



Christ Reformed Community Church

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“The Work of the Word” Ephesians 4:11–12

All right, well let’s take our Bibles and turn to Ephesians chapter 4 where we have planted our feet over the last several weeks, Ephesians chapter 4; and this morning we are going to continue our walk through Ephesians chapter 4. I’m becoming more and more convinced that Ephesians chapter 4 is absolutely foundational to have a proper ecclesiology; that is, a proper doctrine of the church, and I have purposely decided to really slow down in Ephesians chapter 4 because we are a church plant. And being that we are a church plant, I think Ephesians 4 is something that we must wrap our hearts and wrap our minds around, understanding a proper ecclesiology.

Last week we saw in verses 7–11 of Ephesians chapter 4 that Christ sovereignly distributes spiritual gifts to whom He will. We saw that in verse 7 where we read that *“grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ’s gift.”* We then saw following that that Christ earned His right to distribute these gifts, verses 8–10: *“he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.”* Verse 9: *“(In saying, ‘He ascended,’ what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? He who descended,”* verse 10, *“is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.)”* Christ earned the right through His death, burial, and resurrection, His atonement to then give gifts to the church. He won that right by being obedient to the Father. The Father gave Him that right, and as He stood at the right hand of the Father, He distributed these gifts.

Now, there’s a verse that we didn’t look to that I want you to turn to in Hebrews chapter 2. It might be a verse that you normally wouldn’t think of associated with Ephesians 4, but it’s a verse that I think is a parallel verse, Hebrews 2, and it says in verse 4 that *“God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.”* The beginning of that verse says that there were *“signs and wonders and various miracles.”* That refers to the apostolic age of the church where there were resurrections, there were healings, there was the speaking of tongues, there was the gift of prophecy, but then it says at the end of verse 4, *“[He] also bore witness by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.”* That is, distributed according to the will of God. We could say Ephesians 4:7, according to the will of Christ. All the gifts that Jesus gives to the church are therefore given according to His will. They’re given, we could say, according to His authority. They are given to demonstrate His reign over the church.

And in Ephesians chapter 4, the foundational gift that He has given to the church is the gift of teaching. He has given the teaching of the Word, or we could say the preaching of the Word, to equip the body, to equip the body to utilize their spiritually unique giftedness. And that is really

the focus of verse 11 where Paul says, “*And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers,*” verse 12, “*to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.*” As this passage unfolds before our eyes, it’s focusing on these teaching offices of the church, which all are similar in the sense that they proclaim God’s Word to God’s people. The focus naturally becomes the end of verse 11, where it speaks about “*shepherds and teachers.*” That is one office. That is, in the new covenant era, the office that is established by Christ once the apostles die. Once the apostolic age has been done away with, it is the shepherds and teachers who are the chief people in the church who wield the Sword of the Spirit now that the apostles are gone, and they teach the Word of God. We learn in this passage that the Sword of the Spirit being wielded by the shepherds and teachers does not destroy the body of Christ, but it builds up the body of Christ. The Sword of the Lord does not produce death, but it produces life in the body of Christ. The heart of this passage, therefore, is not pastors and teachers. The heart of this passage is not the teaching office of pastor-teacher. The heart of this passage is not the spiritual gifts of the rest of the body of Christ, which does the work of ministry as verse 12 says. No, the heart of this passage is the work of the Word of God. The focus of this passage is the sovereignty of God by which in His providence, He has chosen the Sword of the Lord being wielded from the pulpit to build up the body of Christ.

What we find is that God’s wise purpose in giving different gifts to those in the body is not meant to produce competition and friction, but it is meant to produce teamwork and unity. Back in chapter 2 and verse 14, we read, “*For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility.*” The gospel of Jesus Christ has established peace. It is a peace that has been sovereignly created by God, but as we saw at the beginning of chapter 4, it is a peace that we are to keep. It is not a peace that we create—God creates the peace through the gospel—but it is a peace that we are to keep. Verse 3: We are to be “*eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*” There is unity in the midst of diversity. Paul said in verse 4, “*There is one body,*” there is “*one Spirit,*” there is “*one hope.*” He said in verse 5, there is “*one Lord, one faith, one baptism.*” He said in verse 6, there is “*one God and Father of all.*” There is one. There is one. There is one. There is one body. There is unity. There is unity, however, in diversity. God has uniquely gifted everyone in the church with a particular spiritual gift, but there is unity because of the gospel. There is diversity in the exercise of those gifts. The particular gift that you have given to you by a sovereign God “*according to the measure of Christ’s gift,*” but you were all given the same Spirit and the same Christ you are united to. The model of this is the Trinity which comes out in chapter 4 and verse 4 which speaks about the Spirit, verse 5 which speaks about the Lord; namely, the Lord Jesus Christ, and verse 6 which speaks about God the Father. God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit—a unified God that has diversity in terms of the persons of the Trinity, each expressing their various roles in accomplishing our redemption.

