

Ephesians Series

12. Apportioned Grace Ephesians 4:11-12

We heard this morning about how even though we are one body, we are not all the same. We become more mature because Christ has apportioned grace to give people gifts to prepare God's people for works of service to build up the body of Christ. This is why Paul only mentions five gifts not here and not the more extensive ones you find in I Corinthians 12 and Romans 12.

Here are the lists.

THE SPIRITUAL GIFTS

Rom.12.6-8

Prophecy
Ministry
Teaching
Exhorting
Sharing
Taking the lead
Showing mercy

Eph.4.11

Apostles
Prophets
Evangelists
Pastors and Teachers

I Corinthians

12. 8-10

Word of wisdom
Word of knowledge

Faith
Gifts of healings
Operations of powers
Prophecy
Discernings of spirits
Kinds of tongues
Interpretation of tongues

12.28

Apostles
Prophets
Teachers

Powers
Gifts of cures
Helps
Governing
Kinds of tongues

12.29-30

Apostles
Prophets
Teachers
Powers
Gifts of cures
Tongues
Interpretation

As you can see, they are different in each letter but there are obvious some commonalities. They were not written as textbooks but by letter designed to deal with problems the church was facing. In all cases the lists are neither exhaustive or systematic. Paul always writes with the assumption that they know what he was talking about - even if we don't. That's important because we need to read carefully if we are to assess the relative importance of the various gifts. This is exactly what Paul does in 1 Corinthians 14 where he compares the relative merits of prophecy and tongues.

Some people would say that the gifts in Ephesians 4 are all leadership gifts. In one sense they are but we see that apart from leadership being a gift in Romans 12, there were designations of leaders in the New Testament, for example the description of Overseers/Bishops and Deacons in 1 Timothy. These were offices. But in Ephesians, these

are people that by the grace given as Christ apportioned it have been raised up with the gifts to perform a function - and that role is to take God's people into maturity.

They are all chosen according to grace, not ability or any form of merit.

What can we say about them?

- ⇒ they are all gifts involving the revealing of God's will to men
- ⇒ they all need to be present if the people of God are to be prepared properly for service and will mature
- ⇒ those with the gift will be recognised and so will the authority of their words.

So who are they and what do they do?

Let me give you a little history lesson. As you know the NT was written entirely in Greek - a common form of Greek known as *koine*, which was spoken by a large part of people in the Mediterranean. As Christianity spread, so did a variety of Christian practices and doctrine based on people's interpretation of the scriptures and unfortunately by the integration of Christian ideas in many places.

If you have ever read 2nd, 3rd and 4th century writings you would know about the battles that raged between great writers like Clement of Alexandria, Irenaeus, Tertullian or Augustine and various sects and opinions that had started to develop.

One of the major problems was language. Although folk in the Eastern Mediterranean spoke *koine* Greek and understood the NT well, Romans were Latin speakers and it was amongst these that problems arose. With the coming of Emperor Constantine and the church being made "official", the Greek NT was translated into Latin by a scholar named Jerome. This was because as he translated, many of the words did not fit what they were doing or the situation at the time. His translation reflected a practice that was already occurring - to not translate the word but turn it into a theological term which concealed the true meaning and "legitimised" what they were doing.

For example, the Greek word baptizo means to immerse or submerge (dunk). But baptism at that point was often done by effusion. Oh dear! That isn't what the Greek says. So why don't we *transliterate* the word instead of translating it? So that's what they did. And a whole new mystique developed around the word baptise!.

The same is true of Apostle, Prophet, Evangelist and Pastor. They are all transliterations because by the Christianity was in the Latin-spoken world, practices and theologies had come about that gave these words a life and meaning of their own which perhaps isn't what Paul intended them to be when first wrote to the Ephesians. They meant simple things and we added the mystique and mystery and different meanings by not translating them. And the thing has perpetuated right through to the present day.

As we deal with these words, I think we must make a distinction between gift and office. A gift is something we are given so as we may function in the body of Christ. This is distinct from offices such as Elder, or Overseer or Deacon which are specific leadership roles or offices in the church. This leads to confusion, not less with Ephesians 4:11-12. But look at the wording.

11 It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers. They are gifts to perform a function - to bring people to maturity. The problem is that over the years we have created offices out of designations which muddies the waters - most of all the designation Pastor. The problem is as we shall see, that these gifts perform functions that are leadership attributes.

But in Ephesians 4 these five gifts are just that: something that is given to prepare God's people for service and present them mature in Christ. They are function. However, as we saw this morning, these gifts, because they involve the presentation of God's will to us, we should accept the authority of what is said.

