

EPHESIANS #58 4:11 2-17-13

THE ANOINTED APPOINTED

(Ephesians 4) When you teach thru books of the Bible as I do, you necessarily find your style of ministry shifting somewhat due to the nature of the text that you face in a given week. Some texts make for more exhortational messages, some for more practical ones, others for evangelistic messages, others for inspirational messages, and still others for more purely instructional sermons. Today's text is of the latter variety - of the nature of instruction. The things we cover today are not likely to move the heart, but I hope you will develop from our study a more Christian and biblical mind, with your understanding of God's ways and His church enhanced. Our text for today is verse 11 which falls in a larger context so let's read that starting at verse **7-13** *But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. 8 Therefore it says, "When He ascended on high, He led captive a host of captives, And He gave gifts to men." 9 (Now this expression, "He ascended," what does it mean except that He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth? 10 He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, so that He might fill all things.) 11 And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.* I love this section of Scripture because it is all about the building up of the church. And I love the church. That is what I have given my life to because that is what Jesus has given His life for. We saw last time that our ascended Savior has seen fit, in His goodness, to pour out upon his servants certain graces, certain gifts whereby we might serve him more effectively. Verse 7 *to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift.* Everyone in the church has a gift, and so everyone has a role, has a job to do. But not everyone's job is the same. Just as a team, or an army, or a work force has to divide up its personnel into distinctive roles, so too does the Head of the church. He sovereignly assigns each of us to a specific role and function duty station. Our text for today is verse 11 which deals with this very thing and says 11 *He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers.* From there the passage goes on to say why He

has given some to be these things and we will look at that next time, but for today we only have time to look at these four offices described in verse 11.

The first group mentioned here are the apostles. He gave some as apostles. Do you know what an apostle is? I find many people feel very uncertain about church titles. I was walking through the hall on a recent Sunday when a man said to me, "Good morning, Father." It caught me a bit off guard. I'm not used to that title, but for this man that is what his tradition indicated that he should call his church's leader. That's fine, but I took some time to acquaint him with more Presbyterian terms. Some of you have wondered, haven't you, what you should call me? Pastor, Reverend, Father, Coach? I've been looking for a clever response to that question for thirty years. Occasionally I will tell people to call me, "The Bishop." You can get away with that because most people aren't sure of the difference between a deacon and elder, or a priest or a cardinal or a monk and a friar or an Abbott and a Costello. The first woman bishop ever ordained in the Episcopal Church was speaking to a group of kids and asked, "Does anyone know what a bishop does?" One of the kids spoke up and gave a good answer. He said "Yes, a bishop moves diagonally." Not bad. How about an apostle?

The word "apostle" is used in the New Testament in either its broader or its narrower sense. The broad sense of the word can refer to anyone who is sent out. The root of the term "apostle" is the word "post." When you post a letter what do you do? You send it. A postman delivers what you have sent. You get it? An a-post-le is a person who is sent so that an apostle of Jesus Christ is someone sent by the Lord on a particular mission. In this respect any missionary or gospel messenger can own the title "apostle" in the sense of being sent as a representative of another. Jesus himself considered Himself an apostle of God and He says to His disciples in **John 20:21** *as the Father has sent Me, I also send you*. Now, there is clearly a certain authority that accompanies anyone who is sent by Christ to proclaim His message, but the New Testament clearly uses the term apostle, most of the time, in a much narrower sense to refer to some who are granted double authority in the church because of their being apostles in the strict sense of the word that applied only to a few men. The term "apostle" when used in the early church most typically designated an individual who had seen the resurrected Christ, who had been commissioned personally by Him, whose ministry was marked by the miraculous and who had been given the task of leading and teaching the church in its infancy. Now that doesn't

apply to many people. The book of Revelation, in fact, speaks of the twelve apostles. This is a very narrow group.

