

Gifted men -- God's gift to the church today

"But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore He says: 'When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, And gave gifts to men.' (Now this, 'He ascended'; what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.) And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:7 - 13 -- Scripture quotations will be from the New King James Version -- NKJV -- unless noted otherwise).

Apostles -- Apostles, in the **primary** sense, were selected by God (Acts 10:41; Gal. 1:15), given miraculous powers to authenticate their office (Matt. 10:1; 2 Cor. 12:12; Heb. 2:4), and sent to accomplish a specific task -- as with the twelve kingdom apostles to Israel (Matt. 28:19, 20), and Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles (1 Cor. 12:28). In the **secondary** sense, as in this passage, they were missionaries sent out by the churches to establish and minister to churches in new areas. Barnabas, who was neither one of the Twelve, nor the Apostle to the Gentiles, was sent out by the church (at God's direction -- Acts 13:1 - 4) and is called an "apostle" in Acts 14:14. See 2 Cor. 8:23 and Phil. 2:25 where the Greek word "*apostello*" is translated "messenger." Wuest says that this Greek word is used in the Septuagint for an envoy or ambassador. See 2 Cor. 5:20 -- though the word used there is not *apostello*.

Prophets -- In the **primary** sense the prophet was to receive a message direct from God and make it known -- 1 Cor. 12:10; 13:2, 8. In the **secondary** sense, as here, they were Bible teachers (forth-telling what God has already revealed) -- travelling from church to church to establish the saints (Rom. 12:6).

Evangelists -- Reaching the lost, whether in the local area or elsewhere (Acts. 8:5; 21:8; 2 Tim. 4:5).

Teaching pastors -- The Greek construction indicates that the pastor and the teacher are the same individual: pastoring teachers or teaching pastors. They are to build up the local church and watch over it.

While there are today no apostles or prophets in the **primary** sense, these gifted men are still in the church in the **secondary** sense. The "apostles" (in the secondary sense) we call "missionaries." The "prophets" (again, in the secondary sense) we refer to as "Bible teachers" -- those who teach in our seminaries and Bible Institutes and who are our conference speakers and hold our Bible centered seminars, etc. If this passage does not refer to the **gifted men** we can expect to find in the church **today**, then there is no such list.

In First Corinthians twelve there is a list of gifts **to individuals** (1 Cor. 12:8 - 11) and a list of **gifted individuals** given to the **church** (1 Cor. 12:28). These lists apply to the transition period when the miraculous gifts were still in the church. We find the list of non miraculous gifts to

individuals after the transition is past in Romans twelve.¹ In Ephesians 4:8 there is a reference to gifts to individuals, but no list. In Eph. 4:11 he lists the gifted individuals given to the church.

In Eph. 4:12, 13 we are told that these gifted men are given, not until the end of the transition period -- which was already past at that time, but "till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." "The statement of the great object of Christ's gifts and provision made by Him for its fulfillment is now followed by a statement of the *time* this provision and the consequent service are to last, or the point at which the great end in view is to be realized. It is when the members of the Church have all come to their proper unity and maturity in their Head. . . . Paul gives no clear indication of the *time*, and it may be, therefore, that he has in view only the goal itself and the attainment of it at whatever time that may take effect."²

Kenneth Wuest says, concerning the passage in Ephesians:

"He gave some saints as apostles. The word speaks in a primary sense of the twelve apostles [what about Paul??], and in a secondary sense, of those who proclaim the Word of God today. "Prophets" refers, not to those who foretell the future, but to preachers and expounders of the Word. Evangelists are the travelling missionaries both in home and foreign lands. The word "pastor" is *poimen*, "a shepherd." The words "pastors" and "teachers" are in a construction called Granvill Sharp's rule which indicates that they refer to one individual. The one who shepherds God's flock is also a teacher of the Word, having both the gifts of shepherding and teaching the flock. God's ideal pastor is one who engages in a didactic ministry, feeding the saints on expository preaching, giving them the rich food of the Word."³

Here is an excerpt from my Class Notes on Acts which may be of some help.

