

A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Spiritual Gift of Leadership¹

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Introduction

The thesis of this paper is that a biblical theology of the role of the Spirit in the leadership of God's people demonstrates a distinct work of the Spirit in biblical leaders.

Terms and Definitions

This study uses the following terms and definitions: (1) *God's people* or *the people of God* will refer to Israel and the church. (2) *Biblical leader* refers to anyone who has been formally recognized by God or his people to lead the people of God. (3) *Leadership* denotes any activity of a biblical leader that is an exercise of his authority over the people of God. This study limits its discussion to the activity of leadership that Scripture explicitly or implicitly describes to be the result of the work of the Spirit. (4) As the Spirit is involved in the exercise of a leader's leadership, this leadership may be called *spiritual*. Unless otherwise noted, this paper will not use the phrase *spiritual leadership* beyond this narrow definition. (4) The thesis of this paper speaks of a distinct *work* of the Spirit in biblical leaders, and it is this work that is more difficult to define than any of the terms above. In fact, one might say that this paper seeks to examine this work so as to gather the findings and define this work toward the study's end. (5) This study has chosen the general term *work* to capture the idea that the Spirit is in some way active in connection to the exercise of a biblical leader's leadership.

The Use of *Spirit* with Relation to the Leaders of God's People

Of the 305,500 words in the OT,² the term רוּחַ (*ruach*) occurs 394 times,³ and approximately 100 of these occurrences refer to the Spirit of God.⁴ Approximately 30 of the 100 uses of רוּחַ refer to the Spirit of God are used in relation to the leadership of the leaders of Israel.

Of the 138,162 words of the NT,⁵ the term πνεῦμα (*pneuma*) occurs 379 times,⁶ and approximately 275 of these occurrences refer to the Spirit of God.⁷ Roughly 90 of these 275 NT uses refer to the Spirit of God in relation to the leadership of NT leaders.

¹ This paper has been copied and modified from sections of David Huffstutler, "A Biblical Theology of the Role of the Spirit in the Leadership of God's People," Ph. D. Dissertation (Wake Forest, NC: Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2014). If you would like a pdf copy of my dissertation, email me at huffy@fbcrockford.org. I only ask that you do not forward it to others without my express consent. Thank you.

² Francis I. Anderson and A. Dean Forbes, *The Vocabulary of the Old Testament* (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1989; repr., 1992), 3.

³ James M. Hamilton, Jr., "God with Men in the Torah," *Westminster Theological Journal* 65 (2003): 131–33, catalogues 389 references to רוּחַ in the OT. 378 are Hebrew, and 11 are found in the Aramaic portions of Daniel. David G. Firth and Paul D. Wegner, introduction to *Presence, Power and Promise: The Role of the Spirit of God in the Old Testament* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2011), 16, assume the legitimacy of רוּחַ for 5 variants, bringing the total uses of רוּחַ to 394.

⁴ Leon J. Wood, *The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 23. James Elder Cumming, *Through the Eternal Spirit* (Chicago: Fleming H. Revell, 1896), 17–24, carefully catalogues 88 passages "in which a Divine Person seems to be spoken of . . . contained in the Old Testament" (p. 17).

⁵ Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 31.

⁶ See E. W. Bullinger, *Word Studies on the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1979), 209–17.

⁷ *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, s.v., "πνεῦμα" 3:117.

In each testament, roughly one-third of the references to the Spirit of God involve the leaders of God's people. God clearly emphasizes and desires us to know how the Spirit works through His leaders. We do well to examine these texts in order to know how the Spirit should be seen to work through us as leaders today.

Clarifications and Limitations

This paper is not about the Spirit's work in regeneration, indwelling, sanctification, creation, or miracles. Neither does this paper concern such matters as the personality of the Spirit, the Spirit as God, or the Spirit's attributes. This paper is also limited to vocational leaders and thus omits any discussion of vocational prophets (e.g., Elijah) or men such as Joseph and Daniel.⁸

Criteria for Inclusion and Exclusion of Biblical Texts

Four criteria are offered as a filter for limiting the texts to be included in this study. First, there must be an explicit mention of the Spirit of God with the use of either $\kappa\alpha\iota\ \rho\upsilon\epsilon\iota\ \tau\omicron\upsilon\ \sigma\pi\iota\tau\iota$ (OT) or $\pi\upsilon\epsilon\upsilon\mu\alpha$ (NT). Second, there must be an explicit reference to a biblical leader as defined above. Third, the text should describe the work of the Spirit as having affected the exercise of the leader's leadership. A fourth criterion (if one could call it that) would be to recognize that later texts may refer to the Spirit, the Spirit's work, and the leadership of a biblical leader by some other means than the direct terminology that was used to speak of these topics at first.

