

The Five-Fold Ministry (Ephesians 4:11)

Introduction: A Misunderstood Verse

Today I want to speak on one verse, Ephesians 4:11. This is a verse that I believe a lot of people are using in a wrong manner. There are many leaders calling themselves apostles and prophets, for instance in the New Apostolic Reformation, and I want to show that this scripture is describing the way in which Christians are built up through the ministry of the word, it does not refer to offices in the church.

"And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers." -- Ephesians 4:11

The first thing I want to mention is this: we do not find anywhere in scripture where it gives the necessary characteristics of an apostle, or the characteristics of a prophet, or an evangelist, or a pastor, or a teacher. It doesn't say that a pastor must be this and this, or that a teacher must be this and this. It does not say any of those things.

Church Leadership in Scripture

But when we look at 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 2, we see that churches are led by **overseers (episkopos) and deacons (diakonos)**, and then there are **elders (presbuteros)**. There are very strict requirements for those who desire to hold these positions in the local church. The overseers must be men of excellent character, who are able to teach the scriptures. Then there are deacons who serve, and they also must be of excellent character. And then there are elders in the church -- both men and women -- the women too must be able to teach the younger women, and their character is to be exemplary, they are to be an example to others.

We have a clear definition of the character of an overseer, of deacons, and of elders in the church. But we don't have anything like that concerning Ephesians 4:11. The reason is that these are ministries and not offices. Those who minister the word are to be of exemplary character, overseers, deacons, and elders, but the ministry of the word has different functions, for instance evangelistic, pastoral or expository bible teaching.

It is wrong for leaders to use Ephesians 4:11 in order to gain honour through titles. Jesus forbade the use of titles by His disciples. *Matthew 23:8-11* "But be not called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ; and all of you are brethren. And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven. Neither be called masters: for one is your Master, even Christ. But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant."

Paul never referred to himself as the Apostle Paul, he wrote "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ." It was not a title. The word apostle means one who is sent. Paul had received his

commission from the Lord Jesus Christ on the Damascus Road. The other apostles had been with Jesus during his earthly ministry.

1 Corinthians 9:1-2 "Am I not an apostle? am I not free? have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? are not ye my work in the Lord? If I be not an apostle unto others, yet doubtless I am to you: for the seal of mine apostleship are ye in the Lord."

The Apostolic Ministry: Doctrine, Not Government

When it comes to the apostles in the early church, we see in Acts 2:42 the believers gave themselves continually to **the apostles' doctrine**. The apostles were teaching doctrine, and God confirmed His word with mighty signs and wonders. In fact, the apostles were still discovering doctrine. It was a process. They preached Christ crucified, risen and ascended, but they didn't understand the extent of the gospel. We see this in Acts 10, where Peter is given a vision of animals which were regarded as unclean by the Jews, and he is told to kill and eat. The vision is given three times. Peter is told "Don't call that unclean which I have cleansed." A Jew would not enter into Cornelius' house, but because of the vision, Peter understands that he must obey the Lord. After Peter preached, he and those with him are shocked because he sees that the same Holy Spirit that came upon them on the Day of Pentecost now comes upon these Gentile believers. Suddenly they see that the gospel is not just to Jews and proselytes, but also to the Gentiles.

Then comes the question: What is the message to these Gentiles? Do they have to keep the law? There were people saying they must be circumcised. The apostles met together in Jerusalem to make a definite statement on what is required of the Gentile believers. Paul goes with Barnabas and they have a church council, Acts 15. That council was not concerning the government of the church; **it was concerning the doctrine of the church**. This is why God did special miracles, that were not repeated again, because the Holy Spirit was confirming the apostles' doctrine.

The apostles' primary objective was doctrine and teaching, not the government of the church. They planted churches, but then they would appoint overseers within that church who would govern it. It was the duty of overseers and deacons to take care of the church.

Paul's Revelation and the One Gospel

In Galatians 1:11-12, Paul writes that he didn't receive his gospel from man. It wasn't something that was taught to him by others. He said he received this by direct revelation. Paul preached a gospel that stood in contrast to the legalism of the Judaism. Paul preached the wonderful doctrine of **justification by faith in Christ alone**, and he condemned anyone who preached a different gospel. He writes that if anyone comes, even if it is an angel from heaven, and preaches a different gospel, let that person be

anathema, let them be damned. There is only one gospel, and that is the gospel of justification by faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ alone. The primary purpose of the miracles that took place when Paul preached was to confirm the gospel he preached.

