

Ephesians 4:11 Answers
Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Pastors, Teachers

Introduction:

Ephesians **4:1-16** is about maintaining unity. In 4:11-16, Paul explains how God equips this one, unified body through supernaturally gifted church leaders. Pentecostals call these the “fivefold ministry” gifts and posit that they are all five still active today.

Teacher’s Note: This lesson may require two sessions.

****** Overview: Why did Christ gift the church with leaders (4:11-16)?** He gave the church leadership gifts **1)** to equip **2)** to build up **3)** for unity **4)** for knowledge **5)** for maturity. These goals will be dealt with in the next lesson.

— **Apostles** —

1. What is/was an apostle (4:11)? See 2:19-21, John 17:18, 2 Corinthians 12:12. Apostle is transliterated from *apostolos*. Roughly, it means missionary. In classical Greek it was used of a naval expedition. It was used of a ship ready for departure. It even referred to a letter or dispatch. In the New Testament it meant ambassador, messenger, or delegate (BAGD, p. 99). In particular it referred to the twelve apostles. The verb form, *apostello*, was used by Jesus in John 17:18 (“sent”).

ESV **John 17:18** As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.

It should be noted that there are two types of apostle evident in the New Testament. The first is what we might call a big “A” Apostle, someone handpicked and personally trained by Jesus to uniquely represent Him (like Peter or Paul).

A big “A” apostle, handpicked by Jesus, could work miracles:

ESV **2 Corinthians 12:12** The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with utmost patience, with signs and wonders and mighty works.

Ephesians 2:20 indicates that the ministry gift of apostle is a foundational ministry. Once the foundation is laid, their ministry is not as necessary.

The second type might be called a small “a” apostle, someone handpicked by the Holy Spirit (like Timothy or Titus). Modern missionaries are small “a” apostles.

The big “A” apostles wrote Scripture and were the norm for doctrine in the early church. As such, it was a foundational ministry. Paul declared himself to be the last big “A” apostle chosen by Jesus. Since New Testament days, missionaries have filled that role in principle. Unlike big “A” apostles, missionaries are sent out by the Holy Spirit, are trained by the church, and only read Scripture (not write it).

Paul made it clear in 1 Corinthians 9 that apostles (and by extension missionaries) are qualified to be supported by God's people.

— Prophets —

2. What is/was a prophet (4:10)? See 2:19-21, Acts 11:27-30, 15:32, 1 Corinthians 13:8, 14:24-25, 29, 31, 1 Thessalonians 5:20-21. "Prophet" is transliterated from *prophétés*; *pro* means before or forth and *phétés* means to speak. In general, prophets are people who get divine revelation and pass it on. They proclaim and interpret divine truth (BAGD, p. 723).

This revelation may concern sin in a person's life (**1Co 14:24-25**), it may be a lengthy word of encouragement (**Acts 15:32**) or it may be a prediction about the future (**Acts 11:27-30**).

ESV **John 4:17-19** The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true." The woman said to him, "Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet.

ESV **Luke 22:63-64** . . .the men who were holding Jesus in custody were mocking him as they beat him. They also blindfolded him and kept asking him, "Prophecy! Who is it that struck you?"

ESV **1 Corinthians 14:24-25** . . . if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or outsider enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all, the secrets of his heart are disclosed, and so, falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you.

ESV **Acts 15:32** . . . Judas and Silas, who were themselves prophets, encouraged and strengthened the brothers with many words.

Insight: Many prophets are people of passion who speak forth words of encouragement, exhortation, motivation and application. They are not Bible teachers and their forte is not exegesis. They are life change agents.

ESV **1 Corinthians 14:31** . . . you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged . . .

ESV **Acts 11:27-28** . . . in these days prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. And one of them named Agabus stood up and foretold by the Spirit that there would be a great famine over all the world (this took place in the days of Claudius).

New Testament prophets seem to have been different from Old Testament prophets. Whereas Old Testament prophets wrote Scripture, it was the apostles who wrote the New Testament (not the prophets). Whereas Old Testament prophets were to be stoned if any prophecy was wrong, a wrong prophecy by a New Testament prophet was to be judged as wrong but he was not killed. In fact, it did not even necessarily mean that he was a false prophet (**1Co 14:29, 1Th 5:20-21**).

ESV **1 Thessalonians 5:20-21** Do not despise prophecies, but test everything; hold fast what is good.

ESV 1 Corinthians 14:29 Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said.

As with an apostle, being gifted as a prophet was a foundational ministry (**Ep 2:19-21**). Before the completion and compilation of the New Testament writings, prophets were especially important in the early church. However, now that the church has been established and the Scriptures completed, their foundational ministry is largely completed. Certainly God may still give special revelation to his people, especially in frontier areas, but as with apostles, the ministry of prophet today may not be what it was in the first century. As with apostles, perhaps there are only small “p” prophets today but no more capital “P” prophets.

ESV 1 Corinthians 13:8 . . . As for prophecies, they will pass away . . .

— Evangelists —

3. What is/was an evangelist (4:11)? See Acts 8, 1 Corinthians 9:14. As with the words apostle and prophet, evangelist is an untranslated word. It is transliterated from *euaggelistés*; *eu* means good (as in eulogy) and *aggelisés* means news. We also get our word evangelism from it.

An evangelist is someone supernaturally gifted by Christ to tell others the good news about Jesus. There is such a thing as the gift of evangelism. Phillip is an example of a New Testament evangelist. Jesus said that those who preach the Gospel should get their living from the Gospel. God's people have an obligation to support evangelists.

ESV 1 Corinthians 9:14 . . . the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel.

An evangelist was not listed as a foundational ministry in **Ephesians 2:19-21** and is still needed today. Even established churches need help reaching people with the Gospel.

