

THE NATURE AND WORK OF A PRESBYTERY

Peter Hay, prepared for word ministry, 29 November 2020

Transcription of recording, slightly edited

Introduction

This session today is our third session coming out of the letter that Vic has written to the presbytery, and then from the presbytery to all the churches that we have connection with.

In our session today, we will consider how the Lord establishes a presbytery; and how they are to function together in fellowship, which means in 'first love'.

The fellowship and word of the presbytery

The apostle Paul used the term 'presbytery' to describe a fellowship of firstfruits believers who function and work as overseers, elders and deacons in the care of the church. They are appointed to this work by the Father. 1Ti 4:14.

As believers receive the word proclaimed by God's messengers, who are part of a presbytery, the Holy Spirit joins those hearers to the *fellowship* of the presbytery.

So, the first key is that the presbytery itself is to be a *fellowship*, and a word is then proclaimed *from* that fellowship.

As people hear that word and believe it, the activity associated with believing, which is *speech*, is enacted, or participated, in the very fellowship of presbytery from which the word has proceeded.

We know from the first letter of John that the fellowship of the presbytery is fellowship with the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ.

Christ's administration is not of this world; it is of the Spirit

Now, while that is very easy to demonstrate in the Scriptures, and that principle is plain, many people's understanding of presbytery, or the leadership of churches, has been unhelpfully affected by religious traditions or the past endeavours of the church to operate in a manner that is similar to worldly organisations.

Now, Christ was clear - His kingdom is *not of this world*, and His church should not operate according to the principles of the flesh.

Hence, the way in which a presbytery functions, and the way that a church functions, should not be

as a worldly organisation functions; but, also, it should not be based on religious traditions.

It needs to be 'of the Spirit', which is obvious.

But what we have called 'the Spirit' has very much been from loyalty to religious tradition and worldly structures.

And the Spirit is calling the churches to turn from that, and to be established in Christ's administration which is 'suitable for the fullness of the times'.

So, a presbytery, given that it is not like the administrations of the world, is not a board or committee of professional clergy whose qualifications, be they institutional qualifications or qualifications based on a body of work, grant them authority to run the church by consensus.

That is *not* what a presbytery is. It is not a board or a committee or a set of directors who have some authority to run the church because of certain qualifications.

Presbytery – a spiritual fellowship functioning by offering

The presbytery should be a *spiritual fellowship* that *functions by the principle of offering*.

So, we need to understand the nature of this in a presbytery, because the way in which it practically operates in a presbytery should be the way it practically operates in the whole church.

In this regard, we will consider some scenarios and points of application for us.

Who belongs to the presbytery?

Now, a common question among believers in our stream of churches is, 'Who belongs to the presbytery?' And this is an important question to ask.

Even though Jesus talked about the 'mystery' of the stars and the angels and the churches, He didn't mean that it is a mystery because only a few have some kind of special knowledge. He was saying, 'That mystery is supposed to be made known to us *all*.'

Firstfruits believers called, equipped and set apart

So, it is a good question to ask: 'Who belongs to the presbytery, and how do they get there?'

The most fundamental qualification for participation in the presbytery is *firstfruits*.

A firstfruits believer is a person who is born of God and is joined to the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings as a member of His body. They are obtaining the blessing of life that Christ came to give through His offering on the cross, and they are *sharing* this life with others.

So, they are *receiving* the life, and the demonstration of firstfruits is that they are able to *minister* that life to others.

Now, of course, this should describe the life of every Christian. The apostle James noted, 'We should all be a certain kind of firstfruits of His creation'. Jas 1:18.

However, not every firstfruits believer is called by the Father, equipped by Christ, and set apart by the Holy Spirit to oversee and care for the church.

So, we are *all* supposed to be firstfruits believers, but not everyone - and this is fundamental to overseership in the church - who is a firstfruits believer has been given to that work.

Not every firstfruits believer is called by the Father, equipped by Christ, and set apart by the Holy Spirit to oversee and care for the church.

Such a work is according to a person's *sanctification* as a son of God.

'According to sanctification' means that God the Father named them and set them apart for that work, even before He established the foundation of the world.

The apostle Paul testified to this, saying, 'But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I may preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus.' Gal 1:15.

