

The Gifts of Government, Ministry, and Ruling
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I had a seminary professor who often faulted St. Paul in his choice of Greek words when writing his letters to the Church. Father Howard Rhys said Paul could have used one syllable words where he chose multiple syllables thus not being clear in what he was trying to say. I suppose that could be called verbosity in writing.

Such is the case of the gift of Government in First Corinthians 12: 28, and the Gift of Ministry, and the Gift of Ruling in Romans 12: 7 and 8. The choice of Greek words would imply something very opposite to what we today would think of from reading these verses. That is not necessarily St. Paul's fault as much as it is the re-definition of terms by the contemporary Church. Because of the similarity of these three gifts, I am considering them together.

In the case of the Gift of Ministry, St. Paul uses the Greek denoting the office of a Deacon. Clearly this office in the New Testament was that of servant, and from the reading in Acts (Acts 6: 1-2) one would conclude that the Deacon served tables, looked after the widows and children, and cared for the poor. Archbishop Thomas Hines, Primate of the Charismatic Episcopal Church in the Philippines, will not ordain a man to the diaconate until he has a viable ministry. It may be a house group, a prison ministry, a street ministry, but he must demonstrate first the role of servanthood. Too often the Deacon in some of today's churches has become a glorified altar minister who sets the table for the Eucharist and administers the Chalice, waiting to be advanced to the Order of Priest, with little activity beyond the church door. In some places "Eucharistic ministers", being lay people, have replaced the Deacon who by all rights of his ordination would be the one distributing the Reserved Sacrament to the home bound or hospitalized church members.

For whatever reason St. Paul chose particular words to cite these gifts of the Holy Spirit, it is reasonable to conclude that he expected those who bore that particular anointing would exercise that gift with all sincerity of duty, purity of life, and in sacrificial love.

Matthew Henry, in his commentary on the Gift of Ministry, concludes that there may have been greater responsibility placed upon the Deacon in St. Paul's day than we may surmise today. Some denominations have a Board of Deacons as part of their church government but they have definite charitable responsibility to show hospitality within and beyond the church door. Sacramental Churches have the Order of Deacon that may be transitional or permanent, but they too have responsibility in their assistance to the elder or pastor. In one church where I was Rector I had a Deacon who each Monday evening had a list of home bound people whom he visited, took the Holy Communion, and prayed with them. He was a tremendous help to me, and a blessing to those to whom he ministered. What the

role of the Deacon to whom St. Paul is referring in the use of the Greek word for “deacon” in this particular gift may go beyond what many churches today define as the role of the Deacon. In any case, he was challenged to faithfulness in carrying out the responsibilities placed upon him by the laying-on-of-hands.

In his letter to the Church in Rome, Saint Paul sends greetings to Phebe. Most translations refer to her as a “servant” but the Greek is the feminine gender for the diaconate. During the early years of church history there were both male and female in the Order of Deacons having specific duties assigned which differs from those in this Order in churches today where both sexes are ordained. At the request of my Bishop in 1973, I made a study of the first five hundred years of church history as our Episcopal diocese then was studying the issue of ordaining women. Their role was definitely one of a servant to the Body of Christ. The female Deacon, or Deaconess, ministered exclusively to women and children, in homes, hospitals, prisons, and assisted in the baptism of females. The early church practice was for the baptismal candidate to enter the water, a creek or river perhaps, and remove their clothes in the water symbolizing the burial of the old life. The Deacon or Deaconess would assist those of their gender and upon exiting the water on the other side, clothe them in a white robe and present them to the Bishop for the laying-on-of-hands to receive the Holy Spirit (Confirmation). The male Deacon did the same for the men, ministering to them in their work place, hospital and prison, and assisting in the baptism of men. The “ordination” service was identical except for the gender.

We need to recover the vital role of the Deacon today, and see it as something more than a testing or preparation time waiting to be ordained to the order of Priest. Some men are specifically called to this Office. They are an asset to the Church, however the role and ministry need to be clarified in specific terms. The Charismatic Episcopal Church has chosen not to ordain women to the diaconate due to the confused ministry illustrated by those denominations that have unscrupulously ordained women. While scriptural support and historical evidence may be given to the female diaconate, there is no evidence that the Orders of Priest and Bishop can be supported. Both of these Orders are in the category of “ruler” and the admonitions of Saint Paul clearly forbid the exercise of authority in the church by women.

Again, Matthew Henry concludes that by the Gift of Government St. Paul is referring to those who would carry out the charitable ministry of the church as founded by the Apostle and encouraged by the Prophet. There was always in the heart of St. Paul a concern and passion for the poor. It must have been at his exhortation that some of the churches received offerings for St. Paul to take back to Jerusalem and sustain the Christians there. Apparently they were the greater persecuted by the Temple because the Christians in Jerusalem were Jewish believers giving allegiance to Jesus Christ rather than the Priests and Rabbis of Judaism. No doubt in becoming a Christian you became unemployed and possibly homeless. Jerusalem is not much different today. Less than seven percent of the population is Christian; they have

moved away because of discrimination. Wherever the Church was in St. Paul's day, its greatest witness was seen in the eyes of the world as it cared for the less fortunate. We have allowed government to assume the role of charity in the caring of the poor, contenting ourselves to a massive feeding program at Thanksgiving and Christmas that alleviates the feeling of guilt when we sit and feast on a bountiful meal. Blessed are those few churches that provide ongoing feeding programs and pantry items for the needy.

The Gift of Ruling takes on a slightly different emphasis. There must have been those in the early church who along with the Pastor held the responsibility of keeping the Church without fault; a discipline of the unruly, and a restoration of the fallen. These labored in proclaiming the word and heeding accurate doctrine as well as making sure the witness of the church always reflected the purity of the word and doctrine. What a need we have for this Gift today when the admonition of the Scriptures regarding homosexuality is cast to the winds in the election of bishops who are openly living a lifestyle contrary to Scripture. Those who attempt to exercise with "diligence" a watchfulness over the decisions of the Church are few in number, and ostracized when they do not go along with the majority, or outside what is politically correct. The Church that advocates a pro-life position is being faithful to God's seal on the sanctity of life, but comes in conflict with a populace who take no thought of solving an undesirable pregnancy by murdering the unborn at the hands of an abortionist doctor.

1 Timothy 5: 17 St. Paul refers to the presbyter or chief pastor as the one who rules and again it appears he is talking about a watchfulness over the Word and Doctrine. The proclamation of the Word sets up a guideline by which we are to pattern our lives, and the power of the Word proclaimed becomes an authority over our conduct. Heeding to correct Doctrine will keep us in the proper discipline of the Church, and he who exercises this gift should be counted worthy of a double portion of blessing.

God give us such gift-bearers today so the Church may always stand firm against the onslaught that comes forth from the gates of hell.