

## “Called to Be a Gift”

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*“And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.”  
(Eph. 4:11–12 ESV)*

What a joy that our Lord gives such gifts to mankind! In his epistle to the Ephesians, Paul extols these gifts for the sake of the unity and preservation of the church of God. Let’s take a closer look and a deep dive into each of these gifts in the immediate context of Paul’s letter. We’ll see how our risen and ascended Lord Jesus Christ gives the one Office of the Holy Ministry for the perfection, service and building up of the church on earth. Perhaps you’ll also find that He even calls you into the joyous work offered in these gifts.

### I. General Context of the Ephesians

A. Read Acts 20:17–38 (especially 20:28–32).

1. This sermon of Paul to the elders (pastors) of Ephesus suggests that the Ephesians suffered from a crisis in the pastoral office. It appears that some pastors needed to be removed from office and others were given to fill the positions for the sake of the church. Shortly after this meeting with the elders, Paul wrote his first letter to Timothy, who served as bishop (overseer) of the Ephesian churches. This background helps us to understand the pastoral guidance given in Ephesians 4.

### II. Initial Context (Eph. 4:1–10)

A. Read Eph. 4:1–6.

1. The word for “urge” (ESV) or “beseech” (KJV) is best translated “encourage.” It’s the Greek word that gives us paraclete (helper, comforter, advocate, intercessor), a title of the Holy Spirit (John 14:16, 26) and our Lord Jesus (1 John 2:1). Rather than an exhortation toward moral living, Paul seeks to comfort the Ephesian pastors and encourage them in the pastoral vocation to which they’ve been called.
  - i. As the church, how can we continue to encourage our pastors today?
  - ii. How can we encourage those who desire and/or should be encouraged to enter the Office of the Holy Ministry?

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2. Paul refers to the “calling” or “vocation” to which these men were called.
    - i. What is a calling or vocation?
    - ii. Which vocations are you called to?
    - iii. How does God use the vocation of pastor to serve the church?
  3. Look at the manner in which these pastors are to walk according to their vocation.
    - i. How does Paul describe the manner in which these pastors are to walk according to their vocation?
    - ii. Why might this be vital to the unity and preservation of the church?
    - iii. What are the opposites of these characteristics and how might they harm the church?
      - a. *“With all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:1–3 ESV).*
  4. Notice the Creed-like confession in verses 4–6.
    - i. Why does Paul order it backwards? (Spirit–Lord–Father, rather than Father–Son–Spirit)
      - a. This is the way we experience the Holy Trinity. We first meet the Spirit through the Word and Sacraments delivered by pastors. These bind us together by faith into the Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. In Christ, we then behold the glory of the Father, “who is over all and through all and in all.”
  5. Notice what Paul is doing as he repeats certain words.
    - i. Which word gets repeated in these verses? How many times? What might this mean?
      - a. “One” is repeated seven times. This accomplishes two things: First, it shows the unity of God and His work in contrast to the disunity brought about through false preachers and teachers (Deut. 6:4). Second, seven is a divine number, the number of completion (consider Creation). This suggests that all of God’s works (and gifts) are *His* works and gifts, not our own.
- B. Read Eph. 4:7–10.
1. Paul says that “grace was given” (4:7) and “When he ascended ... he gave gifts to men” (4:8).
    - i. Who gave these gifts?
    - ii. When did He give them?
    - iii. What does the ascension of Jesus have to do with pastors?
  2. Read Ps. 68:18.
    - i. Do you notice any difference between the Psalm and the way Paul cites it?
    - ii. Why might this be?
    - iii. Could Paul be quoting this Psalm according to its fulfillment in the ascension of Jesus?
      - a. In the Psalm it says, “And *receiving* gifts among men.” But in Ephesians it says, “You *gave* gifts to men.”
      - b. Paul brings both receiving and giving together here, echoing Matt. 28:16–20.

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### III. The Gifts He Gives (Eph. 4:11)

A. Paul lists five distinct offices within the Office of the Holy Ministry, which Christ *gave* to and for the church. These are all foundational callings within the ministry for the sake of the church's beginning and sustaining.

1. What are they?
2. Who are the apostles? Read Matt. 10:1–7; Mark 3:14; Luke 11:49; Acts 1:2, 6–26, 2:42–43, 14:14; 1 Cor. 4:9, 12:28; Eph. 2:20, 3:5; Heb. 3:1.
  - i. Who do the Scriptures count among the apostles?
  - ii. What is required of an apostle?
  - iii. What do apostles do?