So let's look at them in detail.

APOSTLES

This is one aspect on which I may shed more heat than light. This is one of the most confused words in the NT. What is an apostle? Let's translate it. Messenger. An apostle in a Christian context is a messenger of God. So we have messengers. Who are they?

The traditional way of looking at this has been to say that the Twelve, plus Paul were the Apostles. And that's it. That is what they are described as in Acts and that's it. So we have been given the gift of their heritage - the New Testament. The gift of apostolic ministry died in the 1st Century.

Let's look at the evidence.

Matt 10:2 These are the names of the twelve apostles : first, Simon (who is called Peter) and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; 3 Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; 4 Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

Mark 3:14 He appointed twelve--designating them apostles --that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach 15 and to have authority to drive out demons

There are a large number of descriptions of the Twelve as apostles in both the Gospels and Acts. There is no doubt but they had both the description of The Apostles: THE Messengers. A description and a designation without doubt. A special role and function given by Christ. And in 1 Cor 9:1 (Am I not free? Am I not an apostle?) we see Paul claiming the same authority as them. So far so good. You'll not find much argument about any of this.

But what about this?

*Acts 14:3 So Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time there, speaking boldly for the Lord, who confirmed the message of his grace by enabling them to do miraculous signs and wonders. 4 The people of the city were divided; some sided with the Jews, others with the **apostles** .*

*Or verse 14 But when the **apostles** Barnabas and Paul heard of this, they tore their clothes and rushed out into the crowd, shouting*

Just a minute. We know that Paul was an apostle - but Baranabas?

*It gets worse - Romans 16: 7 Greet Andronicus and Junias, my relatives (brothers) who have been in prison with me. They are outstanding among the **apostles** , and they were in Christ before I was.*

*Or what about 1The 1:1 Paul, Silas and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Go to 2:6 As **apostles** of Christ we could have been a burden to you, 7 but we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children*

And there were no lack of people going around claiming to be apostles in Paul's time but weren't - see 2 Corinthians 10.

So what may we conclude. First of all we have the Twelve - THE Messengers. There is no question about their authority and the respect in which they were held in the early Church. That is clear from Acts and Paul's letters. But as well as being THE messengers, there were messengers. It was a gift, a calling, a function in the early Church. That's why Paul uses the term extensively in 1 Corinthians and here. Why? Because even though there were THE Messengers, those involved in his ministry were also Messengers. It was a gift of God, a function that built up the body of Christ. So Paul refers to messengers generally rather than the 12 specifically . I don't know whether you agree or not. That seems to be the way that the Scripture is suggesting the situation was.

And what did the Messengers Paul refers to do. They were itinerant. They planted churches, they taught them, they set up structures, they founded ministry, they arranged oversight, they kept in touch, they sorted disputes, they did return visits and the churches looked to them as people who gave authoritative words. They associated with them although Paul didn't like them to do that. There was no formal office, but people accepted by what people like Paul or Barnabas as God's men of authority. They spoke and acted with an authority which was recognised as transcending individual churches.

The messengers were therefore very influential. They brought God's word to people but they were more than evangelists, church planters, teachers, leaders etc. They were about everything bound up into one.

So what happened? By the time Christianity was in the Roman world, particularly with the official recognition of the Church in the 4th century, the structures were such that this wasn't recognised and the traditional view came to the fore. I don't have time to go into this here, but Episcopal structures, or for that matter Congregational ones, do not fit apostolic ministry well.

So if there is a gift of messengership (apostleship), are there things like apostles today? Some Christian groups say yes and appoint Apostles. The early Baptists actually recognised Messengers and their role was apostolic. But remember, apart from the Twelve it seems to have been a recognised function rather than an office. If we are looking for people with a ministry of church planting, or church building, that ministers in an area rather than a church and whose teaching is recognised in that context then perhaps they do whether we recognise them as messengers/apostles or not. Think of people that may exercise an apostolic ministry in this country. If apostolic ministry is needed, the Spirit will raise up people to do it and if my definition of apostolic ministry is correct, the apostolic gift exists and is operated whether churches recognise it or not.

PROPHETS

Prophets. The word is much the same in Greek and Latin and now English. So what does it mean?

in Greek writings, an interpreter of oracles or of other hidden things

Somebody to whom God reveals things to be shared to others of God's people. Often it was a case of predicting the future and we have some great prophecies in scripture. Otherwise it was mostly forth-telling God's word - warnings, blessings. And sometimes the prophet's word was not accepted such as Isaiah or Jeremiah.