The point I want to draw attention to from this passage is that Paul's apostolic work - even though he wasn't an apostle until he was converted, and

then, even after that, there was a season of work and service in the church before he was given to that apostolic work - was according to his *sanctification* which the Lord had set him apart to in his mother's womb.

So, regarding 'the will of God in Christ Jesus', it is the Holy Spirit who sets people apart *according to that will of the Father*.

His will made known through offering

So, how does a firstfruits believer - recognising that we are *all* to be firstfruits - come to know God's will concerning the shepherding of His flock?

It is made known as they faithfully *make offering in the fellowship of the body of Christ*.

This is true for every person; and it was true for the apostle Paul.

'Worthing' God and one another

We know the following passage well, but it is good that we keep it in mind as we consider this understanding of how the will of God, in relation to the shepherding of the church, is made known to those who are firstfruits believers.

'I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.' Rom 12:1-2.

That phrase, 'reasonable service,' can be translated as 'a reasonable service of *worship*'.

The reason why that is important is because worship has to do with 'giving worth' to another. It is not only worship of the Lord; it is actually the ability to worth and recognise the name of another.

This is the initiative of a person who is making offering by the mercies of God.

It is actually the commitment to true worship 'in Spirit and truth'. That is the truth of their own sonship, but it is also the ability to recognise and worth the truth of another believer.

So, this is the quality of the presentation of a firstfruits believer.

Not conformed to this world

And the outcome of this mode of relating with one another in the body is that they are not 'conformed to this world'.

They do not operate or try to ascend or negotiate their way in the church by the principles of the world.

The principles of the world attest that there is a trajectory that you can attain if you 'climb over the top of others'.

Transformed to the mind of Christ to know God's will, our sanctification

Firstfruits living is the complete opposite of that – it is not being conformed to this world, 'but be *transformed* by the renewing of your mind'.

We spoke recently about 'leaven', and the need for our mind to be transformed from 'malice' to 'the mind of Christ'.

For what purpose?

'That you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect *will of God*.' Rom 12:2.

And the will of God is your *sanctification*. 1Th 4:3.

So, *everyone* is supposed to be firstfruits.

A firstfruits person is someone who presents themselves, by the mercies of God, to *make offering*, which is their spiritual service of worship, which means that they are completely committed to revealing another.

Through this process, they are not being conformed to the principles of this world. Rather, they are being *transformed* to think according to a particular way - to have the mind of Christ. And that mind is actually the desire *to be obedient*.

Through obedience, then, they are able to *prove* what is the will of God. And that is the will of God for *every* person.

But, for *some* people, that will of God will be to oversee and shepherd the church.

So, *everyone* is doing this; it is simply that, through the process of offering, every person's particular sanctification is being made clear so that they are all functioning as part of an effective body.

So, no-one is more important than another, but everyone is being 'fitted' by the Father.

Grace for life through humility

Now, the implication of living by offering is that, through humility, a person obtains *grace for life*. James wrote that God 'gives grace to the humble'. Jas 4:6.

Now, what does a humble person do? A humble person is being *real*!

A person who is *not* humble, who is proud, actually *projects* something - they want to be received in a particular way.

A humble person is actually one who simply proves what is the will of God.

And this is how they obtain grace for life. It is *grace* to join them *to* the life. It binds them to the offering of Christ, but it is also the ability to *minister that grace to others*.

Putting off immaturity, ministry projection and life pursuits

So, a person who is obtaining grace puts off immature projections regarding ministry in the church, as well as fleshly life pursuits.

So, we kind of 'lean on' putting off *ministry* projections but, really, a person who is obtaining grace by offering is also putting off all of their *fleshly* life pursuits.

The immature and proud person may continue to project themselves, thinking that to make a name for themselves in the secular world is somehow 'less idolatrous' than seeking to make a name for themselves within the ministry context of the church. Both are idolatry; both are born out of immaturity and carnality.

A person who is standing in the grace of God, to which they have received an introduction by faith that comes by hearing, is putting that off.

It does not mean that we don't have immaturity. It simply means that, as we are becoming mature, we are putting that off so that we are living in simplicity and sincerity.

So, they put off immature projections regarding ministry in the church, as well as fleshly life pursuits.