That is the model. That is the template for the body of Christ, which is the church. There is unity in the midst of diversity. Each member saw their role in light of the unified plan of redemption. And each member of the body of Christ sees their role in light of the particular gift given to them by Christ and empowered by the Spirit of God for the growth of the body. Notice verse 16, for instance. Paul says, “*from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.*” Now, all of this can be ultimately traced back to a work of the Word. A work of

the Word begins with godly leadership. That’s where verse 11 focuses on; all the teaching offices of the church ending with shepherds-teachers, godly leadership, more particularly the minister, or as he’s called here, the pastor-teacher, the shepherd-teacher. That’s where it starts. Sadly, you and I both know that many Christians take their cue from pop evangelical culture, and they listen to what it says instead of what God’s Word says, and there have been many confusing views of leadership in the church. John Stott in his commentary provides three unbiblical views of the working together of church leadership with the body that prevails today. And I want to mention these three views because I want to sort of deprogram us before we even get into the text and give you some common views of the way Christians typically view a pastor and the elders and then the rest of the body. And, of course, I’m giving these to you so that you understand what an improper view of the church is so that when we look at Ephesians 4, you will be convinced of what a proper view of the church is and then a proper ecclesiology of the church as we immerse ourselves in Ephesians 4.

So, the first view that is improper is what we might call “clericalism.” It’s what John Stott calls “clericalism.” What is clericalism? This is the view that the minister is paid to do the work of the ministry. The minister is paid, and everyone else watches. Everyone else watches. Sometimes they support financially, but they always feel that it’s their job to tell the minister how to do his job. John Stott says that “this clericalism was fed by the Roman Catholic Church in their institution of the priesthood,” and of course we would believe that every believer is a priest—not a segmented group of people. I say that this is also fed by laziness in the pew where people don’t want to do work. They would rather pay the pastor and tell him how to do his job. It’s sort of the idea of people saying, “The pastor needs to do his job and leave me alone.” On the other hand, I think it can go the other way if we are going to be objective and fair. The people might say “Do your job and leave me alone,” but the preacher often says, “I don’t need your help, and I want to be the center of attention,” sort of a Diotrephes approach who wanted to always be the center of attention in 3 John 9–10. We aren’t to do that. Pastors are not, Peter says, to domineer the flock. They are not to be the center of attention; and as we are going to see in this passage, it is not the pastor-teacher who is the center of attention. It is not the elders who are the center of attention. It is the Word of God that is the center of attention that builds up the body of Christ. Nevertheless, there is prevailing in our culture, clericalism. There’s the pastor. He has a job to do. It’s the congregation’s job to hold him accountable for what he does as they sit and watch. That is not what Ephesians 4 teaches. That’s clericalism.

Secondly, the second view that Stott brings up is what we might call “anticlericalism.” Anticlericalism—this is the exact opposite. The people in the pew view all ministers as corrupt; so, this is a prevailing view. They conclude we’re better off without ministers, or if we have ministers, we must control them, or they will destroy the church. So, this is an overreaction to clericalism—anticlericalism. Now, let me just say, there are definitely delinquent and disqualified pastors and elders in the church today, but there are also some very, very faithful ones as well. And we need to be very careful not to have a reactionary view to clericalism. There is no one in the pulpit who is perfect, and there is no one in the pew who is perfect. The issue here is that there must be trust between the leadership and the congregation, or there won’t be a healthy church. And so, if the view is clericalism, you have a perverted view of the clergy. If there is anticlericalism, you have no view of the clergy or a perverted view and a corrupted view of the clergy that doesn’t let them do their job.

