

STUDY 19

The True Shepherd Works His Service

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‘THE LOVE WAS SPILLED OVER’

The work of the Triune God in creation is well described in one of Martin Bleby’s hymns: ‘the love was spilled over to make all creation so others could join in the fun!’¹ Similarly, the work of the Triune God in redemption, flowing from Christ’s cross, spills over in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit by the Father, through the Son, so that we may receive overflowing grace, and once again ‘join in the fun’ eternally, *rejoicing in the Lord always!* Great grace (*charis*) is upon the church, for service—as together, amidst the suffering² inherent in the gospel action, we join in proclaiming the good news of redemption in Jesus Christ, to the world that God *so* loves.

Recently, I was listening to ABC radio presenter Peter Goers broadcasting from the Adelaide Zoo. Some local politicians and media personalities were joining with *St. Vincent de Paul*, to have an overnight sleepout in the open, to highlight the plight of the homeless, and to raise money to support the work of *Fred’s Van* and other ministries of mercy to ‘the poor’—some of our fellow human beings here in Adelaide. In a moving comment, Peter Goers said: ‘*I am not a very good Christian, but one of Christ’s statements which has left a deep impression upon me is where he said: “just as you did it to one of the least of these [who are members of my family] you did it to me”*’. Goers left out the bracketed words, as many people often do! Even so, it was not his theology of helping the poor so much as his statement about himself which stood out to me: ‘*I am not a very good Christian, but . . .*’ It stood out for a couple of reasons. Firstly, claims to being a Christian are rarely inserted into public conversation in such a natural manner. Secondly, I thought, yea, Peter Goers would not be alone in his quite frank self-appraisal: *I am not a very good Christian*. I suspect it is this way for most. Indeed, it ‘goes with the territory’ of being ‘in Christ’. One is often acutely aware of thoroughgoing inadequacy.

Even so, it is a very lovely thing, a very gracious matter that Christ Jesus does indeed involve us in what he is doing, in *filling all things*. Not only does he call us

¹ Martin Bleby, no. 281, v. 2, in *New Creation Hymn Book*, NCPI, Blackwood, 2010.

² See 2 Cor. 4:10, ‘always carrying in the body the death of Jesus’. Unless otherwise stated, all Scripture quotations in this study are from the New Revised Standard Version.

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and empower us for glad and eager participation in the wonderful work of the gospel, he also sustains us and renews us—even when we are bogged down in accidie, when enthusiasm has virtually dried up. His mercies never come to an end. Christ pours out his gifts upon us, and his gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.

THE QUESTION OF OUR COOPERATION

Some years ago, I came across this passage by Karl Barth (it is a comment on 2 Cor. 5:19). It has been both a matter for quiet contemplation, and also one of enormous encouragement:

The question arises indeed whether God and the world would not be far better served by a ‘word of reconciliation’ . . . spoken by Jesus Christ Himself and alone, without any cooperation on the part of Peter and Paul, let alone the rest of us. May it not be that Christians with their assistance actually do more to compromise, disrupt and hinder the prophetic action of Christ than to further it?³

Our pastoral efforts can sometimes be quite lame, and even unhelpful. It was also Barth who said something like, ‘It is God who speaks to us . . . no one ever heard the gospel from the lips of a man’. Paul says, ‘So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ’.⁴ That is, the living Christ preaches to people, personally, and they know whom they have believed. Since it is Christ who preaches, what then of you and of me? I ask this, as a person who, when in utter need, was directed to the Bible by my mother. She was not present when I read it, only Christ was. And he converted me, and no one else (I guess mum was home praying). I am often thankful that no person, preacher, or ‘five-steps sinner’s prayer’ ever did the trick! Even so, people often—perhaps mostly, I do not know—come to Christ with much assistance and help from others. Barth continues, with these words:

If this cooperation of theirs is actually demanded by Christ in their unity with Him . . . and if it is not ordained in vain, this is to be established and explained only by the fact that the free action of Christ even in this prophetic form, being bound neither to anyone nor to anything, is . . . the action of free divine grace, and as such it does not exclude but includes this human cooperation. It certainly does not need it. But it expresses its freedom in it. In a distinctive overflowing of divine grace it would have it so. He thus calls Christians to Himself, to His side, to His discipleship, to His service, and uses them as His heralds.⁵

So God doesn’t need us. That can seem like a mild rebuff; sometimes it is a huge comfort. However, the thing to see is that Christ is pleased to incorporate us into what he is doing. Not only that, but he equips the whole church, that *he* may use us (utilise us), or employ us ‘as His heralds’. In equipping the church, the gifts of Christ, through the Spirit, include the *dorea*, *domata* and *charismata* (see my previous study 7), along with the gifts given to Israel, and those given at and in creation.