Their *preoccupation* is the will of God for their life and family - and this should be true for us *all*.

The fellowship of the presbytery is the fellowship of the church

So, while we are looking to understand how the presbytery operates, these principles are the same for us *all*, and we shouldn't be surprised at this, because the fellowship of the presbytery *is* the fellowship of the church.

There are not two different 'fellowships'; the principles apply to us *all*.

Able to work under authority 'as to the Lord'

Now, remembering that faith grants us access into the grace in which we stand, and to exult in our sonship being realised, what is the nature of this initiative of faith?

It is demonstrated through a person's ability to work under authority, as to the Lord. Col 3:22-23.

It is amazing that Paul addressed our ability to work under authority 'as to the Lord', both in the church and in secular employment.

So, in the first instance, their work under authority will be their faithful and obedient service within a deaconing administration of the church.

Now, this will be a mind shift for many people, who presume that overseership in the church begins through ministry capacity. That may have occurred in the past, but it has led to corruption in the church.

In truth, the capacity for overseership *begins by the demonstration of the principle of offering*. And that principle of offering is actually through *obedience*.

We are to have this mind that was in Christ, who emptied Himself, coming in the form of a bond slave, and who was *obedient* even to the point of death, death on the cross. Php 2:5-8.

Obedience is the evidence of being co-crucified with Christ so that we are not living by our own life but, instead, by that very life of Christ.

So, the initiative of faith will be demonstrated in the same way as it was by Christ: 'Not my will, but Yours, be done'.

In the first instance, their work under authority will be their faithful and obedient service within a deaconing administration in the church. It is under the authority of someone whose responsibility is to manage and administrate that department.

As much as they will demonstrate this faith initiative in the church, they, equally, will have a good testimony in the context of their secular employment, which will be secure and fruitful.

Exemplifying the culture of godliness through service and employment

Through this work, they obtain the Lord's provision for their house and for their ongoing service in the body of Christ.

So, they do not seek financial support from the church to do their work of ministry as a member of the body; they find that provision through their secular employment.

In this regard, Paul said to Timothy, 'But if anyone does not provide for his own, and *especially for those of his household*, he has *denied the faith* and is worse than an *unbeliever*.' 1Ti 5:8.

Now, that is a powerful statement, isn't it? The person who 'denies the faith' does not *believe*!

He does not hear the word, nor find provision of life through fellowship in the offering and sufferings of Christ, which has the practical outworking, day to day, of doing his job as unto the Lord.

So, it is in this context of service and employment that firstfruits believers exemplify the culture of godliness that is characteristic of those who are able to oversee the church.

Another way of saying it is that if we are not exemplifying godliness, both in service in the church and in our secular employment, then we are not able to oversee the church.

Love - laying life down to reveal another

Overseers are to, literally, *reveal someone else*.

Can you see the point that that is foundational to 'love'?

Even though we might know that it is not the case in practice, we often think that love is 'what I have to give to someone else'.

Rather, love is the ability to *lay your life down to reveal someone else*. And you have to do it under authority, as unto the Lord.

Characteristics of an overseer

In this regard, we note the explicit directions that the apostle Paul gave to Timothy regarding the appointment of overseers and elders in the church.

'This is a faithful saying.' 1Ti 3:1.

When Paul used the term 'faithful saying', he was saying, 'This is a foundational statement of the way

the church operates, and it is faithful and applicable in every generation of the church.'

This faithful saying applied when Paul was ministering throughout the Gentile church, and it applies to us today.

'This is a faithful saying: if a man desires the position of a bishop ['bishop' literally means 'overseer'], he desires a good work.'

'A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behaviour, hospitable, able to teach; not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous; one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence (for if a man does not know how to rule his house, how will he take care of the church of God?); not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride [sounds like 'leaven', doesn't it?] he falls into the same condemnation as the devil.' 1Ti 3:2-6.

'Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are *outside*.' 1Ti 3:7. Here we see the importance of the way in which we work in our secular settings.

'Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.'

Ministry is not a qualification for overseership

Now, it is interesting to note that in this description of the characteristics of someone who can be appointed to oversee the church, there is not one mention of their spiritual giftedness or ministry capacity as a member of the body of Christ.