A Survey of the Spirit's Work in Biblical Leaders in the Old Testament

Moses

Moses experienced the work of the Spirit in multiple ways. His miracles were performed by the power of the Spirit (Isa 63:11), and these miracles confirmed to Israel that Moses was their head who would lead them out of Egypt (Ex 4:1–9). Moses described his leadership of Israel as bearing the difficult burden that Israel could sometimes be (Num 11:11, 14; cf. 11:17), and this language could also be used to describe judging matters of difficulty that arose among the people (Deut 1:9–18). Just as the Spirit enabled Moses to lead Israel in these matters (Num 11:17), the Spirit was given to the seventy elders so that they would be enabled to do the same (Num 11:17, 25–26). The confirmation of their leadership was not through miracles but prophecy, also a work of the Spirit (Num 11:25–26).

Joshua

The Lord identified Joshua as a man in whom the Spirit resided in response to Moses' prayer for Israel's next leader (Num 27:18). The Spirit's work in Joshua's leadership would enable him to be Israel's shepherd and commander in battle (Num 27:17, 21) by giving him the wisdom to do so (Deut 34:9). When referring to Israel's conquest over Canaan, Isaiah omitted any reference to Joshua and spoke of Israel as being led by the Spirit alone (Isa 63:14).

⁸ For an excellent discussion of the Spirit's work in prophets, see Daniel I. Block, "The View from the Top: The Holy Spirit and the Prophets," in *Presence, Power and Promise: The Role of the Spirit of God in the Old Testament* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2011), 175–207. For an examination of the Spirit's work in Joseph and Daniel as prophets and leaders, see Huffstutler, "A Biblical Theology of the Role of the Spirit in the Leadership of God's People," 167–75.

Four Judges

The Spirit enabled Othniel to lead Israel in battle and effectively conquer her enemies (Judg 3:10). The Spirit not only enabled Gideon to do the same, but to do so in spite of his timid and fearful nature (Judg 6:34; cf. 6:15, 25–26; 7:9–10, 20–21). Jephthah was enabled by the Spirit to lead Israel to conquer her enemies as well (Judg 11:29). Samson was moved by the Spirit to be righteously distressed over Israel's oppression (Judg 13:25), but his sinful choices led him into situations in which only he himself could attack the Philistines (Judg 14:19; 15:14; cf. 14:6). His persistent disobedience eventually forfeited him the enablement of the Spirit (Judg 16:20). Other judges may have been enabled by the Spirit as well (cf. Judg 2:18), but there is no explicit description of the Spirit in their leadership. Most of these judges are not even given a lengthy narrative that would provide the data to make a conclusion one way or the other.

Saul

Saul experienced the Spirit's work in multiple ways. He was enabled by the Spirit to prophesy at the beginning and end of his kingship (1 Sam 10:10; 19:23–24). Like the seventy elders, his prophecy at the beginning of his leadership confirmed that the Spirit would enable him to effectively lead the nation (1 Sam 10:6–7). The Spirit enabled him to lead Israel to victory in battle (1 Sam 11:6–7). Because of his disobedience, Saul lost the Spirit's enablement (1 Sam 16:14). Stated another way, the LORD was no longer with Saul (cf. 1 Sam 18:12).

David

In addition to the Spirit giving David revelation from time to time (2 Sam 23:2; 1 Chr 28:12), the Spirit granted David an ongoing enablement to lead as king when the Spirit departed from Saul (1 Sam 16:13–14; cf. 18:12). Though David committed significant sin and feared the loss of the Spirit like his predecessor Saul, David's repentance and request for the Spirit not to depart allowed his enablement to continue (Ps 51:11).

Kings after David

The Spirit's role is not described as being involved in the leadership of any of the kings after David. A case may be easily made to state that Solomon received his wisdom by the Spirit of God (1 Kgs 3:12; 4:29–34; cf. Deut 34:9; Isa 11:2), but the evidence is not explicit for one to conclude that the kings thereafter were enabled by the Spirit to lead.

The Prophesied King of Isaiah

The prophesied king of Isaiah would be a Davidic descendant whose enablement by the Spirit was like no other ruler before him. The repeated descriptions of his obedience suggest he would perfectly obey the Lord, which would guarantee he would not lose the Spirit's enablement like Samson or Saul of old (Isa 11:2–3). The Lord's placement of the Spirit upon this individual would inaugurate his reign (Isa 42:1) and anoint him as a prophet to proclaim the Lord's favor to the world (Isa 61:1–2a). The Spirit would grant him wisdom and power of such a nature that would allow him to rule the world in perfect righteousness (Isa 11:2–5). Though his rule would be marked by gentleness and peace (Isa 42:2–4), he would proclaim and execute justice against his enemies as well (Isa 11:4; 61:2b–3).