So, Stott says there is clericalism, there is anticlericalism, and then here’s the third view. The third view he calls “dualism.” Dualism says this—this is also unbiblical—since there is clergy and laity, and the clergy have one job and the laity have another job, then just let the clergy do their job, the laity do their job. Let them do their jobs in their own spheres, and never shall the twain meet. Never shall they overlap. This obviously produces rivalries within the church, and I can give you one example of this in my past experience. Not necessarily that this actually happened but whenever you have a Baptist form of polity that has a pastor and deacons, and particularly, if you have a pastor with a whole staff, as I have had in the past, you have a pastor and a staff who are working all week together formulating and strategizing and praying and working to make the church all that it needs to be. And you only see the deacons three times a week, and then once a month for a pastor-deacons meeting, and oftentimes, if you are not careful, this can be problematic because there’s not trust between the deacons. And then the pastor and the staff and rivalries can set in. Although I’ve never pastored a Presbyterian church, I understand that sometimes this conflict and friction can arise between the session at a local church level and the presbytery at the regional level in the Presbyterian form of church government. This is sort of a dualism. This is pitting the pastors and the staff or the pastor and the session against the laity, or all the pastors against the lay elders—divisions that aren’t meant to be in the body of Christ.

What we need to understand from Ephesians 4 is that the church will only flourish in health when God’s Word is the focus. God’s Word must be allowed to do its work. There can’t be people in the church vying for attention with agendas, vying for leadership roles and all the rest. There must be godly leadership that is qualified that know how to handle the Word of God, and this begins with the pastor-teacher. It is interesting and is probably so simple it doesn’t need to be mentioned but does need to be mentioned in our horrendous evangelical world today, that numerical growth is not the emphasis of the New Testament. Ephesians 4 is the go-to passage for the growth of the church, and it says nothing about numerical growth. Instead, it speaks about the spiritual growth of the body in love. And why is that? Here’s the reason. Because the latter—that is, spiritual growth in love—is indispensable. It is the prerequisite of the former. That is, numerical growth of the church. In other words, the body of Christ, as it grows spiritually, inevitably will produce numerical growth.

And where does all of this begin? It begins with the pastor-teacher. It begins with the teaching and the preaching of the Word of God, as we’re going to see this morning where the Word of God is unleashed and the saints are equipped to do the work of ministry, and as that happens, you have a spiritually healthy body where gifts are being used. It’s an every-member ministry and therefore the Lord will bless that, and the church will grow. Why will it grow? Well, because the church becomes a light to the community. The church becomes salt to the community. The world sees that; they hear the gospel; they’re drawn to that. Numerical growth will not happen apart from everyone using their spiritual gifts, and particularly, the spiritual gifts they’ve been given; not someone else’s. As verse 7 says, “*But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ’s gift.*” And further to the point, a strong church will not only have strong leaders, but it will also have strong and willing followers. Such is so critical for any church, and especially for a church plant. I think that you would agree.

So, what we want to do this morning, we’re going to just begin an adventure on this, begin looking at verses 11 and following, and we are going to focus on verses 11 and 12. But what Paul does in verses 11 through 16 is he helps us see the work of the Word, the work of the World. And Paul is a master at making an argument. He first gives to us the general argument of the work of the Word. That’s verses 11 and 12. Then he gives to us the specific work of the Word in verses 13 through 16. So, we’re going to begin to look at this morning the general work of the Word, the outer circle of this in verses 11 and 12, and then in weeks later we will look at verses 13 through 16, specifically how the Word works in a congregation. Of course, Paul’s goal, as he writes under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, is for the church to be committed to the work of the Word to understand that the power for the spiritual growth of the church and then what follows from that, the numerical growth of the church, begins and ends with the teaching and the preaching of God’s Holy Word.

So, I just have two points this morning, and I’m not convinced how far I will get. Maybe I’ll only get through the first point. That’s okay. I’m purposely working slowly through this passage. What we find in verses 11 and 12 in this general argument of the work of the Word, we find in verse number 11 the teaching positions in the Word of God, and then we find in verse 12 the teaching purposes of the Word of God. So, the teaching positions in the Word of God, verse 11, those teaching offices that God has given to the church as gifts for the Word to be unleashed and disseminated. The teaching positions that we find in the Word of God, followed, verse 12, by the teaching purposes of the Word of God. Now, this is the impact of the teachers, the preachers doing their job. There’s a short-term goal and a long-term goal to equip the saints for the work of ministry to the building up of the body of Christ. So, those are our two points: the teaching positions in the Word of God, verse 11; the teaching purposes of the Word of God, in verse 12. Let’s see how far we get this morning.