And that is different from the way that we have thought about it in the past, isn't it? We have previously started from that premise.

Now, why were these attributes not mentioned?

It is because *every person* has a *ministry work* to do as a member of the body of Christ - and no person's ministry is more important than another's.

Paul addressed that clearly and point blank. He said, 'No, every person, as a member of the body, has a ministry; and not one ministry is more important than the other.'

That is *not* the qualification for overseership. *Everyone* should be doing the work of the ministry,

according to their sanctification, in the *place* where the Father has appointed them.

Appointed by God, affirmed in fellowship; not measured against criteria

Now, the next vital point to note is that Paul did not give these instructions to aspirant leaders as criteria against which they were to 'measure themselves'.

He didn't give this list so that we could read the Scriptures and think, 'Right, I need to make sure that I'm blameless - tick; husband of one wife - yes, definitely, tick; temperate - yes; sober-minded - mostly; good behaviour.'

It is not criteria against which a leader assesses, or measures, themselves.

Who did he give this to? He gave it to Timothy and to Titus, who were part of an apostolic administration, and it was *their* responsibility to *appoint* overseers and elders in every city. They were to use these characteristics as foundational to recognising those with overseership capacity.

It was their responsibility, as men who were part of an apostolic administration, or fellowship, to ensure that, in every city, they appointed overseers and elders who exemplified the culture that Paul outlined in his letters.

As we were talking about this in the presbytery, we were reminded of a passage which is very helpful in affirming this point - that we do not *presume*.

A person is not to presume upon the ministry of eldership because of their own assessment of their suitability.

The focus of every believer is not to be on themselves at all. This is foundational to the way in which presbytery should actually function. The focus of every believer should be *to reveal another, by offering*.

In the context of this work, God Himself appoints people as overseers according to His name for them, which is known and affirmed in the light of *fellowship*.

'For we dare not class ourselves or compare ourselves as those who commend themselves.' 2Co 10:12.

We do not read the criteria in the book of Timothy and compare ourselves to that criteria, making an assessment about our suitability.

‘But they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise.’ 2Co 10:13.

This is *not* by ‘the wisdom that comes down from above’ that grants faith for participation, which works by offering. They are not wise.

Working within our sanctification

Paul continued, ‘We, however [Paul said that, in the presbytery that he was part of and fostered, ‘We however’], will not boast beyond measure’. 2Co 10:13.

He said, ‘We do not glorify ourselves outside of our sanctification. This is who the Lord has named us to be and the work that He has given us to do.’

‘We, however, will not boast beyond measure, but within the limits [of sanctification] of the sphere which God appointed us – a sphere which especially includes you.’ 2Co 10:13.

Now, I love the point that Paul made, because he said that the work is completely *relational*. It is not a ‘position’ to be fulfilled.

He said that this was consistent with his *sanctification*. So, the way that he spoke was in fellowship, according to his name. This mode facilitated, fostered and promoted the fellowship of the body of Christ.

That is what overseership should ‘look like’. It is ‘set apart by the Spirit’.

I love Paul’s expression, ‘We, however, will not boast beyond measure, but within the limits of the sphere which *God* appointed us.’

This is not according to our own measure nor according to our own aspirations or our own ideas of the way things should run, but according to His appointment.

The Holy Spirit appoints, others bear witness

The question that we must answer and understand is, ‘How do we know what God appoints?’

It is *the Holy Spirit who sets men apart* for the work of ministry as an overseer or elder, to which others in the presbytery and the church are able to bear witness.

‘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.’ Act 13:1.

There was a fellowship in Antioch. They did a work in Antioch, in the church, administrating and facilitating the gathering of the believers.

‘As they ministered to the Lord and fasted [So, there was a prayer fellowship, wasn’t there?] 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, they laid hands on them, and *sent them away*.’ Act 13:2-3.

So, there was a progression. A ‘work’ was being done; a commitment to fellowship in the Spirit.

Then the Holy Spirit set apart ones to a particular work of ministry, which was then borne witness to among the fellowship of overseers in that place, marked by the laying on of hands.

They did not impart some ministry *imprimatur* to those men.

Rather, they set them apart, in agreement, commending them to what the Spirit had said concerning those ones. So, there was an initiative of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

We, then, are all to participate in giving those ones, symbolised by the laying on of hands, to the work that the Spirit has called them to do.