2 Corinthians 12:12 "Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds."

Paul is preaching this wonderful new doctrine: Christ in us, the hope of glory. Christ living in us.

Colossians 1:27 "To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory:"

Galatians 2:20 "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless, I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me."

Timothy: An Apostolic Ministry

Timothy, a young man, travelled with Paul and Silas. Paul's letter to the Thessalonians refers to Timothy along with Paul and Silas as the apostles of Christ. **Timothy had not seen the Lord Jesus Christ; there is no record of signs and wonders taking place under Timothy's ministry.**

1 Thessalonians 1:1 "Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians which is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ."

*1 Thessalonian 2:6, "Nor of men sought we glory, neither of you, nor yet of others, when we might have been burdensome, as **the apostles of Christ.**"*

Timothy had **the ministry of an apostle** because it had been passed down to him. He could preach apostolic doctrine. Timothy was classed with the apostles because he was able to speak as an apostle. He had learnt from Paul. He was not sent directly by the Lord Jesus Christ, but by Paul. He told Timothy, *1 Timothy 4:12-16, "Let no man despise your youth; but be an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity. Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. Neglect not the gift that is in you, which was given you by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery. Meditate upon these things; give yourself wholly to them; that your profiting may appear to all. Take heed unto yourself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this you shall both save yourself, and them that hear you."*

The gift Timothy had was the ministry of the word. The prophetic word was the apostle's doctrine. The laying on of hands meant the elders in the church recognised Timothy's

ministry. It is all about preaching the word. *2 Timothy 4:2* "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine."

A Warning About False Apostles

Identifying a false apostle.

1. They place emphasis upon miracles, prophetic words and the power to impart spiritual gifts.
2. They use titles to elevate themselves.
3. They present the scriptures in a way that is beneficial to themselves.
4. They seek to gain followers to themselves.
5. They do not accept any form of dissension or criticism.

They regard leadership in the church as hierarchical and they are at the top. They associate an apostle with one who governs churches, and through whom the gifts of the Holy Spirit operate. They claim to have performed miracles including raising the dead, which can never be verified. They claim to have been commissioned by the Lord Jesus Christ, and have the same authority, and power as the apostles of the early church. Many claim to have personally seen the Lord Jesus Christ through visions, dreams or even through a direct encounter with Jesus, and this qualifies them to be apostles. They make bold claims of miracles as a sign of their apostleship.

Paul warns us about false apostles within the church. Those who follow false apostles will be taught to never say anything critical about anyone in leadership -- but that isn't what the Bible says. The Bible says that we are to judge according to the scriptures. We are to watch, and we are to be careful, because there are false apostles and false prophets and false teachers that Satan uses to lead the church in the wrong direction.

2 Corinthians 11:13-15 "For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore, it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works."

The Ministry of a Prophet: Proclaiming, not Directing

When it comes to prophets in the New Testament, **the prophet informed; he did not direct.**

There was Agabus (Acts 11:28), and Agabus said there would be a famine, but he didn't tell them what to do. They decided that themselves. The Jerusalem Christians would need help, so they went and took supplies to the church there because they knew through this prophetic word that there would be a famine.

It was the same when Paul was going to Jerusalem (Acts 21:10-11). Agabus comes and takes Paul's belt and binds his hands and feet and says, "This is what's going to be done

to the man whose belt this is." That was the word. Then others said, "Paul, don't go." And Paul says, "Why do you weep and try to break my heart? I'm ready not just to go but also to die." The Holy Spirit was telling Paul what was going to happen -- not telling him what he should do. Paul could work that out for himself.

In the book of Numbers, chapter 11:25-29, we have this wonderful story of when the Holy Spirit comes upon seventy elders and they prophesy. Two of them are among the people, prophesying among them. A young man runs and tells Joshua, and Joshua is all upset because he thinks this is an attack on Moses's leadership. But Moses says, "Are you concerned about me? Oh, that all of God's people were prophets, and that the Lord would pour out His Spirit upon them!"