Let’s begin in verse 11, the teaching positions in the Word of God, and there are four of them. Notice your Bibles. Paul says, “*And he...*” that’s speaking about Christ who is the antecedent in verses 8 through 10, “*And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers.*” Notice, again, that is four offices, not five: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the shepherds and teachers. That last category is not two offices. It’s the same office with a dual function. Now, the order is important. I want you to turn back with me to 1 Corinthians chapter 12. Paul is writing in an organized way. He’s mentioning the apostles first, then the prophets, then the shepherds and teachers. He does the same thing in 1 Corinthians 12:28. Notice your Bibles: “*And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers.*” The same order that we find in Ephesians 4. That order is important because that is a chronological order. We’re dealing with the offices particular to the new covenant, and in the new covenant, there have been apostles, there have been prophets, there have been evangelists, and now there are shepherds-teachers. First there were apostles, then there were prophets, then there are shepherds and teachers. And all of this flows, as I said, from verse 7.

Notice the first word in verse 11 is the word *and*. “*And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers.*” That’s flowing from what he said in verse 7, “*But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ’s gift.*” He went into a sort of parenthetical rabbit trail in verses 8 through 10 to speak about the proof that Christ has a right to distribute these gifts, but he’s really following back on the heels of verse 7 when he says “*And,*” in verse 11, “*he gave.*” He’s returning back to the gifts that Christ has given to the church, and

he’s focusing in—please note—not on every gift that Christ gave to the church but the specific gift of teaching. It is not a stretch to say that the offices of teaching, in and of themselves, were gifts, in and of themselves, that Christ gave to the church; and the first office he lists is the office of the apostles. Notice verse 11: “*And he gave the apostles.*” He, that is Jesus. “*He gave the apostles.*” Who were the apostles? The apostles had a job, and their job was to proclaim and teach God’s revelation. They also received revelation from God. That was the apostles. The Greek word is *apostolos*. *Apostolos* has a basic meaning, which literally means “a sent one.” Now, that can refer to a number of different people in the Bible. For instance, in John 13:16, Jesus actually refers to all Christians as “sent ones.” The same word is used there: *apostles, apostolos*. There is a sense in which all Christians are sent ones—right?—because we are sent to proclaim the gospel. Jesus also uses the verb *apostellō*, the verb form, in saying that the Father sent Him. In John 17:18 and John 20:21, Jesus is referred to as a “sent one” or an apostle, you could say. Hebrews 3:1, Jesus is referred to as “*the apostle and high priest of our confession.*” In 2 Corinthians 8:23, this word *apostolos* is translated “messengers,” but it’s referring to those who were sent out by the church—sent ones, sent out by the church—referring to Titus and others. And it is also used in Acts 14:14 to refer to Barnabas as an apostle, one sent from the church; and even Silas and Timothy in 1 Thessalonians 2:6. And in 2 Corinthians 11:13, Paul uses this word to refer to false apostles. The word itself, *apostle*, however, is not used again after Acts chapter 16. The only apostle who was replaced was Judas. He was replaced by Matthias, and then later Paul was added. Paul says of himself in 1 Corinthians 15:8 that he was “*the last of all.*” He was an apostle “*untimely born.*”

So, Jesus might be an apostle, as He is called in Hebrews 3:1. You might be an apostle in the sense that you’re a sent one. Titus might have been an apostle and Barnabas sent out of the church, but those are all lowercase *a* apostles. What Paul is referring to here in verse 11 are *the* apostles. Notice there is that definite article: “*And he gave the apostles.*” He is referring specifically to the office of apostle. He is referring to the original twelve disciples minus Judas, who rejected and betrayed Jesus, plus Matthias who replaced Judas, plus the apostle Paul. It is *the* apostles. This is the group of men that Jesus strategically called and equipped and sent these men on a particular mission. These were the twelve men He chose. By the way, twelve is not an insignificant number. In the Old Testament, twelve represented the twelve tribes of Israel. It was a summary number to identify Israel as God’s people. In the New Testament, Jesus began with a new Israel, the foundation of the church, the twelve disciples, to place them in contrast to the apostate national of Israel. He was establishing the New Testament church, and these apostles, this particular group of men—listen to this—had the very authority of Christ in both the words that they proclaimed and the words that they wrote down. Just as with elders in the church today, these apostles had certain qualifications they had to meet.