In his list of special offices in the church, Paul lists the apostles first. He does it here. He does it in I Corinthians 12:**28a** *God has appointed in the church, first apostles.* Why apostles first? Several reasons could be given. They are first in order of importance, and they are first in order of time. The church began with the apostles and spread out from there. We saw in our study of Ephesians two that the ministry of the apostles is foundational for the church. There it says that the church was 2:**20a** *built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets.* And how many times do you lay a foundation? Once and then you move on. The apostolic ministry is one associated with the foundation of the church. Because of that there is no reason to expect this office to continue in our day. I offer three reasons to believe the office of apostle to be temporary. #1 is the nature of the office itself, that of laying a foundation. #2 is the nature of the qualifications to be one. In Acts 1 Peter said that to be an apostle you need to be an eyewitness of the resurrected Lord. In I Corinthians 9 Paul argues for his own apostleship on that same basis. He says, “Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?” Apostleship is not like the Olympic torch, it can’t be passed from person to person. You are an apostle only if Jesus Himself lights that torch. Reason #3 to believe this office was temporary is the testimony of the early church fathers. The writings of those men who were one generation removed from Peter, Paul and John make it plain that they saw the apostles as a distinct class. I went back this week and read some of the writings of Clement of Rome, the chief elder in the Roman church in 96AD, and Clement very plainly refers to the great apostles as a unique set of men whose role was not duplicated in himself or any other. But listen, saying that this office was temporary doesn’t mean that we are without apostolic ministry in the church today. Even today the church builds on the apostolic foundation. We still have apostles because God, in His wisdom, supplies us with their teaching via the Scriptures. Got it? He gave us the church, first of all, apostles.

Secondly, then it says He gave some as prophets. This is the same order we have in I Corinthians **12:28ab** *God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets.* I want to tell a story before we plunge any deeper. Barry Switzer used to be the coach of the Dallas Cowboys. But before Switzer coached the Cowboys he coached at the University of Oklahoma where he once had a star player who was having trouble in school. This young man had flunked a math class that would have made him ineligible for the football season, so Coach Switzer

pleaded with the professor to give his athlete another chance. The professor agreed to give him another final exam, and he agreed to let the coach be there with his star player just to offer moral support. The day came and the athlete showed up for the test, with the coach. The professor said, *“My test today has only one question. If you can get it correct you will pass the course. If you miss it, you fail. Here it is: what is 7 x 7?”* The athlete’s face dropped. He shook his head and said, *“OOh, that’s a hard one.”* He thought about it for several minutes. The coach was really sweating, and finally the big jock said, *“It’s 49”* And when coach heard that he said, *“Ahh, come one Prof, give him another chance!”* Sometimes, the teachers know little more than the students. Sometimes all I feel I have to share with people is my confusion. And today is one of those days. I must confess that I still am under some confusion concerning the New Testament teaching about prophecy and prophets. I’ve read plenty on the subject, but nothing has thoroughly satisfied me. Still, I offer my best shot at it, in brief form, this morning.

To prophesy is normally understood to mean that you deliver to a person or persons a particular message which you received from God. It means you stand as God’s spokesman, His instrument for addressing someone or some group. Everyone agrees that in general ways all believers are to be prophets in that we speak God’s word to men. But there is enormous disagreement over the stricter definition of prophecy. Those who believe that God no longer gives special words to men apart from the Scriptures have either taught the abolition of the gift of prophecy or they have defined it to take out any notion of new revelation. They speak of someone who preaches as having the gift, equating my work behind the pulpit with prophecy. When someone takes a stand on a social issue or becomes a social analyst from a Biblical viewpoint we call that person a prophet. Still others take their cue from I Corinthians 14:3 and

say that prophecy is simply some kind of word of exhortation. **3** *One who prophesies speaks to men for edification, and exhortation, and consolation.* I have heard this verse discussed as if it were a definition of prophecy. Prophecy is anything that edifies, exhorts or consoles. But this verse is not giving a definition but a description of an effect. These are the results of prophecy. It is similar to saying, “when someone sings he inspires, soothes and motivates.” All that is true but it is no definition of singing is it? And this is not a definition of prophecy. The only way to find out what the Spirit means by this word is to see how it is used throughout the Bible and especially in the New Testament. I invite you to undertake such a study. I did it and what I found is that the term “prophesy” or “prophet” is used almost

exclusively in reference to someone receiving and delivering a particular word given to them directly by the Holy Spirit. Since that is the case I feel I can do nothing else than conclude that is what the gift is. Just as a for instance, we read in Acts about a man named Agabus who is called a prophet. Twice he shows up. The first time is in Acts 11:**27** *Now at this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch.* You see that there were some noted as holding this office, and of manifesting this gift. **28** *One of them named Agabus stood up and began to indicate by the Spirit that there would certainly be a great famine all over the world. And this took place in the reign of Claudius.* Agabus didn't get that reading His Bible did he? That came directly from God, don't ask me how. Now look at Acts 21. Paul is in the city of Caesarea. living in the home of Philip, the deacon and evangelist who had been ministering the gospel there. **10-11** *As we were staying there for some days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea.* ¹¹ *And coming to us, he took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands, and said, "This is what the Holy Spirit says: 'In this way the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.* This is foreign to my experience, but it instructs me about what Ephesians 4 means when it speaks of prophets. One who prophesies in the New Testament speaks to others a word from God.