Conclusion

The survey of the passages above allows one to conclude that the OT presents a distinct work of the Spirit in biblical leaders. This work may be more precisely described as the Spirit granting the necessary wisdom to a leader in order for him to lead God's people in carrying out the various purposes of God. This work of the Spirit in leadership was described in various ways: bearing the burden of the people (Num 11:17); shepherding (Num 27:17); leading in battle (Num 27:17, 21; Judg 6:34; 11:29; 13:25; 1 Sam 11:6–7); and exercising authority with wisdom (Deut 34:9). Though David was enabled by the Spirit to lead and seen as a paradigm for kings to follow (1 Sam 16:13; cf. 1 Kgs 3:14), the prophesied king of Isaiah would be enabled by the Spirit to lead like no other. His wisdom and power from the Spirit would enable him to execute justice throughout the world (Isa 11:2–4).

To describe this work further, the work of the Spirit in leadership was given *selectively* in that the OT describes the Spirit being given to some leaders but not to others. When this work of the Spirit was granted to a leader, it was of either a *continuous* (e.g., Moses) or *occasional* (e.g., the four judges) nature. Disobedience could forfeit a leader's enablement by the Spirit (e.g., Saul).

What helps to clarify this study's thesis further is that some leaders experienced multiple works of the Spirit, and though these works were related to the Spirit's work in leadership, these works of the Spirit were distinct from the Spirit's granting of wisdom for the purpose of leadership. The Spirit enabled some to perform miracles (Moses, Joshua), prophesy (the seventy elders, Saul), and speak the revelation of God (David), but these activities were of a more supernatural character than the Spirit's granting of wisdom to leaders for the purpose of leading God's people.

A Survey of the Spirit's Work in Biblical Leaders in the New Testament

Jesus

Jesus was anointed by the Spirit at his baptism (Matt 3:16; Mark 1:10; Luke 3:22; John 1:32–33) and was identified by the Father as the king of Israel (Matt 3:17; cf. Ps 2:7) and the prophesied Servant of Isaiah (Matt 3:17; cf. Isa 42:1). This anointing began a multi-faceted work of the Spirit that characterized Jesus' entire ministry (Matt 12:18; Luke 4:14–15; Acts 10:38). The NT records the work of the Spirit in Jesus' teaching (Luke 4:14–15), performance of miracles (Matt 12:28; cf. Luke 4:14, 36), and granting spiritual and physical deliverance to the oppressed (Luke 4:18–21; cf. Isa 58:6; 61:1–2a). Though Jesus is the Messiah who will execute his enemies and bring about worldwide peace (Isa 11:2–5), his ministry before his death did not include these activities but was of a gentle nature (Matt 12:18). He was a prophet who proclaimed the good news of salvation (Luke 4:18–21; cf. Isa 61:1–2a) and perfectly revealed the Father (John 3:34).

Jesus experienced the work of the Spirit after his resurrection (Acts 1:2) and sent the Spirit upon his followers just as he and others promised he would do (Acts 2:1–3, 17–18, 33; cf. Matt 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; 24:49; John 1:33; 15:26; 16:7; Acts 1:5, 8). He gave revelation to John and others through the Spirit (Rev 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22; cf. John 16:12–15) and continues to grant the work of the Spirit in spiritual gifts to those who confess him as Lord (1 Cor 12:3–5).

The Apostles and Their Delegates

The Spirit gave the apostles the words to speak in defense of the gospel (cf. Mark 13:9–10) when standing before others in the context of persecution, both before (Matt 10:20; cf. 10:5–8) and after (cf. Mark 13:11; see below) the death of Christ. Jesus promised the apostles that he would send the Spirit to empower them, witness with them, and recall and reveal truth after he ascended to heaven (John 14:16–17, 26; 15:26; 16:11, 12–15; cf. 20:22; Acts 1:4–5, 8). That he had sent the Spirit for these purposes was initially confirmed by other works of the Spirit such as fire, wind, and the speaking of tongues (Acts 2:1–4). From that point forward, Jesus’ promises concerning the *Paraclete* began to be fulfilled (Acts 5:32; cf. John 15:26–27).

The Spirit’s work through the apostles involved the miraculous from time to time (Acts 5:4–5, 9–10; 13:9–11), but the descriptions of the Spirit’s work primarily involved the proclamation and defense of the gospel. The Spirit spoke to and through leaders in the church in order to guide them to where they would proclaim the gospel (Acts 10:19; 11:12; 13:2, 4; 16:6–7), and the Spirit was an internal guide along these lines as well (Acts 19:21; Acts 20:22). With reference to the act of proclamation, the Spirit filled Paul after his conversion to boldly preach (Acts 9:17; cf. 9:20), and Apollos’ fervency in preaching came from the Spirit as well (Acts 18:25). Paul identified the Spirit as the empowering source of his preaching (1 Thess 1:5) and noted that the Spirit also bore witness to his listeners to demonstrate the truthfulness of God’s Word (1 Cor 2:4–5). As to the manner of proclamation, the indwelling Spirit in Timothy enabled him to teach with courage, love, and self-control (2 Tim 1:6–7, 14). When being persecuted for proclaiming the gospel, the Spirit granted Peter the words to speak when standing before his opposition (Acts 4:8).

