

Revisiting the So-Called 'Fivefold Ministry'

I'm often asked, "Do you believe in the fivefold ministry? And do you believe that God is restoring it today?" To my mind, that's the wrong question. It's pushing the cart before the horse.

The ascension gifts mentioned in Ephesians 4 are anointed people whom God gives to the body of Christ. They are the natural outgrowth and byproduct of true face-to-face community under the headship of Jesus.

All in all, there are 20 gifts mentioned in the New Testament. If a group of believers gathers around Jesus Christ alone (rather than a doctrine, a theological system or a ritual)—and they are void of a clergy system—then that group will eventually produce all the gifts and gifted ones that exist within the body of Christ.

It's no mistake that Paul used the physical human body as an apt image to describe the way the body of Christ functions.

When a baby girl is born, most of her capabilities are not present. She can't ride a bicycle, add and subtract numbers, or eat with a fork and knife.

However, within her body she possesses the genetic codes that will produce the physical development by which she'll one day carry out these activities. If she is fed and nurtured properly, in time these abilities will automatically develop within her without being forced or manufactured by other humans.

She will organically grow into them. Why? Because they are native to her species as a human being. They are the product of human life.

In the same way, when a genuine church is born, it possesses within its spiritual DNA all the giftings that are in Jesus Christ. But it takes time for them to develop and emerge.

(Unfortunately, we live in a day when many church leaders don't seem to understand this spiritual principle. Hence, they try to force the exercise of gifts and ministries in the body prematurely.)

What is needed, then, is not a restoration of the so-called fivefold ministry. What's needed is the restoration of the organic nature of the New Testament church. And that is what God is seeking to restore today, as He has in every generation.

Therefore, if we can discover how a church is born from God's perspective and how it is to be nurtured and maintained, then we will see a restoration of all the gifts that are in Christ in the way that they were meant to be expressed.

The pressing question is, are we going to get serious about discovering how to gather around Jesus Christ in an organic (New Testament) way? Or are we going to blithely ignore New Testament principles and for the next 200 years continue to hope (and prophesy) that the fivefold ministry will one day be restored?

Again, God's way of raising up the ascension gifts is by restoring true body life. The ascension gifts don't magically appear because someone writes a book prophesying that they're just around the corner. Nor should we assume that they have been restored when someone claims to be the "first," the "last," or the "new" apostle.

Authentic apostles, prophets, evangelists and shepherds/teachers are gifted people who grow up face-to-face communities that are under the headship of Jesus—not as leaders but as brethren—equal in status to everyone else in the church.

Because they have grown up out of the soil of authentic church life, they have been tested and proven to be safe to the kingdom of God and to the Lord's children.

Their outstanding hallmark is that they glorify, reveal, present, magnify and bring into clear view the Lord Jesus Christ in unusual depths and practical experience.

Frank Viola is a speaker, entrepreneur, author and writer of the blog *Beyond Evangelical*. His latest book is *Jesus Now: Unveiling the Present-Day Ministry of Christ*, from which this article is adapted.

Order *Jesus Now* by Frank Viola from between Monday and Thursday and receive the book at a 50 percent discount (the best price anywhere)—plus you'll also receive the study guide as a free gift.