



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

## A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics)

### Lesson 13.19 – The Doctrine of Church and Ministry

#### Christ's Gifts of the Public Ministry to His Church

Christ has given the ministry of the keys to every individual Christian and to every group of Christians. To help the Christians carry out this Gospel service to the world, Christ has also established what we call the public ministry. That is, Christ has given special gifts to His Church on earth, and He has instructed His Church on how to use these gifts for the benefit of all. Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome: **"As we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them"** (Romans 12:4-6). **"The manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all"** (1 Corinthians 12:7).

All Christians are equal before God in the sense that each of them is a son or daughter of God, with the same blessing of forgiveness of sins in Christ, the same presence of God in their lives, the same hope of eternal life, and the same full access to God in prayer. The apostle Paul has made that very clear by his words: **"You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise"** (Galatians 3:26-29).

But Christians differ from one another in the special gifts God has given them, and therefore Christians have different functions or tasks in the Church in accordance with the gifts God has given them, just as the various members of the human body have different functions. Christians have the privilege of recognizing the special gifts God has given to some of them and calling these gifted individuals to use their special gifts in the ministry of the Gospel. This is what is meant by the public ministry. Certain individuals with special gifts are called by Christian congregations or larger church bodies to use their gifts for the benefit of and in the name of the Christians who called them. That is why it is called the public ministry. These public ministers do their work not in their own name as individual Christians, but in the name of the Christians who called them. In this way they are servants or ministers not only of God but also of the Christians who called them, whether it is a small congregation of two or three, or a large congregation of hundreds or thousands, or a church body made up of few or many congregations. While these called ministers are servants of those who called them, if there is any conflict between what Christ says and what the calling group of Christians says, what Christ says has to come first.

It is important that these gifted individuals not consider themselves as lords and masters over Christ's Church. Jesus told His disciples that they were not to imitate the Pharisees, who did their works **"to be seen by men"** (Matthew 23:5), or to be honored by men by having **"the best places at feasts, the best seats in the synagogues, greetings in the marketplaces"** (Matthew 23:6), and other such privileges. Rather, He said: **"One is your Teacher, the Christ, and you are all brethren. Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven. And do not be called teachers; for One is your Teacher, the Christ. But he who is greater among you shall be your servant. And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted"** (Matthew 23:8-12).

On the very night of Jesus' arrest **"there was also a dispute among them, as to which of them should be considered the greatest. And He said to them, 'The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over**

**them, and those who exercise authority over them are called “benefactors.” But not so among you; on the contrary, he who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he who governs as he who serves”** (Luke 22:24-26).

The Bible mentions some of the gifts Christ gave to the early Christians. Paul wrote to the Corinthians: **“Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually. And 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? But earnestly desire the best gifts”** (1 Corinthians 12:27-31).

Notice that it was God who gave these gifts to His Church. In many cases God Himself at first *directly* appointed these persons to their positions. For example, Christ Himself personally chose His apostles. Later on, God called or appointed persons to their offices *indirectly*, through the Christians, as He did, for example, in the choosing of the seven helpers in the congregation at Jerusalem (Acts 6:1-6). In either case we should regard such servants of the Church as having been called by God. The apostle Paul reminded the elders of Ephesus that it was the Holy Spirit who made them overseers in Christ’s Church. Paul said: **“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”** (Acts 20:28).

After the teaching of the apostles was put into writing in our New Testament, the Lord no longer saw fit to give His Church so many supernatural gifts, such as the gift of prophecy, miraculous healings, or the sudden ability to speak in foreign unlearned languages. But the gifts of teaching, helping, and administering have been continued through the years and are still found in the Church today.

These gifts that Christ has given to His Church are discussed in Paul’s letter to the Ephesians: **“To each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift. Therefore He says: ‘When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men.’ ... And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God”** (Ephesians 4:7-13).

The apostles are listed first, for these gifts are foundational for the work of the Church. We have their writings in our New Testament, and we use these gifts constantly. The prophets referred to are those like Agabus (Acts 11:28 and 21:10) who received special messages from God in those early days for the benefit of His Church. There is no reason to believe that our Lord is still providing His Church with such prophets today. We have the writings of the Old Testament prophets and the New Testament apostles as God’s sufficient Word for us. Evangelists are Gospel preachers, and Christ still supplies them to His Church. Pastors are shepherds watching over Christ’s flocks of believers in different places. Such pastors are also teachers of God’s Word. Paul’s letters to Timothy and Titus are called pastoral letters because it is in these letters in particular that Paul lays out what the duties of such pastors are. The Lord also supplies other workers in His Church, such as schoolteachers, congregational elders, musicians, administrators, and deacons, all of whom may be called by Christians for specific duties in His Church.

When the congregation at Jerusalem needed assistants for the task of distributing food to the needy, the apostles said: **“Seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business”** (Acts 6:3). They were to look for those persons to whom the Lord had given certain traits, both spiritual and practical. So, when we Christians today need persons to carry out certain church duties, we look for those to whom God has given the necessary gifts for the work to be done.

Paul told Timothy what gifts were needed for a “**bishop**”, that is, a spiritual overseer, a spiritual shepherd or pastor. “**If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, 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, keeping his children in submission with all reverence (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?); not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil. Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil**” (1 Timothy 3:1-7).