Elders

Just as Joshua was qualified to shepherd Israel because he was “a man in whom is the Spirit” (Num 27:18; cf. 27:17), so also these elders were to shepherd the flock of God because the Spirit had appointed them to do so (Acts 20:28).

Deacons

Deacons are not required to lead the church, but it is helpful to examine them for the work of the Spirit as well. Deacons’ lives were to be characterized by the Spirit’s work in general and specifically in the Spirit’s granting them the necessary wisdom for effectively ministering to the needs of others (Acts 6:3). Stephen and Philip were deacons who experienced this work of the Spirit and additional works of the Spirit as well. The Spirit granted Stephen the words to speak in persecution and a vision before his death (Acts 6:10; 7:55). The Spirit spoke to Philip in guiding him to the Ethiopian (Acts 8:29) and then transported him away (Acts 8:39).

The Spiritual Gift of Leadership

Thus far, this paper has examined the work of the Spirit in specific leaders as it is described in Scripture. This study continues by briefly discussing the nature of spiritual gifts and then examining two key texts that identify what is commonly called *the spiritual gift of leadership*.

Spiritual Gifts in General

Though this study cannot explore the myriad of issues related to spiritual gifts, it is at least necessary to offer and explain a working definition for the term *spiritual gift*. The closest parallel to the English term *spiritual gift* is found in Rom 1:11 (χάρισμα πνευματικόν, *charisma*

pneumatikon), and its meaning is somewhat ambiguous.⁹ What is typically meant by *spiritual gift* stems from terms such as χάρισμα (*charisma*)¹⁰ and πνευματικός (*pneumatikos*)¹¹ and may be defined as some type of Spirit-enabled ministry that a Christian exercises for the benefit of the body of Christ.¹²

Six passages are typically cited as providing incomplete lists of spiritual gifts (Rom 12:6–8; 1 Cor 12:8–10; 12:28; 12:29–30; Eph 4:11; and 1 Pet 4:10–11), and a comprehensive list from these passages yields approximately twenty gifts.¹³ Though using different terminology, both 1 Cor 12:28 and Rom 12:8 identify what is commonly called the spiritual gift of leadership. This gift is examined in the context of each verse below.

First Corinthians 12:28

After demonstrating the need for both unity in the body and a diversity of spiritual gifts (1 Cor 12:12–26; cf. esp. 12:27), Paul closes this matter by stressing again the need for diversity by listing several offices and ministries in the church (1 Cor 12:28–30). One of the ministries identified in 1 Cor 12:28 is “administrating” or “gifts of leadership” (NET Bible).¹⁴

The term translated “gifts of leadership” is the plural form of κυβέρνησις (*kubernēsis*), which, though only used once in the NT, may be understood to include the notion of guidance according to its use in the OT (Prov 1:5; 11:14; 24:6; LXX).¹⁵ The cognate κυβερνήτης (*kubernētēs*) refers to the pilot or helmsman of a ship in both the OT (Prov 23:34; Ezek 27:8, 27, 28 LXX) and NT (Acts 27:11; Rev 18:17), and it may be said that a κυβερνήτης (a helmsman) possesses κυβέρνησις (the ability to guide his vessel on the sea).

In Paul’s day, this nautical term was a commonly used image for leadership in the political arena and likely functioned in 1 Cor 12:28 as a metaphor for polity, implying the role of

⁹ Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 59–60. Moo surveys two options and then tentatively concludes the phrase to mean “an insight or ability, given Paul by the Spirit, that Paul hopes to ‘share’ with the Romans” (p. 60).

¹⁰ The term χάρισμα implies a manifestation of the Spirit that is itself an expression of the grace (χάρις) of God. See *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (BDAG), “χάρις,” 1079–81. “The χάρις of God manifests itself in various χαρίσματα: Ro 12:6; Eph 4:7; 1 Pt 4:10” (p. 1080).

¹¹ The term πνευματικὸν implies the agency of the Spirit (πνεῦμα) in enabling an individual to carry out a specific ministry. The terms χάρισμα and πνευματικὸν overlap in their meaning as they are used interchangeably by Paul (cf. 1 Cor 12:1, 4). See Fee, “Spiritual Gifts,” *Dictionary of Paul’s Letters*, 341 and Robert L. Thomas, *Understanding Spiritual Gifts: A Verse-by-Verse Study of 1 Corinthians 12–14* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1999), 19.