The traditional view as with Apostles is that the gift died with the first century. Eph 2:20 - the church was built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets. It was because there was no NT so it needed these people. Once we had the Bible they were needed no more as the revelation of God was complete. True in terms of the written word. But the New Testament is not law and the Bible can't cover every eventually. And besides don't we all have a relationship with the living God? Does God speak to His people by His Spirit through people gifted as prophets. Many Christians say yes, many say no.

It isn't hard to find preachers like AW Tozer whose writings were strongly prophetic. The New Testament gift of prophecy (1 Corinthians 12:10, 28) was not to predict but to tell forth what God has to say and to proclaim God's truth for the present age.

You'll find no lack of people today who claim prophetic gift. Rather than influence you with my opinion, I prefer to default to scripture and ask you to consider the two tests for a true prophet in scripture.

Two tests.

1. *Deut 18: 21 You may say to yourselves, "How can we know when a message has not been spoken by the LORD?" 22 If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the LORD does not take place or come true, that is a message the LORD has not spoken.*
2. *Deut 13:1 If a prophet, or one who foretells by dreams, appears among you and announces to you a miraculous sign or wonder, 2 and if the sign or wonder of which he has spoken takes place, and he says, "Let us follow other gods" (gods you have not known) "and let us worship them," 3 you must not listen to the words of that prophet or dreamer. The LORD your God is testing you to find out whether you love him with all your heart and with all your soul. 4 It is the LORD your God you must follow, and him you must revere. Keep his commands and obey him; serve him and hold fast to him.*

Whenever we come across these things, let's use scripture to test the truth of what people say. I have personally experienced situations where people claiming the gift of prophecy have correctly made a specific comment that has proved to be true. Test and see for yourself. I've found plenty of people that I believe speak words in the Spirit - and even more who utter things in the flesh!

EVANGELISTS

- 1) a bringer of good tidings, an evangelist
- 2) the name given to the NT heralds of salvation through Christ who are not apostles

An evangelist - someone who brings the good news. No problems with this one I think and I haven't a clue why it ever got transliterated.

Notice the importance of the evangelist above the pastor and teacher. I don't think that is any coincidence. Because the greatest message God wants to give isn't to us comfortable Christians in our historic church buildings but to a lost world. What a pity we don't give it the same importance.

But let's look a little more carefully at the role the evangelist plays in this passage. He prepares God's people for service. How might he do this? To encourage us all to be witnesses. We aren't all evangelists but we're all witnesses. But it also links conversion and maturity. These folks are gifted to make us mature. The gospel isn't just about salvation, because salvation is to an end - maturity in Christ. The work of salvation is not a one time thing but a continuous thing until we are presented together as the bride of Christ. We were saved, we're being saved, we shall be saved. Our salvation doesn't end until we're in glory - and mature!

PASTORS

Here's another one where office and function has been mixed throughout the years. We call our leaders Pastor a Shepherd - another transliterated word. But here pastor is a function and not an office. However in Acts 20:27 Paul sees the function of the Ephesian elders as being that of shepherd.

For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God. 28 Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.

So here it's function but it can also be a leadership role. In one sense all five of these gifts may be exercised by leaders and usually are, but not necessarily so. Prophets in the NT in particular are often not portrayed as leaders but people are led by their words.

What does a shepherd - that's the word - Shepherd - what does a shepherd do? Cares for the sheep. He cares for their health and welfare. Why so they will be healthy and will grow properly and not go astray.

A shepherd leads from the front and the sheep follow. That's the function of the Pastor - the Shepherd - he leads, the people follow. We often emphasise the caring aspect of a Pastor - someone to look after us, but a Pastor primarily leads - and what is he supposed to lead us to - *prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up 13 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ*

TEACHERS

The last one is the least controversial - a teacher teaches - expounds God's word and we follow it. We are all people that need to be taught. Because we are disciples - learners. We are meant to learn and we have teachers.



So there we are; the five gifts to prepare us for service in Ephesians. You may not agree with me for at least two of them. Fine - mine is a minority view. All I ask is you search the scriptures yourself and be open to what the Lord is speaking to you. There is a lot of history in the things we believe and not necessarily good history.

But you should have no problem with the rest. The issue then is: OK here are these people and they are presenting God's word and God's will to us. Whether you recognise apostles and prophets or not, God has raised up people - evangelists, pastors, teachers - and all for the intention to prepare you for works of service, to build up the body, to reach unity in the faith, to become mature.

The question isn't whether you dispute my theology or not on apostles and prophets - it's whether you are prepared to listen to the voice of God, to be prepared to witness, to be prepared to be led and to be prepared to learn. If so then we'll all head towards maturity in Christ. If not then we're going nowhere in 2003.