

Opening Words

Do we have apostles and prophets today? The answer is “no” and “yes”. Listen to our message today and learn what I mean by this double answer

56 Eph Gifted Leaders 1

I have been challenged and refreshed as I have gone through Ephesians 4 with you. They have challenged me as I have thought on the need for unity in the church and among churches. The challenge has been for me to be humble, gentle, patient, tolerant, and diligent to preserve the unity that comes from the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The refreshment has come from the realization that the gifts we exercise come from the risen, glorified Lord Jesus Christ who is our conquering hero, who has led his captives in his triumphal procession, and who has distributed gifts to his people because of his victory over all enemies. The Lord Jesus Christ is going to fill all things as it says in verse 10. A day is coming when there will no longer be rebellion in the world we cannot see and the one we can see. A day is coming when the only spirit that will fill the universe is the spirit of Jesus Christ. As Paul says, he was exalted above the heavens that he might fill all things.

As the Lord over all, one way that Jesus has exercised his kingly authority has been to distribute gifts to his people. I shared that the New Testament has four primary passages on spiritual gifts – this one in Ephesians 4, 1 Peter 4, 1 Corinthians 12, and Romans 12. We have about 20 gifts listed. The lists have some overlap and most commentators do not believe they are necessarily exhaustive but representative, although they are thorough.

The list in Ephesians 4 has a unique characteristic about it. It doesn't so much list gifts as it does gifted leaders. Let's listen to what Paul says in Ephesians 4:11-12.

And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ;

Paul mentions four or five gifted leaders in verse 11. The reason I say four or five is that some take pastors and teachers to be separate while others believe pastors and teachers to be one type of person with two jobs. We'll get to that in greater detail as we go through this list, look at the gifted leader, and learn how the exalted Christ blessed his church – and through the church the world.

We begin with apostles. The word apostle simply means “a sent one” and in one sense we are all sent. We do not want to lose sight of this. We may not be sent across the world, but we can be sent to our friends or family members to witness. Christ Jesus himself is called an apostle, and he is the supremely sent one. We find this in Hebrews 3:1 which says, “Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession.” In John 17:18, before he was crucified, Jesus was praying to his Father and he said, “As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world.” Then, after his resurrection in John 20:21, he said, “as

the Father has sent Me, I also send you.” This forms a perfect bridge to the main use of apostle in the New Testament.

Jesus, the supreme apostle, selected twelve men to be his apostles, his special sent ones to Israel and the nations. These twelve were to be eyewitnesses of his resurrection and to proclaim it to Israel and the nations. Peter, James, John, Andrew, and the other apostles did just that. The religious leaders said they filled Jerusalem with their teaching and eventually they filled the whole land with the gospel of the crucified, risen Jesus. After a few months, maybe a year, we have this report of the success of the apostolic work in Acts 9:31: “So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace, being built up; and going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it continued to increase.”

This shows us what the primary gift of apostleship was for – to expand the church to new regions of the world. We can say that apostles were foundation layers of the church. Listen to how Paul described his ministry in 1 Corinthians 3:10, “According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation....” Paul’s apostolic work was to lay the foundation of the Church in different regions of the world. Our book of Ephesians says that apostles and prophets are the foundation of the Church with Christ Jesus being the cornerstone of that foundation. This is a gift of Christ to the Church.

Often, people ask, “Do we have apostles today?” And my answer is “No,” and “Yes!” Let me explain. We do not have apostles like the original 12. They were a special set of sent ones from Jesus who were to be eyewitnesses of his resurrection and to proclaim, first to Israel, that their Messiah had come. We should also include Paul in this list as the resurrected Jesus appeared to him and commissioned him to go to the Gentiles as a representative of Israel. We should also include the half-brothers of Jesus, James and Jude. All these were foundation layers of the Church of the resurrected, enthroned Lord. That foundation no longer must be laid. The Church must be built up now. So, my answer to the question, “do we have apostles today?” is “No, not like the 12 or like Paul.”