Acts 6:1 - 6. The Scofield Bible entitles this chapter "The first deacons." Nonsense. It is not really the appointing of "Deacons" here, but the setting apart of one group of "deacons" to serve tables so other "deacons" could minister the Word. Verse four says, "We will give ourselves continually to prayer, and the ministry [literally '**deaconing**'] of the Word."

The word "deacon" is not used concerning these men in this passage. However the word translated "use the office of a deacon" in 1 Tim. 3:10, 13 (*diakoneo*) is used **many** places where no **office** at all is in view. *Diakoneo* is used in verse two here, but not as an office. It is translated "serve."

The noun form (*diakonia*) is used twice in Acts six. In verse one it is translated "ministration" and in verse four "ministry." It is translated "office" in Rom. 11:13; "administrations" in 1 Cor. 12:5; "ministration" in 2 Cor. 3:7, 8, 9; "relief" in Acts 11:29; etc. It is used often as "ministry."

Another related word, (*diakonos*), is translated "deacons" in Phil. 1:1; "servant" in Matt. 23:11; Rom. 16:1 and "minister" in Rom. 13:4; 15:8; 1 Cor. 3:5; 2 Cor. 3:6; 6:4; 11:15, 23; Gal. 2:17; Eph. 3:7; 6:21; Col. 1:7, 23, 25; 4:7; 1 Thess. 3:2 and 1 Tim. 4:6.

¹Romans was written during the transition period, but, in this passage, looks forward to the permanent program.

²Expositors -- cited by Wuest in "Ephesians and Colossians in the Greek New Testament" page 101.

³ Ibid -- pages 100, 101.

(Acts) **6:3**. The "deacons" were **selected** by the congregation (Look **ye** out -"); **commissioned** by the Apostles ("whom **we** may appoint -"); and **dedicated** by prayer and the laying on of the Apostles' hands (v. 6).

While the word "pastor" is found only once, and there in the plural, there seem to be indications that "pastors" were given to individual congregations, not (in those days) because they were elected by the congregation, but as a recognition of their gift. They may have been looked upon as "leading elders" with the gift of teaching pastor. The "true comrade" addressed in Phil. 4:3 may have been such a one. Even though the epistle was addressed to the church as a whole, this instruction was addressed to one person in that church who must have had a place of leadership and responsibility above the other "overseers [*episkopois*] and deacons" (1:1). 1 Cor. 9:6 - 11 seems to indicate that there were those in special places of leadership who were to be supported by the church.

The noun translated "pastor" in Eph. 4:11 (*poimeen*) is found in the verb form (*poimaino*) in two passages where Paul's ministry is involved:

--- "Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers [*episkopous* - 'bishops'], to shepherd [**pastor**] the church of God which He purchased with His own blood" (Acts 20:28). These older men (*presbuterous*) Paul has called to his side are from Ephesus. He tells them here that the Holy Spirit has made them bishops to "pastor" the church of God -- and in the letter to them written later he points out that, as pastors, they are a gift of God to the church (Eph. 4:11, 12).

--- "Who ever goes to war at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its fruit? Or who tends ["shepherds" or "**pastors**"] a flock and does not drink of the milk of the flock?" (1 Cor 9:7).

The Greek word "*episkopos*" (translated "overseer" in Acts 20:28 and "bishop" in Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:7 and 1 Pet. 2:25) is the noun form of the verb *episkopeo*. This verb is found in two verses -- in which we get a clue to the meaning of the noun:

--- "**Looking carefully** [diligently] lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled" (Heb 12:15).

--- "Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, **servicing as overseers** [taking the oversight], not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly" (1 Pet 5:2).

Interestingly, the latter verse links this "taking the oversight" with "shepherding [*poimaino* -- verb form of the word in Eph. 4:11] the flock of God." It seems that the one taking oversight of the church is pastoring ("shepherding") it. Whether he is called "pastor" or "bishop" (in the scriptural use of the word) does not detract from his qualifications (1 Tim. 3:2 - 7; Titus 1:7 - 9), his work (Eph. 4:12, 13), his responsibilities (1 Pet. 5:2 -- to borrow a principle inherent in the meaning of the word, which is surely still applicable), or his right to be supported by the congregation (1 Cor. 9:6 - 11; 2 Tim. 2:6).