Therefore, when a spiritual shepherd is needed for a group of Christians, they should not just pick names at random. They should very carefully consider the gifts God has given and choose that man who has been blessed with these gifts. This is a very serious matter, for the devil can create chaos in a church through a poor leader. When the Christians in Antioch of Syria were in the process of choosing missionaries to go into Gentile territories, they “**fasted and prayed**” (Acts 13:3) before sending Barnabas and Paul on their way.

Many of the gifts they were to look for in a candidate are gifts that every Christian should strive for, but there was one gift in particular that is not found in every Christian. That is the gift of being “**able to teach**”. Paul stressed this same gift in his letter to Titus, where he again lists the qualifications that we should look for in those who are to be spiritual shepherds: “**I left you in Crete that you should ... appoint elders in every city as I commanded you – if a man is blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of dissipation or insubordination. For a bishop must be blameless, as a steward of God, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but hospitable, a lover of what is good, sober-minded, just, holy, self-controlled, holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict**” (Titus 1:5-9). Spiritual leaders should have a good knowledge of God’s Word so that they will be able to detect false teachers and correct them from the Word of God.

Notice that Jesus chose men, not women, to be His apostles and leaders of His Church. In the same way the apostle Paul speaks of men only as being qualified to be spiritual leaders of God’s people and teachers in Christ’s congregations. In fact, Paul wrote specifically to Timothy: “**I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression**” (1 Timothy 2:12-14). Notice that this instruction was based on God’s original plan for man and woman at creation: man to be the head, and woman to be his helper. Paul wrote the same thing to the congregation in Corinth: “**Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak**” (1 Corinthians 14:34). What is forbidden is for women to teach men or to have authority over men in the church; they are not permitted to address an assembly that includes men. Women may be teachers of other women and of children. If someone says that this was just the opinion of Paul and it no longer applies today, remember that after giving this instruction, Paul wrote: “**The things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord**” (1 Corinthians 14:37).

In his first letter to Timothy Paul also listed the qualifications for deacons (or helpers) in the church. “**Likewise deacons must be reverent, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy for money, holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience. But let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons, being found blameless. Likewise, their wives must be reverent, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things. Let deacons be the husbands one one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well**” (1 Timothy 3:8-12).

Notice that these deacons (helpers) did not need to be “**able to teach**”, for their work did not include the teaching of God’s Word. Because the Greek word translated “wives” in 1 Timothy 3:11 is not used

earlier with respect to the wives of bishops or pastors, it is likely that 1 Timothy 3:11 is best understood as referring to women who served the church in a similar way as the male deacons. Such women “**must be reverent, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things.**” In his letters the apostle Paul mentions the service of various women who helped him in his work and who served the church. See Romans 16:1-15.

The public ministry in Christ’s Church may take many different forms. Christian congregations and church bodies are free to call individuals to take over the entire spiritual supervision of Christians in a certain area, or, if they prefer, to divide the various duties among several individuals who have the necessary gifts and training. For example, one minister could be called to be in charge of the Christian training of the children. Another minister could be called to conduct the Sunday services. Another minister could be called to visit the sick. Whenever there is a special need, the Christians can call someone to fill that need. If there is a man in the congregation who has some special talent, the congregation may want to call that person to use that talent in some special way, such as to write hymns or teach singing or lead the worship, or perhaps to preach God’s Word on the radio or television. A church body such as a synod needs men with special talents, such as someone to establish new congregations in neighboring villages, or to be in charge of the Christian schools in a certain area, or to be in charge of a seminary to train men to be pastors, or to teach the Bible languages of Greek and Hebrew.

There are two basic principles that need to be followed in setting up various ministries in Christ’s Church. One: “**Let all things be done decently and in order**” (1 Corinthians 14:40). “**For God is not the author of confusion but of peace**” (1 Corinthians 14:33). Two: “**Let all that you do be done with love**” (1 Corinthians 16:14).

The Church of the Lutheran Confession has adopted the following statement as a reminder of how we understand God’s Word. *“In Christian liberty, as circumstances require and as the Lord supplies diversity of gifts, operations and ministries, the Church may separate the various functions of the public ministry of the Word and apportion them to whatever number of qualified persons it may choose to call. It is essential that each call thus extended shall specify the area of responsibility and the type of duty thereby assigned, and that each laborer abide by the terms of his call”* (Concerning Church and Ministry, pp. 32-33).

## **Questions**

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1. To whom did Christ entrust the ministry of the Gospel?
2. What is meant by the public ministry?
3. In what ways are all Christians the same? In what way are they different?
4. Why should Christian leaders today not imitate the Pharisees?
5. What are some of the gifts Christ gave the early Christians?
6. What new church position did the congregation at Jerusalem create when there was a special need?
7. Why is it not necessary for all congregations to have the same kinds of Gospel ministers?
8. What are the qualifications for ministers in Christ’s Church?
9. What type of church office should not be granted to women?
10. What special skill should all spiritual shepherds have?
11. In what ways are women able to serve the Christian congregation?
12. If there are special needs in the Gospel ministry in your locale, name these needs and suggest ways they could be satisfied.
13. What are some of the special needs of a synod or church body?