¹² This definition excludes the notion that *people* are spiritual gifts (cf. Eph 4:8, 11), though it may be said that the people who are gifts are spiritually gifted according to their role in the church. The confusing conflation of people and ministries as gifts stems from the use of the English term *gift* as a translation for the terms χάρισμα (typically found in the “gift lists”; cf. Rom 12:6; 1 Cor 12:4, 30; 1 Pet 4:10) and δόμα (refers to people in Eph 4:8; cf. 4:11). For an excellent discussion on this issue, see Kenneth Berding’s article “Confusing Word and Concept in ‘Spiritual Gifts’: Have We Forgotten James Barr’s Exhortations?” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 43 (2000): 37–51, or his longer work *What Are Spiritual Gifts? Rethinking the Conventional View* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2006).

¹³ One of the reasons for a variation in number is whether or not one assumes the people in Eph 4:11 to have a unique gift related to their office (e.g., apostles possessing the gift of “apostleship”). Cf. Berding, *What Are Spiritual Gifts*, 89–90.

¹⁴ Translations offering a plural term (NASB, NET Bible, KJV) reflect the plural use of κυβέρνησις (κυβερνήσεις).

¹⁵ Cf. Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 1021.

an elder in keeping the unity of the church.¹⁶ The spiritual gift of leadership speaks to the leader's ability to avoid the "rocks and shallows" of division within the church¹⁷ or difficulties in general.¹⁸

Though Paul speaks of a spiritual gift and does not specify who possesses this gift, multiple reasons suggest that elders are in view. Assuming Rom 12:8 to refer to the spiritual gift of leadership as well (see below), if Rom 12:8 is understood to refer to elders, the gift as listed in 1 Cor 12:28 could refer to elders as well. Also, the juxtaposition of "helps" next to "gifts of leadership" in 1 Cor 12:28 is parallel in concept to the juxtaposition of "one who leads" next to "acts of mercy" in Rom 12:8. Though Paul does not refer to an office that exercises either of these gifts, it could be that he has elders and deacons in mind, which would be similar to his address to "the overseers and deacons" in Phil 1:1.¹⁹

Based upon the imagery and background of the term *κυβέρνησις* and its juxtaposition next to spiritual gifts that could refer to the ministry of deacons, it is plausible to suggest that Paul has elders in mind as those who are uniquely gifted to govern the body of Christ. At the least, it may be said that those who rightfully govern the body are uniquely gifted by the Spirit to do so.

Romans 12:8

Similar to 1 Corinthians 12, Paul exhorts the Romans concerning the matters of unity among the body and having a diversity of spiritual gifts (Rom 12:4–5) and lists what several of these gifts would be (Rom 12:6–8). In giving this list, Paul not only identifies several gifts, but also the manner or means whereby they should be used. All of the gifts were to be exercised, and for "the one who leads, with zeal" (Rom 12:8).

There does not seem to be any apparent structure to Paul's list of seven gifts in Rom 12:6–8,²⁰ though it is tempting to see the final three gifts as a group in order to conclude that the phrase *ὁ προϊστάμενος ἐν σπουδῇ* (*ho prohistamenos en spoudē*) means "the one who gives aid, with zeal" instead of "the one who leads, with zeal."²¹ The reason it is tempting to do so is that all three gifts would then refer to some type of service to others.²² The first of these three refers to giving, the last to meeting the needs of others, and the gift in between could be understood as giving aid to others.²³ At the same time, Paul's use of *προϊστέμι* (*prohistēmi*) in the phrase *ὁ*

¹⁶ Margeret M. Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation: An Exegetical Investigation of the Language and Composition of 1 Corinthians* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox, 1991), 163–64.

¹⁷ David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 599–600; Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1021.

¹⁸ Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First letter to the Corinthians* (PNCT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 614.

¹⁹ Hermann Wolfgang Beyer, "κυβέρνησις," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 3:1036. Heinrich August Wilhelm Meyer, *Critical and Exegetical Hand-book to the Epistles to the Corinthians* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1884), 295, claims that "most interpreters" (during his time of writing) associate "services of help" with the diaconate and that "most commentators" associate "governments" with elders (he terms them presbyters and bishops). He sees this interpretation as so because their "juxtaposition . . . points to this interpretation."

²⁰ Schreiner, *Romans*, 660.

²¹ James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9–16* (WBC 38; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1988), 735.

²² *Ibid.*, 731. Dunn sees this placement as "almost certainly decisive" for this meaning.

²³ It is possible that *προϊστέμι* could refer to giving someone aid. See BDAG, "προϊστέμι," 870.

