the body of Christ are just as important as public figures like pastors because they also have Christ dwelling in them. In the human body, organs which are considered unseemly to be seen in public (such as genitals or breasts) are given greater care in being covered than those which are considered presentable. Paul, therefore, argues that weaker brethren should be given the greater care.

There should be no schism (division) in the body between better and weaker parts. All should recognise each other's part in the interdependent whole. Trouble in one part affects the organ in another part.

The whole concept of a fuss being made over modern leaders is anathema to Paul. What would he think of the modern day practice in some churches (particularly charismatic ones) where leaders have high salaries (even if members are relatively poor) have large homes, have new cars, have all expenses paid for travelling commitments, are met at airports by loyal volunteers, have their homes cleaned and meals made by loyal volunteers and have expensive holidays to give them sufficient rest!!!

26 And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honoured, all the members rejoice with it.

A small splinter in a fingernail can render the whole body ineffective. If a member of the church is in trouble, it affects all the church and it is only sensible for the church to rush to help the injured party. Likewise good news for one brings joy to all.

27 Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually.

Everyone has their own place and function in the body, just as each has received their own special gift for use within the church (1 Co. 7:7; Eph. 4:7; 1 Pet. 4:10).

Thus Paul completes his analogy. Everyone in the church is vital, no one is more special than another. Every person's gift and function is an interdependent part of the whole and is to be valued and respected. Overly making a fuss of one or two members is plain wrong.

Conclusion

Just from one chapter we have seen incontrovertible evidence that the church functions, not only like a body, but as a body; a close knit group of interdependent organs. In the life of the church this means that everyone has their own special function and place; but it also means that the church meetings are characterised by openness and freedom for all to minister under the operation of the Holy Spirit.

This does not mean that there is a 'free-for-all' or that anyone can do anything they like, it means that each should carefully ponder and pray regarding their contribution to gatherings. Scriptures elsewhere give clarification on what is proper to be brought to a meeting.² Neither does this dismiss prepared ministry, since teaching is vital in church life and teachers need to bring prepared, solid, expositional teaching to build up the body. If anything, teaching is the most important gift since it opens up God's word and shares truth. Nor does it mean that the church is leaderless – leadership is also a gift and a function and elders are called to rule well. But governing well does not mean despotism, prominence or arrogance. A good leader need not always be at the front.

What it does reveal is that the modern practice, seen everywhere, of one man dominating all the proceedings and life of a church is wrong. It is so wrong that it is hard to be rational in explaining why it goes on unchecked. The power of human tradition, of fleshly power, of worldly techniques and human pride seems to overrule a simple observation of clear scriptural teaching.

The church of Christ needs to reconsider this subject as a matter of grave urgency, especially in the fact of the appalling apostasy and decline in recent years. Leaders should forget all the trendy but short-lived, man-made ideas and simply seek to obey the order that God has given his people for 2,000 years.

Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another. (Rm 14:19)

Let it be for the edification of the church that you seek to excel. (1 Cor 14:12)

Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification. (1 Cor 14:26)

Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers. (Eph 4:29)

Therefore comfort each other and edify one another. (1 Thess 5:11)

² For example 1 Cor 14.

Appendix One

Lists of leadership ministry gifts used by Paul

1 Cor 12:28-30	Rm 12:6-8	Eph 4:11-12	
1 apostles		apostles	
2 prophets	prophecy	prophets	
3 teachers	teaching	pastor - teachers	
4 miracles			
5 gifts of healings			
6 helps	ministry (service)		
7 administrations (leadership)	leading	Pastor - teachers	
8 tongues			
	mercy		
	exhortation		
	giving		
		evangelists	

The fact that Paul never uses the same list twice seems to imply that there were many useful ministry gifts available in the church which were at the front of his mind, from which he randomly picks out gifts to make his point.

In listing the priority of gifts in 1 Cor 12 we see what Paul considers to be the most important, a view underwritten by the Holy Spirit who inspired his choice. However, we could make the point that Paul is saying that this priority was what was particularly necessary for the Corinthian situation, tongues being the least important (when they thought it to be the most powerful). However, it is clear that Paul considers all these gifts useful for all churches. In considering the gifts of leaders that are fundamental to the church, Paul lists the four (or five) in Eph 4.

Ephesians was written much later than 1 Corinthians at a time when things were beginning to go wrong with treachery of workers and heresy in the churches. At this point Paul considers that the gift of evangelists was vital. In the revival days of the earlier church during the period when he wrote to Corinth, evangelists may have been less necessary.

The spiritual gifts of 1 Cor 12	Gifts for all - not leadership gifts
Word of wisdom	Spontaneous counsel full of divine wisdom
Word of knowledge	Illumination by divine perception
Faith	Wonder-working faith
Gifts of healings	Various healings
Workings of miracles	Working of powers
Prophecy	Speaking God's words or message
Discernings of spirits	Identifying spiritual sources
Kinds of tongues	Ecstatic speech
Interpretation of tongues	Interpretation of ecstatic speech

Appendix Two

Examples of Biblical believers in *koinonia* (fellowship)

They continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers ...and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common ... breaking bread from house to house ... praising God ... and the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved. (Acts 2:42-47)

The multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common. And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all. (Acts 4:32-33)

Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, "Now separate to me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away. (Acts 13:1-3)

Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight. (Acts 20:7)

[Paul] sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church and ... he said to them: "You know, from the first day that I came to Asia, in what manner I always lived among you ... how I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house ... For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God. Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears. ... Yes, you yourselves know that these hands have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me. I have shown you in every way, by labouring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.' " And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all.

(Acts 20:17-36)