Ephesians 4:11-13

Maturity

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.

# He Gave Gifts… to Establish & Equip

After establishing the deity of Christ and the blowing the minds of the Jewish and Gentile readers with the doctrines from the previous passage, Paul resumes the idea of gifts to men. It’s worth noting that because the church was a parenthetical body – a mystery – that the readers were probably wrestling with what that meant if they came from a Jewish background. The gentiles had to be wonder about all of what Judaism entailed as a past, and their pagan mythology and mystery religions were completely devoid of the character God that they were now confronted with.

The gifts that Christ gave, along with the gift of grace, were purposeful; they created a foundation that could be built on until the return of Christ for His bride, the one church.

## Establishing the Church

### He Gave Some as Apostles

*Why were apostles unique to a tiny handful of people at one time in history?*

2,000 years leads us to look at this passage in a way that may not have been the way that the original readers of this passage looked at it. Some denominations and cults have apostles that still operate with the authority that the establishing apostles had, but they lack the key identifiers: Those who met the Apostles knew their specialness at that time and place because they had seen Christ (including Paul), been commissioned, directed by the Spirit to do miraculous signs to show their authority, and spoke inspired scripture.

The readers of this letter would have known that meeting Paul, or any of the other apostles, was a rarified, special experience and that its foundational role as outlined in establishing the church was unique. The Apostles were taking the gospel to where they were directed and were establishers who worked with other companions like Titus, Timothy, Onesimus, and John-Mark. They helped establish the churches by keeping communications active since the Apostles could only be in one place at a time.

### He Gave Some as Prophets

*Why was being a prophet an establishing role within the church?*

Once a church is established there is a critical jump between Conscience, the Law and Grace. The first century church did not have a New Testament they could grab and determine theological nuance and practical Christian living from. God gave the church prophets who were given special and specific revelation to help clarify New Testament theology. While the Holy Spirit was given to each and every believer there appears to be a gap between people’s understanding of walking by the Spirit (AKA abiding) and daily living. Tendency towards legalism from Jewish saints or carnality from formerly pagan saints needed understanding.

Once understanding was established in the local community it could be shared and spread by the pastors and teachers, and enforced in some cases by the shepherds.

*Why do we record the words of the Apostles in the New Testament, but not any of these prophets?*

### He Gave Some as Evangelists

*Is every Christian an evangelist?*

Once a church was established in a community the Holy Spirit moved through some believers to be gifted with evangelism. This isn’t to say that all believers may not be used to share the gospel. The evangelist shares the good news in a way that reflects a gifted use that impacts a larger community of people. Apollo appears to have had an evangelistic role in establishing the church.

Paul’s expectation was that once someone preached the gospel to another person, and they believed, that the person would bring that new believer to the church there. A purposeful transition would take place as the two people would fellowship at the same church and the shepherds would be able to step up, step in, and begin nurturing the new believer.

### He Gave Some as Pastors (Shepherds)

An established church needs leaders. The word pastor here, which we commonly use today, just means shepherd. It isn’t an authoritarian or power-focused role, but a service-oriented role that often involved helping establish doctrinal clarity, resolving problems between the sheep, fixing spiritual health issues, and counseling.

Paul goes into clear details on the requirements for elders in his letters to Timothy and Titus: 1 Timothy 3:1-7, Titus 1:7-9. These passages clarify that those in the shepherding role are mature, stable, and have a track record of leading their wives, families and business lives in a righteous way.

*Are pastors men?*

While our modern culture tends to be confused by genders and gender roles Paul makes it clear in his writings of the pastoral epistles that elders/pastors/overseers are to be men. This does not belittle women. We find in Titus, for example, that older women have a specific and similar role to be modeling their spirit-led lives as well as teaching younger women godliness. It goes without saying that the authority and responsibility falls on the man’s shoulders, but the helpmate God has given will be serving and praying and equipping right along side him.

### He Gave Some as Teachers

*What’s the difference between a pastor and a teacher?*

In 2 Timothy 2:2 Paul writes, “The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.” The church needs teachers to be able to bring the body along in spiritual growth. This may be expressed in a discipling role, in fellowship as families come together, or in-home studies or at the church. The Greek word here is rooted in a compound word that means ‘to cause to learn.’

### Relevancy

*Are the roles presented here still relevant for the modern church?*

It is worth noting that the roles of Apostle and Prophet appear to be specifically relevant for establishing the church, but that evangelists, shepherds, and teachers are all active today. The consequence of having apostles active today would be quite noticeable as we’d be aware of people having Christ revealed to them (a requirement), miraculous events happening (a requirement), and new revealed scripture (that’s frightening). Prophets are no longer receiving new scripture – except in cults – and the canon of God’s word has been established.

The next few verses explain why the other roles are still critical as we await the Lord’s return.

## Serving the Church

Having established the church and some basic ecclesiology Paul continues on covering ways in which these roles should be operating on a larger scale.

### For the Work of Service

*Are these roles intended for power?*

None of the roles above is without a weighty amount of service. Apostles loved sacrificially to the point of extreme pain, persecution, and in most cases were even martyrs. Prophets were serving the body to clarify in what were not always popular directions. Evangelists were clearly preaching the gospel and bringing in people from all sorts of backgrounds and that only upped the need for clarification from the Apostles and prophets! Shepherds had infantile believers coming into the body who needed much counsel, and older believers who may have had conflicts. Teachers needed to prepare and work to present a clear teaching to those they had been entrusted to communicate with. These are not given as roles of power (which Paul warns about in 2 Timothy 3:5), but as roles of service. The word “deacon” is a transliteration from the word service translated here.