προϊστάμενος ἐν σπουδῇ likely accords with its consistent usage elsewhere.²⁴ Paul uses προϊστημι to refer to those who “have charge” over the body (1 Thess 5:12), the overseer who must “manage” his household well (1 Tim 3:4, 5), and the elders who should “rule” well (1 Tim 5:17). Not only do these uses refer to the exercise of leadership, but each of the uses refers to the leadership of an elder. That the leadership should be characterized “with zeal” indicates that this leadership should be carried out eagerly and with diligence,²⁵ a notion similar to Peter’s exhortation to elders to “shepherd . . . eagerly” in 1 Pet 5:2.²⁶

It is reasonable to conclude that Paul has elders in mind when referring to the spiritual gift of leadership in Rom 12:8.²⁷ If this is so, Paul again identifies a spiritual gift that is unique to elders for the purpose of governing the body of Christ. The terminology reflects Paul’s descriptions of elders elsewhere (1 Thess 5:12; 1 Tim 3:4, 5; 5:17), and the manner whereby they serve is similar to Peter’s exhortation to elders in 1 Pet 5:2. As above with 1 Cor 12:28, it may be said at the least that those who rightfully govern the body are gifted by the Spirit to do so.²⁸

Summary

In both 1 Cor 12:28 and Rom 12:8, leadership is identified as a distinct spiritual gift among a range of gifts that the Spirit may grant to a Christian. There is evidence to suggest that Paul had elders in view when referring to this gift, but whether or not this is so, it may at least be said that those who govern God’s people are gifted by the Spirit to do so, which would include those who are elders. The fact that this gift is identified in isolation from others strongly argues that the Spirit’s work in the leadership of a leader is distinct from other works of the Spirit.

Conclusion

The Spirit’s work in the leadership of God’s people is both similar and different from one testament to the next. In the OT, leaders were enabled by the Spirit to effectively lead Israel’s affairs, and in the NT, Jesus was expected to do the same as Israel’s Spirit-anointed king (cf. Matt 3:16–17; cf. Ps 2:7; Isa 42:1). Though Jesus announced himself as this king (cf. Matt 12:28), it was made clear that the Spirit’s work through Jesus’ initial ministry omitted the execution of justice against his enemies (Luke 4:18–21; cf. Isa 61:1–2a) and would be of a gentle nature (Matt 12:18–21; cf. Isa 42:1–4). His initial ministry primarily involved the proclamation of the gospel (Luke 4:14–15, 18–21; cf. Isa 61:1–2a).

After his death and resurrection, Jesus sent the Spirit to his followers to continue the task of proclamation (Acts 2:33) and empowered the witness of the apostles and the church at large (cf. Acts 1:8; 4:31). The Spirit could be described as “the Spirit of Jesus” in that Jesus guided apostles and their delegates through the Spirit on their missionary journeys (Acts 16:6–7). Jesus through the Spirit enabled the ministries of each member of the church (1 Cor 12:4–5) and

²⁴ Despite the fact that he sees a structured list similar to Dunn, John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Romans: God's Good News for the World* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1994), 328, nonetheless opts for this meaning of προϊστημι.

²⁵ Moo, *Romans*, 769; Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 442.

²⁶ The term for “eagerly” is προθύμως (*prothumōs*), which Jobes, *1 Peter*, 305, describes as “. . . a term often used in secular writings to characterize the benefactor of a city who enthusiastically provides time and money for civic duties.”

²⁷ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Romans* (trans. by John Owen; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948), 463.

²⁸ Cf. Colin G. Kruse, *Paul's Letter to the Romans* (PNTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 473. Commentators typically suggest that this gift could refer to elders but could refer to others who lead as well.

revealed truth about himself to the apostles as exemplified in the book of Revelation (Rev 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22; cf. John 16:12–15).

The description of the Spirit's work through the apostles and their delegates clearly shows an emphasis on the proclamation of the gospel as well. The Spirit guided individuals in a variety of ways to lead them to those who needed gospel (Acts 8:39, 39; 10:19; 11:12; 13:2, 4; 16:6–7; 19:21; 20:22). The Spirit also enabled the act of preaching and tempered its manner as well (Acts 9:17, 20; 18:25; 1 Thess 1:5; 2 Tim 1:6–7, 14). In the context of persecution, the Spirit granted defendants of the gospel the words to say to their opponents (Acts 4:8; 6:10).