Known by and exemplifying the culture of offering

Now, while that was true for Paul, he then demonstrated the same principle in relation to the overseers and elders whom he appointed in the cities that he visited on his missionary journeys.

We note Paul’s commendation of Stephanas as a firstfruits believer. A firstfruits Christian is a person who presents themselves as a living sacrifice by offering, not being conformed to this world. They are completely given to a spiritual service of worship.

Their focus is on others, and they are being transformed by the renewing of their mind; and are ‘proving’ the will of God.

Let us consider what Paul had to say about the household. It is beautiful that he referred to ‘the household of Stephanas’.

Stephanas was the one who was going to be the overseer but, just as Paul spoke to Timothy about the nature of the household of an overseer, Stephanas exemplified this.

Paul said, 'I urge you, brethren [Paul was writing to the whole church], you *know* the household of Stephanas.' 1Co 16:15.

How did they know the household of Stephanas? It was because he was among them, serving.

'You *know* the household of Stephanas, that it is the firstfruits of Achaia, and that they have devoted ['devoted' literally means 'addicted'] themselves to the ministry of the saints.' 1Co 16:15.

That means they were practically serving in the church. That is how they were known. That is straightforward, isn't it?

'I urge you, brethren – you know the household of Stephanas, that it is the firstfruits of Achaia, and that they have devoted themselves to the ministry of the saints – that you also submit to such, and to everyone who *works and labours with us*.' 1Co 16:15-16.

It was not that Stephanas had his 'own' work. Rather, he was a labourer, as part of a presbytery fellowship.

Paul said, in effect, 'We are commending *that* as overseership in your midst, so submit to these ones. They are exemplifying the culture, which is with us. As you submit to them and receive from them, you are joining the same culture. You are exemplifying the same fellowship.'

Paul then said, 'I am glad about the coming of Stephanas [and he added some others], Fortunatus, and Achaicus, for what was lacking on your part they supplied. For they refreshed my spirit and yours. Therefore acknowledge such men.' 1Co 16:17-18.

Overseers to be received by the congregation

So, the Holy Spirit set these ones apart.

But, then, the congregation was encouraged to receive the commendation of the apostolic administration, as they appointed these ones as overseers in the cities.

A work, not a position

This fellowship of firstfruits believers are to oversee the church through the work of eldership and deaconing.

This is a key for us to understand.

Overseership is a *work* to do. It is not a position to fill. It is not a figurehead. It is a labour.

Paul said, 'That you submit to such and to everyone who works and labours with us.'

So, if someone assumes overseership but is not doing the work, they are an imposter, aren't they?

Ascension gift grace functioning in a presbytery

As we have considered previously, among the fellowship of overseers are men who have received ascension gift grace from Christ; some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists and some pastor teachers.

The point is that not all those who have been given to overseership have ascension gift grace. Rather, there is *fellowship* in the presbytery. And everyone in the presbytery should be firstfruits, which means that they are demonstrating the culture of offering.

And then, within that fellowship, there will be some who are overseers, elders and deacons.

And, among those, the Lord gives some to be apostles, prophets, some evangelists, and some pastor teachers, with ascension gift grace.

They are the ones through whom Christ's word is laid down in the context of the presbytery.

It is the word that every person in presbytery and, indeed, the body, is to receive and then multiply, according to their sanctification, or according to the expression that is consistent with their name.

These ascension gift leaders have been set over the church to feed those who are in the church with their portion of food in due season.

The apostle Peter described this food, ministered in due season, as 'the word of present truth'.

The ministry of the word of God through these four 'faces' - so, it is from the face of Christ that the light of the knowledge of the glory of God is coming.

And those four ascension gift graces, which are in His hand as a star, are ministering the light from Christ's face as four expressions of light.

These four faces of Christ's administration are the means by which every person in the church is

equipped for their work of ministry as a member of the body of Christ.

Fulltime service in the body - labouring as part of an administration

Now let us look at fulltime service in the body of Christ.

How does it go from being firstfruits and being commended to overseership, to being on the tithe as someone who works fulltime, ministering within the church?