The lists of the gifts given to the church are mentioned in the New Testament, and they include Ephesians 4:11, Romans 12:6–8, 1 Corinthians 12, and 1 Peter 4:9–11, as well as the gifts to Israel mentioned in Romans 9:4–5. The apostles’ lists are probably not meant to be exhaustive. The *domata* and *charismata* seem to have some overlap:

³ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 4, ‘The Doctrine of Reconciliation’, pt 3 second half (CD. 4.3.2), T & T Clark, Edinburgh, 1962, p. 607.

⁴ Romans 10:17, RSV.

⁵ K. Barth, CD, 4.3.2, pp. 607f.

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And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues (1 Cor. 12:28).

This is one of those matters in the Bible where it seems more beneficial that we are given the gist of the list in an orderly bundle, but not a precise inventory. Even so, for those who like lists, they can be set out in that format. The gifts, services and workings for ministry, *inspired* and *apportioned* individually, by the one Spirit, are given corporately, en masse, to the church (the gifts given to Israel are listed first):

- The sonship (Rom. 9:4)
- The glory
- The covenants
- The giving of the law
- The worship
- The promises
- The patriarchs
- The Christ
- The Holy Spirit (Eph. 4:7)
- The apostle (Eph. 4:11)
- The prophet
- The evangelist
- The pastor
- The teacher
- Prophecy proportionate to faith (Rom. 12:6)
- Ministry
- The exhorter
- The giver, in generosity
- The leader, in diligence
- The compassionate (acts of mercy) in cheerfulness
- Speaker/Preacher (1 Pet. 4:11)
- One who renders service
- The utterance of wisdom (1 Cor. 12:8)
- The utterance of knowledge
- Faith
- Gifts of healing
- The working of miracles
- The ability to distinguish between spirits
- Various kinds of tongues
- The interpretation of tongues
- Hospitality
- The deacon (Phil. 1:1)
- Overseer (Episcopal vision)
- ‘All these are inspired by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills’ (1 Cor. 12:11, RSV).

When we consider the largesse and types of the gifts given to Israel (Rom. 9:4), the possibilities for an expanded list could include elements such as the creation, the Father, the gospel, the mysteries of the kingdom and so on. Even people whose prayers, teaching and books on our shelf we draw upon could be included; ‘For all things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas’, or Barth, or Brunner, or N. T. Wright. To ensure that all is encompassed, we can go on to include ‘the world or life or death or the present or the future—all belong to you’ (1 Cor. 3:21–22).

GOD THE ACTIVATOR

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good . . . All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses (1 Cor. 12:4–7, 11).

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The True Shepherd works his service in and through the body of Christ. He gives gifts to the church, which *he* activates, energises and inspires, so that each member can truly participate in what he is doing. The services, activities and gifts differ according to the grace given, and they are allotted to God's people, *just as the Spirit chooses*. And every member is included. Ernst Käsemann says:

Eternal life does not encourage sleeping partners or uninvested capital . . . For there is no divine gift which does not bring with it a task, there is no grace which does not move to action.⁶

It is very helpful to view the gifts given by God for the work of ministry, in terms of what he is doing, and what he is activating rather than from the perspective of 'who gets what?' It would appear that one reason the very gifted Corinthian church received such a stinging letter from the apostle was that they had begun to focus upon individuals, and upon certain gifts and their use, rather than upon the Giver and all that he had abundantly and graciously given to the church. Time and again the focus needs to be upon mutuality—members one of another—serving one another and the needs of the whole body of Christ, and beyond that, of course, the needy world!

Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received (1 Pet. 4:10).

. . . we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us (Rom. 12:5b–6a).

THE TRUE SHEPHERD—TRUSTS THE FATHER

One of the most underrated characteristics of Jesus' life is his plain humanity:

Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well (John 4:6).

On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, 'Let us go across to the other side.' And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was (Mark 4:35–36).

Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was (John 11:5–6).