In all of the above, though the emphasis is not so much on the Spirit's work in leadership as it is in proclamation, the work of the Spirit in leadership had not vanished. Jesus' entire ministry was characterized by the Spirit (Matt 12:18–21; Luke 4:18–21), and he was also distinct in his leadership as the head of the church who sent the Spirit (Acts 2:33), granted spiritual gifts (1 Cor 12:4–5), and spoke the words of the Spirit (cf. Rev 2:7). The apostles discerned the work of the Spirit and thereby governed the early church (Acts 5:4–5, 9–10; 15:28). Similar to Joshua in the OT (Num 27:17–18), elders were appointed by the Spirit to shepherd and guide the flock of God (Acts 20:28). Though deacons are not leaders who exercise authority in the church, they were appointed to their official ministry on the basis of the Spirit's general work in their lives and granting them wisdom for ministry (Acts 6:3).

The identification of leadership as a spiritual gift is perhaps the most convincing argument that there is a distinct work of the Spirit in biblical leaders. Paul identified this gift in 1 Cor 12:28 and Rom 12:8, and it may have been that he was thinking of elders as the ones to exercise this gift. Whether or not elders were in view, elders would necessarily possess this gift, and it is likely that the apostles and their delegates also possessed this gift to govern the early church. Moreover, if the Spirit distinctly gifted leaders to lead in the NT, it could be said that this work of the Spirit is similar to what is described of OT leaders as well.²⁹ The Spirit's work in leadership in the OT was described as the Spirit granting the necessary wisdom to a leader in order for him to lead God's people in carrying out the various purposes of God. In the NT, the Spirit's work in leadership could be described as the Spirit granting the necessary wisdom to a leader in order for him to shepherd God's people in carrying out the task of gospel proclamation. Though the purpose of the Spirit's work in leadership changes from one testament to the next, it may still be said that there is a distinct work of the Spirit in the leadership of biblical leaders.

Some Applications

1. The passages surveyed in this study help to clarify our role as leaders in the present age. Leaders in the OT were enabled by the Spirit to effectively govern Israel's civil and military affairs. Isaiah promised that the Christ would be enabled to do the same in perfection and also that He would proclaim the good news of salvation to all. The Gospels show that the emphasis of the Spirit's work through Jesus was for this proclamation but that His enemies will be put down when He comes again (Luke 4:18–21; cf. Isa 61:1–2a). The book of Acts and NT letters likewise emphasize that the Spirit's work through leaders is for the purpose of proclaiming the gospel. Simple as this may sound, we can learn from this that the Scripture's emphasis on what the Spirit is doing through us as leaders today involves the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ to the lost. Moreover, we as leaders are enabled by the Spirit to lead and effectively govern God's people towards this end.

²⁹ This statement would apply only to leaders who are described as being enabled by the Spirit.

2. The work of the Spirit in granting the necessary wisdom to effectively govern God’s people is similar from one testament to the next. There are many lessons that we as leaders today can learn from these leaders of old (cf. 1 Cor 10:6, 11).³⁰
3. If you are not zealously and eagerly leading, you are not leading as led and gifted by the Spirit of God (Rom 12:8; cf. 1 Pet 5:2). This is not to say that there will be no suffering in ministry, but it is to say that Spirit-led leaders are those who eagerly lead with zeal.
4. The nature and use of the word *kubernesis* in 1 Cor 12:28 implies that trial and fracture are constant threats of the church. The Spirit works through leaders to identify, tend, and resolve these threats according to the Word of God. Such dilemmas are the regular and common task of those who are spiritually gifted to lead. We should not be so optimistic to think that we will have or find a perfect church without these problems until Jesus comes again. Be faithful in your present church until the Lord Himself moves you on. As Paul said to Archippus, “See that you fulfill the ministry that you have received in the Lord” (Col 4:17).
5. When the Spirit of God works through us to heal division and overcome obstacles within the church, unity is achieved, the love of Christ is seen, and it is by this love that we are known as Christ’s disciples (cf. John 13:34–35).
6. If one consistently and unnecessarily creates division within the church and/or has no desire to minister as a leader, it may be that such a one is not gifted to lead. At the worst, such a one destroys the temple of God, and God may destroy this person (1 Cor 3:16–17).
7. For me personally, my zeal comes from several truths: (1) God has saved me; (2) God has called me to shepherd His church; (3) conflict and trials in a church are inevitable; (4) God’s Spirit uniquely works within me to shepherd the church according to God’s Word; (5) I will be rewarded according to how I have faithfully shepherded God’s people. Cf. 2 Tim 1:8–14.

Appendix: A Biblical Portrait of a Spiritual Leader

Numerous passages list requirements for those who lead the people of God (e.g., Deut 17:14–20; 1 Tim 3:1–7; Titus 1:5–9; 1 Pet 5:2–3). As seen above, there is much to be learned from the biblical narratives of leaders as well. The following section is far from complete in that it is limited to what has been said in this study. At the same time, it may at least be said with confidence that each characteristic below is a work of the Spirit that should be true of every leader of God’s people today. These characteristics have been categorized according to the Spirit’s work that should be true of a spiritual leader in his ministry in general, in the exercise of his leadership, and in his role as a teacher.

