

Ephesians 4:1-16

Background

- When Paul refers to peace in 4:3 he is speaking of peace between Christians rather than inner tranquility.
- 4:11 Paul refers to “pastors”, literally “shepherds” (4:11). In the NT this refers to overseers of local congregations (Acts 20:17, 28; 1 Pet 5:1-2), lay members of the church rather than professional clergy.
- In the Greek of 4:11, “pastors and teachers” are tied in a way the others in the list aren’t, perhaps reflecting the overlap between these roles and the requirement that elders be able to teach (1 Tim 4:13, 16; 2 Tim 2:2).

Questions

1. Paul, himself in bondage, describes the “bond” of peace (4:3) which binds believers together in community.¹ The strength of a bond is measured in the ease with which it is broken; a community (church or otherwise) where the bond is weak is one which individuals find it easy to leave. What communities, church or otherwise, do you feel strongly bound to? By what sort of bond? What strengthens these bonds?
2. Who are the ministers of the church (4:12)? Who equips them for this ministry?
3. The NT allows for two types of apostles: the twelve who were eye-witnesses, and those with lesser authority commissioned to carry the gospel abroad (so Andronicus and Junias are named apostles in Rom 16:7). If we allow that this gospel-spreading ministry goes under the title of missionary in the modern church, then the one type of leader not specifically found in many modern churches is “prophet”². Sometimes a member may be used by God to speak prophetically, but in non-charismatic churches the gift is not generally identified, sought, or modeled, despite the lofty position Paul gives to this gift.

Why were prophets important to the early church? How would this gift aid us?

4. What characteristics does this passage give of a mature church? Is ours mature? How about our small group?

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Fun fact: “Although gentleness was a recognized virtue, most Greek writers viewed ‘meekness’ in the sense of humility negatively” (IVP BBC).

Bonus Fun fact: Jesus’ descent to the “lower parts of the earth” (4:9) is, with a few other passages, the basis for the belief among some of the “harrowing of hell”, that Jesus raided Hell, freeing those held captive. (Bruce, 344)

¹ Paul relates this to the “joints and ligaments” which hold the body together and by which it is equipped; 4:16, 11-12.

² For other “gift lists” see 1 Cor 12:4-11; Rom 12:6-8.

Prophet προφήτης



A person inspired to proclaim or reveal divine word or purpose.
(BDAG)

Prophecy is a mark of the new covenant church: “Then afterward I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions.” (Joel 2:28)

Uses: “Judas and Silas, who were themselves prophets, said much to encourage and strengthen the believers.” (Acts 15:32)

Distinct from pastoring and teaching: “The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets,

some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ (Eph 4:11-12)

A cognitive gift: “And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge...” (1 Corinthians 13:2)

Used in public gatherings, in a controlled fashion: “Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said. For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged. And the spirits of prophets are subject to the prophets, for God is a God not of disorder but of peace.” (1 Corinthians 14:29)

Must be tested: “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; for many false prophets have gone out

into the world.” (1 John 4:1; also 1 Cor 14:29; 2 Pet 1:20; Mt 7:20)

Distinguished from words of knowledge and wisdom: “...there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone... To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit...” (1 Cor 12:6)

Desirable for blessing the body: “Pursue love and strive for the spiritual gifts, and especially that you may prophesy.” (1 Cor 14:1, 39; 1 Thess 5:20)

A sign to unbelievers: “After the secrets of the unbeliever’s heart are disclosed, that person will bow down before God and worship him, declaring, ‘God is really among you.’” (1 Cor 14:25)



The mature church:

- Unified but diverse in gifts
- Wise, not gullible
- Bound by love
- Equipped for coordinated ministry

Leader's Intro:

- ...