### To the Building Up of the Body of Christ

*Why do these roles build on top of each other?*

All of these roles come together for the building up of the body, not only in number, but in maturity, equipping, and to come together in one mind. The Greek word translated as, “building up,” here is a compound word that is translated literally ‘to build a house.’ These are the roles God to establish and build the building of the church. Not 4 walls, but all of the people that come together in the name of Christ.

## The Long-Term Purpose of the Established, Equipped, Church

*What is God’s purpose for generations of believers?*

There’s a big problem for the typical human mind: they tend to think about there here and now. While the here and now is important for staying alive in a biological sense, we find that God has an eternal perspective, and those He sent to establish the church and build it up are focused on things in a scale that lasts lifetimes. The church should ideally be Christ sustained through God’s provided plan until the return of Christ. We see that these same relevant roles [Evangelist, Shepherd and Teacher] – when seen in light of legacy – can help maintain and further the church until Christ returns[[1]](#footnote-1).

### Until We All Attain to the Unity of the Faith

*What is the Faith referencing here?*

Paul uses the term the faith here to refer to our core belief that Christ is the savior and the doctrines surrounding that faith. His second clause that follows this phrase restates the idea about knowledge of the Son of God. The phrase ‘the faith’ is used throughout the New Testament (at least 28 times) and we see that it can be strengthened (Acts 16:5); encouraged (Acts 14:22); something we need to have internalized (Romans 14:22); and something we have to stand firm in (1 Corinthians 16:13).

#### Unity

Coming back around to the critical topic of the last 2 chapters, and the entire book of Ephesians, we see that unity is critical. This unity is not in superficial agreement not to disagree, or placating one another with false kindness, but in Spirit led, God’s truth believed, unity.

*How do we attain a unity of the faith?*

It’s worth considering how we handle division in faith here as well as the desire for doctrinal unity.

#### Examples of Causes of Division & Their Prevention

* As Paul has mentioned before in other letters (like 1 & 2 Corinthians and Galatians) people can follow cults of personality, which should be avoided. *Prevention:* A plurality of shepherds who are not operating from a position of carnal power.
* Believers walking in the flesh. *Prevention:* Shepherds and mature believers are to be coming along side (Galatians 6:1).
* Doctrinal division. Prevention: Shepherds should be delving into these issues, discussing these issues, and teaching unified doctrine. Proper hermeneutical principles, when applied, move past opinion towards clarity and unity.

Doctrine is the word we use for a teaching. An example of doctrine might be that God created the world in a literal 6 days. Some churches major on the minors, and some churches attempt to resolve division by saying anything is OK (see also Unitarianism). By appreciating God’s intent to reveal truth, make it knowable, and in preserving it in His word we have a starting point that lets us recognize a unified faith.

### Until We All Attain to the Unity of the Knowledge of the Son of God

*How are the faith and knowledge related here?*

It’s worth pointing out that while Paul had been discipled by Barnabas, Aquilla and Priscilla educated Paul in Acts 18. We find that our knowledge of the Son of God is rooted in our salvation by grace through faith, but that the gospel is not the extent of our understanding. This growth comes from the Holy Spirit [c.f. Romans 12:1], teaching [c.f. Romans 12:2] and ‘all things’ [c.f. Romans 8:28; 1 Peter 1:7] as we’re conformed to the image of Christ.

### Until We All Attain to a Mature Man

*What does it mean to be mature?*

The Greek word for mature can also be translated as finished or perfect. While Paul knows that the Ephesians will not be perfected in these human bodies, he’s expecting maturity. For each church and the group of believers that commune there the goal is the same! As we grow we should be equipped to pass along the same doctrines with the expectation that the Lord will use those doctrines to mature those the Lord has put in our lives.

This principle presents the need for fellowship, discipleship, and intimacy so that we can grow together, edifying one another, encouraging one another, and seeking to reflect the life of Christ as a unit, not just as individuals.

#### To the Measure of the Stature Which Belongs to the Fullness of Christ.

*How can we measure up to the stature of Christ?*

The measure of the perfection is the fullness of Christ. This shouldn’t be discouraging to us because we’re not expected to deliver perfection of our own, but instead be part of the sanctification process as abiding believers. If the life of Christ is being manifested in the believer, not to their own credit, but to God’s glory. As Paul has already stated: God is glorified when His grace is poured out (Ephesians 1:6). So instead we focus on the relationship (Colossians 3:1-3), knowing that the perfection will be coming at Christ’s return (Colossians 3:4).

# Conclusion

God’s plan for the church was not a quick delay to His Son’s return, but an establishing and established plan. His goal was to indwell His church body, with the Holy Spirit, to mature them, and to prepare them for their marriage to His Son. As we are His vessels on this earth the differences we have may seem like a negative at times, but God’s goal is that we set those aside and be unified – knowing His plan is eternal unity as His bride.

1. Recognizing that the church appears to not be too influential at the end times and wickedness is reigning. See 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)