Undergirding his earthly ministry, Jesus functioned with a simple trust: 'My Father is still working'. J. B. Phillips translated Romans 12:3b in this way: 'Don't cherish exaggerated ideas of yourself or your importance, but try to have *a sane estimate of your capabilities* by the light of the faith that God has given to you all'. While the True Shepherd goes in search of the lost sheep, he also trusts in the drawing power of the gospel itself to stir, awaken and bring the nations in (Isa. 2:3; Micah 4:2; John 12:32). One temptation in ministry is to try to do everything—except to trust the Father. This temptation can arrive in the terms of a minister's job description:

In a major study done in 1934, the minister was seen to have five roles: teacher, preacher, worship leader, pastor, and administrator. A study done in 1980 found that these roles had almost doubled to nine. In addition to the older functions, the minister was expected to have an open and affirming

⁶ Ernst Käsemann, 'Ministry and Community in the New Testament', in *Essays on New Testament Themes*, SCM Press, London, 1971, p. 65.

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style, know how to foster friendship in the church, be aware of things denominational, and be able to lead the church's participation in political discussions as well as provide a witness against the world's injustice.

By 1986, another study found that the expectations of the pastor had expanded still further to fourteen roles. And interestingly, these expectations were largely unaffected by whether or not the church was evangelical. Pastoral responsibility was stretched across an ever-widening terrain in the church. In evangelical churches, the top priority was given to planning ability, facility in leading worship, and sensitivity to the congregation. This was followed, in order, by spiritual development of the congregation, pastoral counseling for the needy, visiting the sick, and support of the church's stewardship program. These were followed by three equally ranked activities: providing administrative leadership, the ability to involve the laity in the church's programs, and support for the church's mission in the world. And holding issues of social justice before the congregation was now last as a pastoral priority.

Fortunately, there are ministers who have broken the professional mold. But they have done so against great odds and have had to work on the fringes of evangelical life.⁷

A renewed humanity embraces our creaturely limitations. In a chapter on visiting the sick, Jay Adams explains how beneficial it is to give attention to the ministry of the whole church, and just not leave the gaps for the pastor to fill:

Yet many aspects of calling visitation as they are now carried on by pastors could be conducted by elders, deacons and others within the congregation—to the great benefit of all involved. It is just simply a fact that if the pastor does not mobilize the *entire* congregation for the work that all can (and ought to) do, it will not be done, what is done will be partial and spotty, and the pastor soon will find himself carrying about the load of guilt of the unmade call. Therefore, perhaps the chief task of the modern pastor consists of planning for and instructing, training and encouraging a congregational ministry to them.

Perhaps one of the main reasons why pastors leave their congregations so frequently these days is to escape from the ever-increasing weight of unfulfilled obligations.⁸

THE GIFTS—IGNORED, HIDDEN, ABUSED

Sadly, the gifts given to the church can be hidden 'under the bushel basket, or under the bed' (Mark 4:21), or ignored, or abused. A 'Christian lone-ranger' is an oxymoron. To function apart from the body, avoiding accountability and the discipline of daily exhortation (Heb. 3:13) can lead to the abuse of God's good gifts. Local churches can harden to Christ, abandon the love known 'at first' (Rev. 2:4–5), and virtually lose sight of grace and self-giving. We can operate blithely unaware of Satan's cruel devices. We can downplay sin's capacity to conspire with 'the flesh'. We can take the good gifts of God and twist and pervert their intended use and noble purpose. We must face this. Gifts are given to the whole church, not to a bunch of individuals, or to a select few. The doctrine of the *priesthood of all believers* helped fire the Reformation, or vice versa. It may need to be recovered more fully, and not viewed as a momentary feature, now consigned to past history:

As it is, there are many members, yet one body.²¹ 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.'²² On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable,²³ and those members of the body that we think

⁷ David F. Wells, 'The D-Min-ization of the Ministry', in Os Guinness & John Steel (eds), *No God But God* (Moody Press, Chicago, 1992), pp. 183–4.

⁸ Jay E. Adams, *Shepherding God's Flock: vol. 1—The Pastoral Life*, Presb. and Reformed Pub., USA, 1976, p. 112.

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less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect;²⁴ whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member,²⁵ that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another.²⁶ If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it (1 Cor. 12:20–26).

‘The Church without Laymen and Priests’

In his Ephesians commentary, Markus Barth confronts a common error which has developed within churches all across the world. He argues from Ephesians that there is not really a Christian church with laymen and priests but, rather, the whole church is ‘the clergy appointed by God’:

He is a ‘pastor’ of God’s flock, who understands himself as a minister to ministers.