‘Ministering’ is not quite the right word; it is a ‘work’, or ‘labouring’, as part of an administration.

When a man is commended to fulltime service in the church, it is to do a ‘work’. They are not commended to fulltime service in the church because of a ministry. It is to do a *work*.

This work is designated and defined for them and their wife by the overseers and senior deacons in the presbytery.

They do not receive the tithe for the purpose of a ‘ministry’. Rather, it is for a work to facilitate the gathering and the administration of our fellowship as a church. The type of work that needs to be done is very practical.

Accountability of those on the tithe

But those who are commended to this work are to do so under authority, and they are accountable to these ones.

Those who are commended to this work are subject to these men, and these are the ones to whom they must give an account.

Paid for a work, not a ministry

If a person does have a ministry grace and capacity, and preferences that, on the tithe, over the work to which they are commended, that is called an ‘unequal balance’. That is unacceptable to the Lord.

It is not that, when they are commended to a work, they do not do that ministry anymore. For example, it might be among the teenagers or with the young adults or through Bible school, but *that* is not what they are being paid for from the tithe.

But, if we preference that, and do not do the work for which the tithe *is* given, there is an unequal balance.

So, we still need to continue to minister, just as every person in the body of Christ is supposed to minister.

But the work is a designated work to do, as unto the Lord, as it is for every person, even in their secular employment.

So, those who are commended to this work are subject to these men. These are the senior overseers and deacons to whom they must give an account.

They must give an account for the work that they have been given, because they are to be obedient. They are given a work that they are to perform.

They are not employed to organise others into teams to carry out these tasks. So, they do not go on the tithe so that they can get everyone else to do the work that they should be doing.

There *will* be the organisation of teams to work *with* us so that the work is done.

The tithe is the provision for this work. Note that the tithe is not for their ministry as a member of the body of Christ.

A growing work, through obedience

However, when a person has been put on the tithe as a fulltime worker and their work is secure and clear, and they are well established – they are engaged in the activities that belong to their obedience, and their sanctification is being proven through obedience – the couple’s ministry may be further clarified in fellowship with those who oversee the church.

There will be an ongoing conversation. This ministry may be in relation to aspects of the church program in which they are already involved. For example, that may be the teenagers program, the young adults program, Bible school or pastoral care.

As we have already noted, the ministries of teenagers, young adults, Bible school etc. are not supported by the tithe, but are exercised according to the talent that God gives to each son of God.

The work of ministry is the reality for every member of the body of Christ.

The Lord provides for everyone to do that work, but it is not the tithe that supports a person’s ministry.

That title supports their work as part of a deaconed administration to facilitate the *fellowship* of the body.

Authority emerges because of obedience and fellowship

Through their work and fellowship, a fulltime worker's authority will become evident within the presbytery and among overseers to whom they are submitted.

This is a key point, and it is opposite to what most of us grew up understanding. For those of us who grew up under the Latter Rain movement, we have had this the other way around.

The authority that is associated with ascension gift grace, emerges because of *obedience*.

Ascension gift grace is not the *reason* why people assume authority and work in the church.

I will read it again.

Through their work - their obedient work and fellowship - a fulltime worker's authority will become evident within the presbytery and among the overseers to whom they are submitted.

A man's gift makes room through offering

This makes sense of a passage that we have used in many different ways, but when you read it within the present context, you will say, 'Of course, I see that.'

'A man's gift makes room for him, and brings him before great men.' Pro 18:16.

Remember that Solomon wrote this to the Israelites. He was not referring to great men in the world. Rather, the 'great men' are the men whom the Lord has put over His house.

What happens is that a person's gift becomes manifest through their faithful offering.

It is through the principle of offering that multiplication comes, and the gift that *does* belong to them and their sanctification is made manifest, or brought before, great men.

Now, is not that exactly what happened to the apostle Paul? Paul said, 'I was set apart to this work of apostolic ministry, from before the foundation of the world.'

But then he needed to be converted. He had to become a firstfruits believer.

After his conversion, he ministered as part of a fulltime team. We do not really know whether they were fulltime, but there certainly was a ministry team in Antioch.

The Holy Spirit set them apart, and he brought his gift that made room for him in that context. Hands were laid on him, and he was sent to do the work.

That is what this passage means.