Now, lemme tell you, that bothers me. I am uncomfortable with that for several reasons. For one, I operate in a theological tradition that says God doesn't speak anymore except through the Bible. Secondly, I can see how the existence of prophesy in the church may threaten the unique authority of the Scriptures. Thirdly, I am bothered by the fact that prophecies does not go on in our church and that I have never heard from God in this way (or have I?). Fourthly, I am bothered because in churches where there is prophecies it is usually more of an embarrassment than an enhancement to their ministry, and those very same churches seem to slide off into doctrinal errors of various kinds.

My confusion intensifies when I read I Corinthians 14 because there it says that in the New Testament assembly, whenever there would be prophetic words offered, those prophecies are to come under evaluation. 14:**29** *Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others pass judgment.* They are not received uncritically. Far from it. **31-32** *For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all may be exhorted;* ³² *and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets.* This inclines me to think that the nature of New Testament prophecies may be quite different from the authoritative declarations of Moses and Elijah. There is just so much about

which I am unsure. It would be a lot more comfortable for me to just conclude that there are no prophets any more. Many whom I deeply respect have concluded just that, that once the New Testament was complete, the need for this gift was gone and so God pulled it away from the church. I concede that to be a possibility but I don't see any warrant from Scripture to believe that is the case. I request your patience with me on these things, and request that we move on to our third point which is that God gave to the church evangelists.

Hey, I think I know what an evangelist is. The word *evangel* means “good news.” And an evangelist is simply someone who engages in the proclamation of that good news. Now, you've probably heard some preacher say at some time that every believer is supposed to be an evangelist. And that is true to the extent that every believer ought to take opportunity as it arises to tell others about Christ. But, there are some in the body of Christ, especially gifted, and especially called to make this the focus of their lives. In our generation we always think of Billy Graham, and certainly he is one who would qualify as that. He has preached to more people and seen more converted under his preaching than anyone in the history of the church. We think, maybe, of one who travels from place to place preaching the gospel. One of the early Christian writings, called *The Didache* said that apostles and evangelists travelled around and prophets and pastor-teachers typically stayed in one church. The reason for that, I think, is that prophets and pastors direct their ministry toward Christians. Evangelists direct their ministry toward the unbelieving world, and therefore have to keep looking for new audiences. I hear people refer constantly to TV preachers as televangelists, but those guys don't qualify for that. Almost no unbelievers watch Christian TV. Those guys are better understood as teachers than evangelists. Evangelists don't want to talk to Christians. They are after the lost. There are many evangelists in the Bible but there is only one man who is referred to by that title. I'll give you 10% off your tithe if you can tell me who it is. His name is Philip whom we just mentioned as being in Caesarea. He is not the disciple Philip, one of the twelve, but another Philip whom we meet first in Acts 6 where he is elected a deacon. But a deacon isn't all that he was. Acts 21 called him an evangelist. Philip had a reputation and a title. Like the bear named *Winnie* is called *the Pooh*, the man named *Philip* is called *the evangelist*. Let's look at the one major story about Philip in Acts 8. Guess what we find Philip doing in this story? **5** *Philip went down to the city of Samaria and began proclaiming Christ to them.* And Philip was very good at this and lots of folks were being converted. Then **26** *But an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip saying, “Get up*

*and go south to the road that descends from Jerusalem to Gaza.” (This is a desert road.) And if you know the story, Philip finds there a court official from Ethiopia. **35** Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him. And when he was done leading this man to Christ it says God beamed him to another city to keep on preaching **40** But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he passed through he kept preaching the gospel to all the cities. And I think he met some lady in Caesarea because by the time we get to Acts 21 he was still there and had four daughters who sang together in a gospel quartet at all their dad’s meetings. Well, that was Philip the evangelist. Thank God for evangelists! Thank God for those gifted and called to go after the lost with the good news! They are gifts to the church.*