But as we survey the rest of the New Testament we find other uses of the word apostle and the expansion of the work of the church through them. For example, Barnabas was called an apostle. Timothy was an apostle. 2 Corinthians 8:23 and Philippians 2:25 speak of the apostles of churches and in Revelation we find references to apostles. These were men who advanced the cause of Christ into new regions of the world. They were not eyewitnesses of the resurrection but they were gifted by Christ with special power to help spread the foundation of the church into new areas. And do we need people like this today who are effective in spreading the gospel quickly into new areas of the world? My answer is yes. About 1/3 of the world has yet to hear the name of Jesus, let alone hear the entire good news that Jesus brought. While all God’s people should engage in some way in getting the Gospel out to the whole world, I believe that the risen Christ can give gifted leaders to plant the Church into new regions building it upon the foundation of the original apostles and prophets.

That is why my answer is both “no” and “yes”. No, we don’t have apostles like Paul, today. But we do have apostles, or sent ones of churches who are effective in planting new churches.

Let's move to the second kind of gifted leadership – prophets. And here we have the same kind of question as with the apostles. Do we have prophets today? And my answer is the same, “No,” and “Yes.” We do not have prophets like the biblical prophets of the Old and New Testament times. The prophets of those times received direct revelation from the Lord which became Scripture. And, I think it is important to emphasize something about those prophets that is most often misunderstood. When we think of prophets we think of them telling about events that would happen in the world before they happened. And that is true. That was part of their ministry as they foretold, particularly of the coming Messiah. But their primary ministry was to preach to the people and call them to repentance. If you read the great books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, massive books of 66, 52, and 48 chapters, you will find that 99% of their words dealt with the issues of their day and their calling God's people to repentance.

And so, do we have prophets today? And the answer is “No,” we don't have prophets who receive direct revelation from the Lord and who record them as Scripture about forthcoming events.

But the answer is also “yes,” because prophets also preached with power that was intended to bring conviction of sin and consolation from the Lord after the repentance. We find this in Acts 15:32 which says that two men by the names of “Judas and Silas, also being prophets themselves, exhorted and strengthened the brethren with a lengthy message.”

Do we need this today? Absolutely! We need prophetic speakers anointed by the Spirit of Christ to preach in powerful ways to bring conviction of sin among God's people. We need prophetic speakers who will preach the word humbly but fearlessly. We need prophetic speakers who understand the times in which we live and who can relate the truth of the revelation of Scripture to our times.

We need to ask the risen, enthroned Lord to grant this kind of prophetic and apostolic work in our churches in the United States and in the world to strengthen and equip the church. Remember that verse 12 goes with verse 11. God gave gifted leaders to equip the church. We'll be talking about that in the lessons to follow, but let's keep this in mind, spiritual gifts and spiritually gifted leaders come to the church not for private use and gain. As one man said, they are not toys to play with but tools to work with. They are given to make the Church strong so that the Church can do its work.

Would you pray with me about this right now? “Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word. We thank you for the apostles and prophets who stood in your counsel, who saw you, who heard you, who faithfully proclaimed your word, who wrote your word so that we might read it and obey it today. We want our lives to be built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets of old and upon Jesus Christ who is the cornerstone.

We thank you today, Father, for Jesus who has been exalted above the highest heavens and who has distributed the spoils of war, the gifts of the Spirit to his Church that the Church might advance over the enemies of the faith in our time.

Father, we pray for our times, that you would continue to raise up gifted leaders with apostolic gifts to expand the church into new areas around the world and prophetic gifts who will proclaim your truth with power and conviction that we might be a repentant, holy, and humble people. We ask it

Word of God, Speak! – Ephesians – Wonders of the Spiritual World
www.WGSministries.org – info@WGSministries.org - ©2017 WGS Ministries

all that your Church would be built up and become fully mature. And we ask in the name of the victorious, conquering hero, Jesus Christ. Amen!"