

Last week we looked at the mission of the Church and found that it was relatively simple in concept but complex in implementation. Our calling...our mission...is fundamentally twofold; to be holy as God is holy and to live and act in such a way as to bring Him glory. We saw last week that our entire life is to reflect and exhibit His glory, whether it is in our witness, our work, our family, our testimony, our prayer and worship...all of these, when done rightly, bring honor and glory to God. Conversely, when done wrongly...when done outside of the will and Word of God...we bring dishonor to God's name and into our lives.

This week we will be continuing in our study of the church and examining the make-up of a church. In other words, how God has designed the local church to function and exercise it's mission and ministry.

Ephesians 4:11-16 is an excellent place to start our examination of the make-up of a church. Here we read, **“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.”**

It is important that we realize the context in which these words were written. Paul is speaking of those early days in the life of the church...conditions that continued to the time of his writing these words. The New Testament is being formulated as the writers expound Old Testament writing and show how they point to Christ. New scripture is being written and spoken as God's chosen spokesmen are sharing the gospel...the “good news” of Jesus and his saving and sanctifying work. God is speaking directly through His prophetic word, much like He did through Old Testament prophets. Elders are being appointed to shepherd and teach these fledgling churches struggling with old methods of thinking and behavior. God has prepared and presented certain men to establish and grow the churches that He is calling and building.

In vs 11 and 12 we read, **“And He gave some *as* apostles, and some *as* prophets, and some *as* evangelists, and some *as* pastors and teachers”** There are four groups mentioned here, not five as some might think. In the Greek, it is clear that the last two terms...pastor and teacher...refer to the same person. So we have men being given as gifts to the church; these men are apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor/teachers.

The apostles were men who were chosen by Jesus to bear witness to His life and resurrection...to be witnesses “in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.” As you might remember from our study of the metaphor of the building and cornerstone, the apostles served as a foundation for the churches...to establish them in teaching and to set elders that could continue their teaching and shepherding ministry after their departure. The apostles were given special miraculous gifts and understanding so that they were readily identifiable as having been sent and established by God. They, along with the prophets, were God's spokesmen to introduce and expound upon this new age, the age of the Church. We covered this new Church age a few weeks ago as we looked at the Mystery of the Church.

This next group, the prophets, were men inspired by God to speak his message,...specifically, at this time,...to speak about the mystery being revealed...that the Messiah came to sacrifice Himself so that those whom God called would be reconciled to Him. Prophets had a special anointing from God to speak on His behalf. In 2Pet 1:20 we read,

“But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is *a matter* of one's own interpretation, 21 for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.”

John the Baptist was such a prophet, and was called by Jesus a “prophet and more than a prophet” in Matt 11:9. John was tasked by God to preach repentance and speak about Jesus, the “Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world”. It is important to note that there were false prophets proclaiming false prophecies in Old Testament times and during this time of the developing church, as evidenced by Peter's warning in 2 Pet 2:1ff.

“But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves. 2 Many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned; 3 and in *their* greed they will exploit you with false words” .

John says much the same thing in 1John 4:1ff, **“ Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see**

whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. 2 By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; 3 and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God “

The existence of false prophets and teachers made it imperative to test their message against the Word of God to make certain that the message being proclaimed was indeed from God. The message of a true prophet is aligned with what God says in His Word.

The next group of men that are a gift to the church are “evangelists”. The term “evangelist can conjure up the image of someone who travels from town to town holding revival meetings and crusades. After spending a few days or a week in one locality, he moves on to the next. But this is not the biblical understanding of an evangelist. Timothy, in 2Tim 4:5, is told to “do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry”. He was the companion of Paul in his missionary journeys, where he would stay for months and years, preaching in the cities, establishing churches, and appointing elders to lead...to shepherd...the church. The job of the evangelist is to preach and teach the gospel...the good news...about Jesus Christ and His saving work in order to establish and build up the church in that region or city.

The last group mentioned are the pastor/teachers. The pastor/teachers would have been elders gifted and appointed to continue to teach and preach the Word and to oversee the growth and spiritual formation of the local church. We will look at this group in greater detail next week, but for now, it is enough to identify them in broad terms. They were the men entrusted with the responsibility to teach and mature the growing church. They were responsible for protecting against false teachers and deepening the peoples understanding of God and themselves. They stood as “undershepherds” to the “Great Shepherd”, manifesting Jesus presence and person among the flock of God. They were called as an example of how to live a godly life. They were the ones entrusted with guiding and protecting the church for the long term...after the departure of the apostles, prophets, and evangelists.