Finally, we come in our text to the pastor-teacher. I say Pastor-teacher because I believe that is the best way to understand it. Greek scholars say it is significant that before each office mentioned in verse 11 you find a definite article, until you come to the word “teacher.” The lack of the definite article indicates that the word “teacher” is connected to the word “pastor.” So, instead of two offices here you have one office with two related functions. The pastor teaches and the teacher pastors. The grammar pushes us to that, but so does experience. The word pastor means, “shepherd.” And what is one of the most critical aspects of a shepherd’s work? It is the feeding of the flock. When Paul writes letters to pastors in I Timothy and Titus, what do we find him urging them to do? Over and over again he says to teach. I Timothy 4:**13** *give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching. **16** Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching.* II Timothy 4:**2** *preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction.* Titus 2:**1** *Speak the things that are fitting for sound doctrine.*

Now, you can imagine a church leader who sees his role exclusively as a teacher. He does his public thing but has no personal follow thru. Such a man is not operating as a pastor-teacher, but only a teacher. The office Paul describes has both aspects. In some men, one may be stronger than the other. As the spiritual gifts vary so pastors will vary, some exercising stronger pastoral gifts, others stronger teaching gifts. I Thessalonians 5:12 sums up the role of the pastor-teacher as it says **12** *we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction.* The pastor-teacher has charge over you. He is your shepherd and overseer while also serving as your

teacher. I have keen interest in this office for the obvious reason that I see myself in this role. So, we will talk more about this in the weeks ahead.

For now, I want to wrap up with a couple of miscellaneous but related thoughts on what we have seen today. First, notice that church officers are God's idea. Some groups speak as if there isn't to be any rank or office among believers. And that doesn't begin to square with the New Testament. God has imposed a certain order on His church. Get it straight. It's His church! We aren't going to be smarter than God. And God says there are to be individuals appointed to special offices and roles and authorities. Why? Because God thinks you need the service of spiritual leaders to help you grow and to prepare you for serving Him. If you don't think so; if you think you can do the solo Christian gig apart from spiritual leadership you are opposing God. Listen to John Calvin who said, "*They are insane, who neglect this God-appointed means for growing his church, who pretend to secret revelations of the Spirit, who content themselves with private readings of the Scripture and imagine they do not need the ministry of the church.*" God appoints leaders for the church because we need them.

Secondly, please notice that although God gives these gifted men to the church, he expects the church to recognize that is so and certify it. There is no place for the man who runs around asserting his own call from God when no one else is prepared to recognize it. Charles Spurgeon dealt with a man once who came to him and reported that the Spirit of God told him that he should preach at Spurgeon's church on the upcoming Sunday. Spurgeon said, "That's funny. The Holy Spirit hasn't told me that." We can expect that where there is a genuine inward call of God that the church and its leadership will validate that call in external ways. John Maxwell says, "he who thinks he leadeth, but has no one following is simply taking a walk." And if you think you are called to preach but no one thinks they are called to listen we have a problem. Church leaders are in a difficult position many times, because they deal with men who aspire to church office, who really think they are called, but who lack the gifts and maybe the graces necessary. It's hard to say, "no" to an eager candidate. But for the church's sake and that man's sake, somebody has to! I recall a Presbytery meeting at which we examined a man who gave just about the weakest exam I've ever heard. This young man wanted to preach but his ability was sorely lacking. *That's okay* some said. *He really has a good heart. He really tries hard. He was too scared to give a good exam.* It's hard to say, "No." Don't I know. But listen to I Timothy 5:22 *Do not lay hands upon anyone too hastily and thereby share responsibility for*

the sins of others. The laying on of hands is talking about ordination to church office. Don't be too quick he says. I Timothy 4:14 *Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you, which was bestowed on you through prophetic utterance with the laying on of hands by the presbytery.* Who called Timothy to be a pastor? God did, but He also called the Presbytery (the group of church leaders in a particular region) to validate that call and put their seal upon it. In Acts 20:28 Paul tells the elders in Miletus that they were made overseers by the Holy Spirit, but in Titus Paul tells Titus 5 *I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city.* Who appoints elders, God or the church? The answer is, "yes." Listen, the church is certainly fallible. The church can make mistakes but she is God's ordained instrument, not to call men or to gift men, but to recognize where indeed the call and gifting of God is. Do you see that? The call of God to special office in the church ought to be confirmed in the heart, certainly, but also, in the church. Whom God anoints the church appoints.(R) Next time we'll move on to look at the Master's purpose behind his appointments. Would you stand and let's speak to our Lord in prayer