The Leader’s Ministry in General

In his ministry in general, the leader must be a man of character and gentle and loving with others. He must be focused on the Great Commission as well.

³⁰ Chapter 5 of my dissertation attempts to unearth some of how leaders in the Bible inform and illustrate the role of leaders in the church today. The appendix below is the summary from that chapter.

A Man of Character

A spiritual leader must be a man of character. He is full of the Spirit in that he lives obediently to God's Word in a consistent and obvious manner (1 Tim 3:1–7; Titus 1:5–9; cf. Acts 6:3; 1 Tim 3:8–13). A pattern of disobedience or even a single instance of disobedience of a great degree could keep a man from leadership or necessitate his removal from his role (1 Sam 13:13–14). He delights to fear the Lord (Isa 11:2–3), and this character will affect his role as a teacher (Acts 11:23–24).

Gentle with Others

A spiritual leader is gentle. His manner of interaction with others is pictured as the ability to handle a candle without snuffing its smoldering wick and to not snap a reed that is ready to break (Matt 12:20; cf. Isa 42:3). He firmly upholds God's Word in the midst of opposition (Matt 12:9–14), but he refuses to engage in needless controversy or use his authority to harshly demand his way (Matt 12:15–16; cf. 12:17–21; 1 Tim 3:3).

Loving Toward Others

A spiritual leader shows love to others. He is motivated by love as he uses his spiritual gifts of leadership and teaching for the good of the people of God (1 Cor 12:7; 2 Tim 1:6–7).

Focused on the Great Commission

A spiritual leader is focused on the Great Commission. This commission is to lead and equip God's people in proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ (Acts 1:8; cf. 4:31). For the spiritual leader, he takes his stand in the front line of declaring the gospel and showing an example for others to do the same (Acts 18:25).

The Leader's Exercise of Leadership

In the exercise of his leadership, the leader bears and shares the burdens of others. He is a shepherd who maintains unity and manages God's people with zeal.

A Bearer of Burdens

A spiritual leader bears the burdens of God's people. He makes difficult decisions on a regular basis and continues to do so in the midst of complaint (Num 11:17; cf. Deut 1:9–18). He realizes that his giftedness does not demand that he make these decisions alone (Num 11:14).

A Sharer of Burdens

A spiritual leader shares the burdens of God's people. When faced with overwhelming challenges, he prays to God for help and gladly delegates opportunities to minister (Num 11:14). He realizes that he is not the only means of leading the people of God (Num 11:25–26).

A Shepherd

A spiritual leader is a shepherd. He cares for his sheep as a shepherd would gently and compassionately care for his lambs (Num 27:17; Ps 78:70–72). He shepherds with care and leads his people as a willing and eager example (1 Pet 5:2–3).

Maintains Unity among God's People

A spiritual leader maintains unity among God's people. He is wise to discern when friction and fracture are taking place and carefully tends to relational problems without division taking place (1 Cor 12:28).

Manages God's People with Zeal

A spiritual leader manages God's people with zeal. He is not reluctant to carry out his ministry, and he is not lazy in studying God's Word. He is enthusiastic and excited to lead God's people in carrying out God's will (Rom 12:8; 1 Pet 5:2).

The Leader as a Teacher

A leader must be a passionate teacher who is dependent on the Spirit for results.

Able to Teach

A spiritual leader is able to teach. He is spiritually gifted to effectively communicate God's Word to others (1 Tim 3:2; cf. Rom 12:7). This ability is seen through his regular instruction of God's Word and his refutation of error (Titus 1:9).

Passionate in His Teaching

A spiritual leader is passionate in his teaching. This passion is seen in his fervency when declaring God's Word in general (Acts 18:25) and in his boldness to declare God's Word to the lost (Acts 1:8). When faced with opposition, he exercises self-control and courageously upholds the gospel of Christ (2 Tim 1:6–7, 14).

Dependent upon the Spirit for Results

A spiritual leader is dependent upon the Spirit for results. He faithfully witnesses to the truth and leaves the internal demonstration of this truth to the Spirit (1 Cor 2:4–5). He faithfully explains sin, righteousness, and judgment, and he leaves it to the Spirit to convince (John 16:8–11). He knows that the Spirit is essential to taking God's Word and bringing about a response of obedience to the faith (Acts 5:32).

Suggestions for Further Reading

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Howell, Jr., Don N. *Servants of the Servant: A Biblical Theology of Leadership*. Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 2003.

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Laniak, Timothy S. *Shepherds after My own Heart: Pastoral Traditions and Leadership in the Bible*. NSBT 20; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2006.