All four of these groups...these gifts of men to the church...were given fundamentally the same task but in different ways and in different times. They were all called to bring the Word of God to the people of God to build them up. Let us go back to our text in Eph 4. We read, “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”

We see this clearly as Paul describes his apostolic ministry in 1Thess 2:8ff. “we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us.9 For you recall, brethren, our labor and hardship, how working night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God.”

In Acts 15:13ff and in 1 Cor 14:3 we see that the ministry of the prophets was the same. We read, Judas and Silas, also being prophets themselves, encouraged and strengthened the brethren with a lengthy message. Paul makes it even clearer..”But one who prophesies speaks to men for edification and exhortation and consolation.”

Timothy is told by Paul...in the very same passage about his doing the work of an evangelist... to “preach the word; be ready in season *and* out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction.”

And what is the calling of the pastor/teacher? It is no different. The Apostle Paul, as he is traveling to Jerusalem expecting imprisonment and death, meets with the Ephesian elders to give them final encouragement and admonition. He calls them to continue in the example of his ministry of teaching and protecting the church. In Acts 20:27ff we read, “For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God. 28 Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. 29 I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; 30 and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. 31 Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears.”

So, beloved, what have we found to this point? God, in His wisdom and grace, called and set in the church special men to speak on His behalf...delivering the Word of God for their protection, maturity, and unity. The purpose of their ministry is the “equipping of the saints”. The means of that equipping is the preaching and

teaching of the Word. Beloved, we are hard pressed to open God's Word and not find reference to the need to establish our lives in accordance with its teachings. We are told to “let the Word of Christ dwell within us richly”. We see Paul's words to Timothy where he reminds him that “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; 17 so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.” And in Ps 119 we read much the same thing when the psalmist writes, “Your word I have treasured in my heart, That I may not sin against You.”

Beloved, let me say it simply...if we do not go to the Word of God to gain our understanding of ourselves, our world, and our God, we do ourselves and Him a great disservice. We can not rely on the wisdom of men because it is built on sand and is ever changing. We have seen that clearly in the constantly changing message and advice regarding the recent “pandemic”. We can not rely on our own understanding and feelings because the natural human heart is desperately wicked and untrustworthy. How often do we do what “seems” good to a man” but have it end in disaster and “death” (Prov 12:28). We are told again and again to seek wisdom in His Word so that things might be good and go well in our lives. As a church, we will be starting a sermon series on James in the weeks to come. Listen to his words in James 1:21, “Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls. 22 But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.”

So we are equipped by the Word of God through the instruments of the men put in place as God's representatives. But equipped for what? That is answered in the next phrase of Eph 4...“for the work of service” It is critically important for us to understand this so we then also understand how the ministry of the church is to function. The ministry of the church is not the purview of a few gifted and paid “professionals”. Remember last week when we talked about the mission of the church? About how we glorify God in our testimony, our service, our worship, our behavior, and our love? Do you notice that it OUR behavior, not the pastor's or teacher's? The ministry of the church to its members and to the world around it is the responsibility of all the saints, not just the leaders or “specially gifted” individuals. Again, pointing back to an earlier study, the church is built up by that which “every joint supplies”...everyone of us are its ministers. As we step out in faith and reliance upon God to do the work for which He has gifted us, we benefit both our church family as well as ourselves. Look at the final verses of our passage this evening.

“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.”

Beloved, let me remind you...we all have a purpose and ministry in the kingdom of God. As work alongside one another for the cause of Christ, we are drawn together in unity and love. As we learn to rely on God in the exercise of our gifts on behalf of our brothers and the lost, we are built up and brought to be like Jesus. As we are equipped by the Word of God taking root in our lives...enlivened by the Spirit of God...we know Him better and become fruitful and mature. Isn't wonderful and amazing that God has it all planned out? That He has given us individuals to establish and expound His word for the edification of His church? And that He, then, brings us to maturity and completeness in the process?

The power behind the ministry of the church is God Himself...the ones empowered for service is everyone of us! Beloved, let our prayer this evening be that we would understand and embrace our calling...that He would make His will, purpose, and gifting clear to us...and that He would embolden us to step out in faith to do the work of the ministry.

Let us pray