A man's gift makes room for him, so people who are pushing for ministry are seeking to reveal *themselves*. They do not need to.

A person does not need to push in order to find a place of authority in the church. The gift itself makes room for them. And it is blessed as it is brought before those who have spiritual sight and have been given care of the church.

A man's gift, which is expressed according to the authority of his name, is seen only by offering - *only by offering*.

But remember that offering is not what I think my gift to give is. This is where the point of confusion is.

Offering is that I *lay my life down to reveal the gift in another*.

When that happens, the gift that does belong to me begins to emerge and be seen.

It is not that I say, 'I have a gift and here it is. I am giving it.' That is *not offering*.

Offering is to lay your life down to reveal another. And when that happens, the gift that belongs to you makes room for you.

So, a man's gift, which is expressed according to the authority of his name, is seen only by offering. In fact, his gift facilitates and multiplies the culture of offering in the church.

If it is not doing that, it is not the gift, or the five talents, that comes from Christ.

The example of Timothy and his gift

This principle was exemplified by Timothy.

Timothy's story is the same as Paul's, but it is nice to see how Luke wrote about Timothy; and then how Paul addressed Timothy.

Writing about Paul, Luke wrote,

'Then he came to Derbe and Lystra. And behold, a certain disciple [or, you could say, a firstfruits

believer] was there, named Timothy, the son of a certain Jewish woman who *believed* [a believer is one 'of faith', which is *firstfruits*], but his father was Greek. He was well spoken of by the brethren who were at Lystra and Iconium. Paul wanted to have him go on with him.' Act 16:1-3.

Timothy had heard the word, and had an excellent reputation, or report, among the church, because he served them. He was no different from Stephanas, was he?

Stephanas did not end up having the same ministry as Timothy. Stephanas was a firstfruits believer who was set as an overseer, but Timothy was faithful in the work in which he was yoked to Paul.

However, Paul needed to encourage Timothy. He said, 'Therefore I remind you to stir up *the gift of God*.' 2Ti 1:6.

We have read about ascension gift grace, which are the gifts of Christ, which are 'Some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelist, and some pastor teachers'. Eph 4:11.

We have learnt that the gift that is given to us makes room for us and brings us before great men.

But Paul addressed Timothy regarding this gift that Timothy received.

'Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands [Through your connection with me when you were brought before great men, Timothy.] For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.' 2Ti 1: 6-7.

Doesn't the term 'a sound mind' sound like a mind that has been renewed because it is being transformed in the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings?

So Timothy was a firstfruits believer, faithfully serving in the church.

He was then commended to a work with Paul and, within that context, his gift, which was the gift of an evangelist, made room for him. He then had to keep faith with the gift that he had received.

Spots on our *agape* feasts - those who serve only themselves

People who presume upon the work of overseership, apart from the culture of fellowship outlined by Paul, are *imposters*.

They either endeavour to be other than whom the Lord named them to be or they do not measure themselves to their name, which can only be known in the light of fellowship.

We note the words of Jude concerning these people and their ministry. Jude warned Christians of these people. 'These are spots on your love feasts.' Jud 12.

Remember that a love feast is an *agape* meal, which is our *participation* in communion.

Those who are overseers should exemplify the very fellowship that we participate in when we commune together.

Those who seek to ascend by any way other than the way that Paul described through his letters, are 'spots on the love feast'.

'These are spots on your love feasts, while they feast with you without fear, serving only themselves. They are clouds without water.' Jud 12.

Their words are not the ministry of the water of the word, which comes like the dew or the rain on the cut grass, 'line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little, there a little'. Deu 32:2. Isa 28:13.

Do you see that they do not minister rest or refreshing, because there is no water!

They are clouds, so they have the *appearance* of one who can bring water, but they do not have the grace for it in their communication.

'They are clouds without water, carried about by the winds; late autumn trees without fruit, twice dead, pulled up by the roots; raging waves of the sea, foaming up their own shame; wandering stars for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever.' Jud 12-13.

Sorry to have to finish on that stark passage, but next week we will look more closely at what fellowship in the presbytery 'looks like'.

You will see that it is very easy for us to be delivered from this way of living and to be secured in a fellowship that is refreshing and is bringing rest.