What kind of prophets were they? They were **proclaiming the word of the Lord** -- talking about the goodness of God, the wonder of God, the nature and character of God, how great God is, and the wondrous things He had done and was doing. A prophet is a person who proclaims the word of God as found in scripture, an inspired preacher. The preaching is for edification, exhortation, and comfort (1 Corinthians 14:3).

Acts 15:32 "And Judas and Silas, being prophets also themselves, exhorted the brethren with many words, and confirmed *them*." Judas and Silas exhorted the brethren.

Evangelists, Pastors, and Teachers: Ministries, Not Titles

Paul said to Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:5, "Do the work of an evangelist." Did that mean Timothy could go and make a newsletter and put "Evangelist Timothy" on it? No! It's a ministry within the body of Christ. He was to preach the word -- be instant in season and out of season. Preach when people want to hear; preach when they don't want to hear. Preach heaven but also preach hell. Preach life, but also preach judgment. Preach the whole word of God -- not just a fanciful, ear-tickling message. **Do the work of an evangelist; fulfil your ministry.**

We do call Philip "the Evangelist" when he preached in Samaria, Acts 8:5, and later when Paul sees him. But I think that's not a title -- they're saying, "You remember, earlier on he was the one that evangelized in Samaria, the one that went and spoke to the Ethiopian eunuch." That's Philip the Evangelist -- it's not a title you put before his name and blow him up as some great man of God. He was a man who loved Jesus, the same as all of us, and he was a man who fulfilled his ministry.

Regarding pastors, I don't see anywhere in scripture where it says a pastor is a person who leads the church. Churches are led by overseers and deacons -- you can read about it in 1 Timothy chapter 3. But the ministry of pastors was fulfilled within the office of overseers.

We see this when Paul is on his way to Jerusalem and stops at Miletus. The overseers from the church in Ephesus come and meet with Paul:

"Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock." -- Acts 20:28-29

Paul tells them to guard themselves and guard the flock -- and to **feed them**. Feed them with what? Feed them with the word of God. That's pastoral ministry: guarding and feeding. They were pastors, but they were overseers in the church. The pastoral ministry was happening within the office of the overseer.

And with teachers as well -- Paul says to Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:2, "Go and teach faithful men who will be able to teach others also." Not men that someone's come along and said have some special anointing. Paul was telling Timothy he should teach **faithful men**; men of good character, who were faithful, full of faith, full of love -- who would be able to teach others the scriptures. They became teachers. But do you give them all titles? No! They were simply fulfilling the ministry of teaching within the body of Christ.

The foundation of the apostles and prophets

The foundation upon which stand is the apostles doctrine as found in the New Testament, and the writings of the prophets as found in the Old Testament. Jesus Christ is the chief corner stone. The prophets prophesied until John the Baptist, Matthew 11:13. The apostles were eyewitnesses of the risen Lord. The scripture is the apostles doctrine. It is complete, there is no further revelation.

Ephesians 2:19-20 "Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone;"

There are many who claim to be modern day apostles and prophets.

Recognising a false prophet

A false prophet will

1. ...claim divine revelation to give personal prophecies.
2. ...give directive prophecy which is not found in the New Testament.
3. ...seek to gain followers by claims of revelation knowledge.
4. ...seek personal gain by claiming to be anointed of God.
5. ...use scriptures out of context to confirm their message.
6. ...elevate themselves.

Conclusion:

Ephesians 4:11 does not refer to offices in the church, they are ministries. They are not to be used as titles. The ministries of apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor and teacher are different ways in which scripture is preached. The apostles teaching is foundational

truth, the prophetic ministry edifies, exhorts, and comforts, the evangelistic ministry reaches the unsaved and encourages Christians to live for Jesus, the pastoral ministry cares for the church, guards the church, and will ensure there is correct leadership in the church, the teaching ministry provides Bible study so that Christians are firm in scriptural knowledge.

The ministry gifts are given so that the body of Christ can be built up through the scripture. Paul told the Ephesian elders that he had preached the whole gospel and not just parts.

Acts 20:27 "For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God."

False apostles and prophets will not preach the whole counsel of God. But it is our duty to preach and teach the scriptures regardless of the consequences. False apostles use scripture to their own advantage. God has put in the church apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teaches so that scripture is fully taught within the body of Christ.

May the Lord bless you. Amen.