*The apostles number 12 and sometimes 13 (Paul) and sometimes a couple others more loosely. There are specific qualifications, and it appears to be a one-time, unrepeatable office. Apostle literally means “sent one.”*

3. Who are the prophets? Read Luke 1:76; Matt. 11:9; Mark 11:32; Luke 7:16; Matt. 21:11; Acts 11:27–28; Acts 13:1; 1 Cor. 12:28–29; 1 Cor. 14:29–32, 37; Rev. 22:6; Acts 11:27–28, 21:10; Acts 15:32; Eph. 2:20, 3:5; Matt. 1:22; Matt. 5:17; Luke 24:27; Rev. 18:20–24.
  - i. Who does the New Testament count among the prophets?
  - ii. What do the New Testament prophets do?

*The Old Testament is chock-full of prophets who are always proclaiming what they see and hear in the divine council, revealed by the will of God (Jer. 23:18–22). This office seems to come to an end with John the Baptist, the last of the prophets of old. The New Testament office seems to be a uniquely predictive office, warning the church in its first days and years. Like the apostles, this office tapers off and ceases after the founding of the church.*

4. Who are the evangelists? Read Acts 21:8; 2 Tim. 4:5.
  - i. Who is listed as an evangelist in Scripture?
  - ii. What does an evangelist do?

*It's not until the third century with Hippolytus and Tertullian that we see “evangelist” applied to the four Gospel writers. In the New Testament it seems to be a unique preaching and missionary office — someone charged with preaching the “evangel” (Gospel). This office seems to be fading in the New Testament, giving way to what follows.*

5. Who are the shepherds/pastors? Read Matt. 26:31; John 10:11, 14; Heb. 13:20; 1 Peter 2:25.
  - i. Who is a shepherd in the New Testament?
  - ii. What does a shepherd do?

*Shepherd is a very common metaphor in the Old Testament for king and thus for God (Psalm 23). Of course, there are also real shepherds in both testaments. The New Testament office of shepherd, from which we get “pastor,” is rarely tied to specific individuals other than our Lord. Yet the pastors are commanded “to shepherd the flock of God” (1 Peter 5:2).*

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6. Who are the teachers? Read John 1:38; Matt. 8:19, 22:16; Mark 10:17; John 3:2, 13:13–14; Matt. 10:24–25; Matt. 23:8; Luke 2:46; 2 Tim. 4:3; John 3:10; 1 Tim. 2:7; 2 Tim. 1:11; James 3:1.
    - i. Who is called teacher in the New Testament?
    - ii. What do New Testament teachers teach?

*Some translations appear to combine shepherds and teachers. However, these are two separate offices in the early church. Teachers play a vital role in the profession of the faith and as guardians of the doctrine handed down.*

- B. Which of the five offices above does Jesus fill and fulfill?

#### IV. The Purpose of the Gifts (Eph. 4:12)

- A. Paul lists three purposes for the gift of these pastors:
  1. For bringing the saints to completion;
  2. For the work of the ministry; and
  3. For building up the body of Christ.
- B. What does it mean for the saints (Christians/baptized) to be brought to completion? What means does a pastor have to accomplish this? When will this completion be?
- C. What is the work of the ministry (*diakonia*)? How do pastors care for the human needs of the church? What works of mercy are done in your church?
- D. How is the body of Christ built up by pastors? How does He build them up spiritually and faithfully?

#### V. Where Are You in All This?

- A. The Lord does not create pastors out of thin air. He raises them up from within congregations and families. These men need our prayers and our encouragement as they consider whether this is what the Lord has for them to do.
- B. Every man should prayerfully consider whether the Lord is calling him into a life of service as a pastor. This begins with the inward call or the desire to serve in this capacity. Following the decision to attend the seminary, and the study and preparation through the seminary, the Lord confirms that desire to serve with the outward call to a congregation.
- C. Pray for these men as they prayerfully consider this vocation. Encourage those in your congregation and even in your own family who should consider studying at the seminary and someday receiving a call to be a pastor in a congregation. As our Lord said to His disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest” (Matt. 9:37–38 ESV).

Eph. 4:11–12 is so rich in pastoral theology. Much more can be and has been said. For more, please see Dr. Thomas Winger’s magnificent commentary on Ephesians in the *Concordia Commentary Series* (Concordia Publishing House, 2015). In the meantime, continue to rejoice in the gifts that our ascended Lord gives. Rejoice in your pastor. And consider whether the Lord may be calling you into this gift of service to the church.