In turn, the task of the whole church and of every saint is to carry out a work of service for the praise of God and the benefit of all who need it. There are needy people inside the church—the ‘lonely men at the top’ may well belong among them. There are even more people in want outside the church . . . Divers books of the NT show that all ‘clerical’ titles available from Israel’s history and literature have been conferred upon Jesus Christ and comprehended in him. If after Christ’s coming and under his rulership any legitimate clergymen are left in the world, then all saints and the whole church are these clergymen of God, installed for the benefit of those as yet unaware of the Messianic peace.⁹

Although never confined to ‘clergy’, as such, the ‘New Creation *Pastor’s* School’ was changed in 2002 to be called ‘New Creation *Ministry* School’. A fresh revelation had come of the importance of being built up as the whole church. It is all ‘the saints’ that are to be equipped. The saints are all of us who are Christians.¹⁰

In recent years, the lack of ordained ministers willing to serve in country areas has spawned the invention of ‘Lay Ministry Teams’. Many hidden talents have subsequently been unearthed among local church memberships. People without a theological degree have helpfully presided at the Lord’s Supper.¹¹ Farmers and business people have been renewed in their hope, having discovered afresh a love for the Lord, an enthusiasm for the gospel, and—more importantly—a way to participate that had not previously been required, nor sought after. With the apprehensive advent of Lay Ministry Teams, it would appear that the Lord gave gifts to the church to meet the circumstances of history. However, it begs the question, ‘were many gifts lying dormant for years, due, in part, to false clergy-laity structures?’ If so, why do church structures have an inbuilt capacity to ignore many gifts given to the church?

One major problem is surely the perpetuation of a false, unbiblical divide between so-called clergy and so-called laity. In reality, all are ministers of Christ. All are the laity, that is, the people. Many men, in particular, have struggled to fully participate in

⁹ Markus Barth, *Ephesians 4–6: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible, Doubleday, New York, 1974, p. 481.

¹⁰ Praise the Lord, for the fruitful ministry of Mary MacKillop—a member of the Roman Catholic Church; but the *Protestant* point still needs to be made: biblically, she is not Australia’s first saint. There are millions of them.

¹¹ I noticed, in a local library, that the Roman Catholic and Anglican Churches were both having a week or so of celebrating ‘the Priesthood’. One book on the shelf was about 10 Roman Catholic priests who continue to celebrate the Latin Mass; many do so because they believe that it alone conserves the authentic Priesthood; some believe that the ‘liberty’ flowing from Vatican II was unhelpful, to say the least. Another book on the same shelf was decrying the scandalous abolition of women priests in the early centuries of the Christian church. As I left the library, I felt the pressing need to cry a quote from one of my family members: ‘My giddy Aunt!’

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the real action of the ascended, reigning Christ. Having painted the gutters, and carried the offering plates to the front of the church, men then join *Rotary*, *Apex* or *Lions*:

All members of Christ's body are ministers (*diakonoi*) and the changes history has wrought in the Church have been unhappy ones. I have made the point that the outward form of ministry is wrong, but that Christ has raised up both *domata* and *charismata* in succeeding years. Underneath the clergy-laity order, the true order of the Church must have been—and is—in spite of the imposition of the biblically wrong clergy-laity division.¹²

Gifts Meet Deep Need and Serve All Creation

Christ is the head over all things *for* the church (Eph. 1:22–23). Blessed in Christ with the whole spiritual blessing (Eph. 1:3), the church serves creation in gospel power. The Great Shepherd's church is bursting with gifts for ministry. A love-hierarchy of eldership and overseers is a functional blessing given to the church, as are the service gifts of *domata* and *charismata*. As the Father sends both the Son and the Spirit, and all mutually indwell one another in joyful service, so too the church community is sent, in union with the love hierarchy of the Triune Community. All members drink of the oneness Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13), displaying God's union and unity of purpose as they tell the good news of him 'who fills all in all'.

The common good is paramount: 'To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for *the common good*' (1 Cor. 12:7). Christ keeps giving and energising the gifts and the opportunities and capacities to share in his mission to a needy world. All may confess therefore: 'Though unworthy, and unable, I have been called, equipped, justified, sanctified, forgiven, given eternal life, and I know the secret of life—Jesus Christ. Because of his grace, his gift of the Spirit, the *charismata* he gives, and his unbounded joy, I am enabled to share daily in Christ's work. Therefore, I can, and need to find suitable expression—helpful outlets—for this bursting joy that I know, to love and serve him, humanity and all creation.'

¹² Geoffrey Bingham, *The Beautiful City of God*, Redeemer Baptist Press, Castle Hill, 2001, p. 149.