A Rose By Any Other Name: Many Baptist churches have on staff a man they call their preacher but who is really an evangelist. Every week in the church service he presents a purely evangelistic message. The church members are encouraged to bring the lost to church each week to hear him proclaim the Gospel.

4. What is the difference in duty between an apostle and an evangelist (4:11)? See 2 Timothy 4:5. These gifts overlap. Though an apostle did the work of an evangelist (**2Ti 4:5**), the apostle also organized churches and taught believers. Evangelists do not necessarily do much beyond evangelism. Like Phillip with the Ethiopian eunuch, they often love 'em and leave 'em; they are hit and run men. Apostles (missionaries) and evangelists need to work in tandem; each needs the other.

— Shepherds —

5. What is/was a church shepherd (4:11)? We finally have a Greek word (*poimén*) here that was not transliterated into English! A literal shepherd takes care of the sheep, guiding, protecting and feeding them. A church leader who is a shepherd is focused on the pastoral aspects of church life (guiding, protecting and feeding). This is what we today commonly think of as a pastor.

6. How is a shepherd (4:11) different from an elder? See Acts 20:17, 28, 1 Timothy 3:1-7, Titus 1:5-7, 1 Peter 5:1-3. Whereas an elder aspires to the ministry (1Ti 3:1), a shepherd seems to be supernaturally gifted for shepherding (4:7-8, 11). Also, whereas serving as elder is a local duty, the ministry gifts of Ephesians 4:11 may be itinerant. Unlike a local elder, a shepherd may serve more than one church (he may serve several churches or a whole city of churches).

Synonyms: Throughout the New Testament, the words elder and overseer (bishop in the KJV) are clearly used interchangeably (**Acts 20:17, 28, Titus 1:5-7 and 1 Peter 5:1-3**). They are synonyms. The noun shepherd (pastor in KJV & NAS) is found only here in Ephesians 4:11. However, in verb form it is used several times to describe the activity of elders. Elders (noun) shepherd (verb) the church. Thus it is not too much of a stretch to say that elders are shepherds (pastors). Generally speaking, in the New Testament elder = overseer (bishop) = shepherd (pastor). That said, here in Ephesians 4:11 Paul seems indicate that there is a special gifting that Christ gives some men to serve as “shepherds”.

Parallel: All elders have to be able to teach, but separate from that some people have the spiritual gift of teaching. Similarly, even though all elders shepherd the church, some men have the spiritual gift of being a shepherd.

— Teachers —

7. What and who should the teacher teach (4:11)? See Romans 12:7, 1 Corinthians 12:28. “Teacher” is from *didaskalos*, basis for “didactic”. In this context, the gifted teacher is to teach God's people about God, using God's Word. He may do this in a local church or at special ministry meetings (as Paul did in the lecture hall of Tyrannus).

The teaching listed here is a spiritual gift.

ESV 1 Corinthians 12:28 . . . God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers . . .

8. What is/was the difference between a teacher and a prophet (4:11)? See Acts 15:32, 1 Corinthians 14:31, 2 Kings 22:14ff, 1 Timothy 2:12. In short, a teacher has to study written revelation ahead of time and a prophet does not since he operates via direct revelation! The teacher is divinely gifted in the presentation of previous revelation (Scripture). The prophet is divinely gifted with a personal revelation given directly to him. Whereas the teacher teaches from Scripture, the prophet receives a revelation directly from God about what to say.

The spontaneity of prophetic revelation is seen in 1 Corinthians 14:29-30.

ESV 1 Corinthians 14:29-30 Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said. If a revelation is made to another sitting there, let the first be silent.

Prophecy in the form of exhortation (**Acts 15:32**) results in learning and encouragement (**1 Corinthians 14:31**), as does teaching. There thus can be overlap between the two gifts, though as with apostle and evangelist they are never-the-less two distinct gifts. Another difference is that whereas women may prophecy to men (**2Ki 22:14ff, Luke 2:36ff**), they are not to teach men (**1Ti 2:12**). Perhaps prophecy is more application and encouragement oriented than is teaching.

— Shepherd-Teachers —

9. What is the difference between a teacher and a shepherd (4:11)? *See 1 Timothy 5:17.* A qualification for elders is the ability to teach. However, “teaching” itself is also a spiritual gift. A person does not have to be an elder to have the gift of teaching. Similarly, an elder has to be able to teach, but not does not have to have the gift of teaching.

The syntax of the Greek here suggests that shepherd and teacher are not two distinct gifts, but only one (the gift of pastor-teacher).

Note: There still remains those gifted as teachers who are not gifted as shepherds. A man gifted as a shepherd-teacher would be sort of a super elder! Perhaps this is the type of person described in **1 Timothy 5:17**.

ESV 1 Timothy 5:17 Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching.

Time Marches On: As foundational ministries, the ministry gifts of big “A” apostle and big “P” prophet waned as the church was established and the Scriptures completed. Increasingly, the ministry gifts of evangelist and shepherd-teacher emerged as the highest level of church leadership (MacArthur, p. 147).

So What?

10. What purpose do church leaders serve (4:11-16)? *(Read the text again).* He gave the church leadership gifts **1)** to equip **2)** to build up **3)** for unity **4)** for knowledge **5)** for maturity.

**** = ask this question before reading the text aloud. This is put people’s minds in gear and them something to look for as the text is read. It causes focus.

Teacher’s note: These lessons are based on the ESV and are designed for 45 minute sessions. If you can hand out or email out each lesson’s questions a week in advance it will encourage people to think about the passage during the week. Coving each question in class will give importance to the questions and give incentive for the class to spend time preparing for the discussion.

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