First of all, they had to be a witness to the risen Christ. All of them were, including the apostle Paul, who witnessed and spoke to Christ on the road to Damascus. Secondly, they had to be personally called and sent by Christ; and third, they had to confirm their message by signs, wonders and miracles. That’s exactly what Paul says in 2 Corinthians 12:12. Paul says, “*The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with utmost patience, with signs and wonders and mighty works.*” In fact, I quoted earlier Hebrews chapter 2. You turn there to Hebrews chapter 2, and that is another verse that speaks about the authenticating signs of an apostle. Hebrews 2:4: “*God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.*” So, the apostles in verse 11 are a pretty elite group of people. They were

commissioned and called by Christ Himself. They were, as we already saw in Ephesians, the foundation of the church, right? Turn back to Ephesians 2:20. Paul says that the household of God, verse 20, is “*built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone.*” That’s a beautiful image. Christ is the cornerstone and, He gathered around Him when He walked upon this earth the disciples; that is the authoritative apostles that He commissioned.

Again, in chapter 3:4, “*the mystery of Christ,*” verse 4, “*which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations,*” i.e., Old Testament prophets, “*as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit.*” That is exactly what happened, right? Jesus said in John 14:26, “*But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.*” He told the apostles, “You will be My authoritative witnesses. You will have supernatural recall by the Spirit of God to give to the church all of these things that I told you. You will authenticate by signs, wonders, and miracles that you walked with Me, the very Son of God, you talked with Me, and that I commissioned you to be the foundation of the church.” Paul was a Johnny-come-lately apostle, “*one untimely born.*” He called himself the inferior of all the apostles because of this. He only meant by that not that he did not have equal authority with the apostles but because he seemed to be such an odd selection, but really not much more of an odd selection than Matthew, the tax collector, or any of the other apostles who were lowly fishermen, uneducated. Now, Paul was equal with all the other apostles, and all the other apostles recognized him as the apostle to the gentiles. Paul said this in his letter to the Galatians, that, verse 15, when had been set apart before he was born, he was called by God’s grace, who “*was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him [Christ] among the Gentiles.*” That was Christ, and He then was preached by Paul, and the other apostles confirmed and authenticated the apostle Paul as a true apostle. So, back to Ephesians 4:11, “*he gave the apostles.*”

Let me just say this; there are no longer apostles today. I understand if we want to use that term *apostolos*, “sent ones” in the sense that all Christians are sent ones, we can use it that way. But there is no longer an office of apostle; that has passed away. What does continue into today is not the office of apostle, but apostolic ministry does continue into today. Where does apostolic ministry continue today? Only through the witness of the Holy Scriptures. The apostles are the foundation of the church. When we read the New Testament or when the pastor preaches the New Testament, he is continuing the apostolic ministry of the apostles so long as he is standing on the authority of God’s Word. But the apostles themselves and that office had a unique, unrepeatable, redemptive, historical role and function in the life of the church. The apostolic office has ceased to exist, and it ceased to exist once the canon of Scripture was completed. It’s been completed. So, the church today continues the legacy of the apostolic ministry when it does what the early church did in Acts 2:42, and it devotes itself “*to the apostles’ teaching, the apostles’ teaching.*” I say all of that to say because that’s ultimately where Paul is driving. The last office he mentions is shepherds and teachers. The only office that I believe continues into this day—I’m giving you a hint before we even go through the others—it continues into this day, and it is the job of the pastor-teacher to only stand on the authority of the apostles to deliver what they delivered, the message they proclaimed if the church is to be orthodox and strong and built-up and equipped as the body of Christ.

So, there are four offices. We’re talking about the teaching positions in the Word of God, and we’ve mentioned first the apostles. Notice second in verse 11: *“And he gave the apostles”* secondly, notice your Bibles, and *“the prophets.”* This follows the apostles in order because the prophets served the apostles. The prophets were subservient to the apostles. Back in 1 Corinthians 12:28, *“first apostles, second prophets.”* They were subservient, the prophets were, to the apostles. They are listed, aren’t they, as the foundation of the church along with the apostles in Ephesians 2:20? The church is *“built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets.”* Again, they’re mentioned in second place there because they are subservient to the apostles. Now, we know and we’ve already talked about this when we went through Ephesians 2:20 and Ephesians 3:5, that there were Old Testament prophets, but that is not what Paul is talking about here. In the context it’s clear that he is speaking about New Testament prophets. Back to chapter 3:5, *“[The] mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations,”* i.e. Old Testament prophets, *“as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit.”*

So, it’s New Testament prophets, but there is an analogy here, isn’t there? Just as in the Old Testament, New Testament prophets, as an office, received direct revelation from God, and they, like Old Testament prophets, declared: *“Thus says the Lord.”* They were helpers to the apostles. It was the apostles who would judge the validity of their prophecy. It was the apostles who could override their revelation as inaccurate if they wanted to, and this is one of the reasons we no longer have prophets in the church. Why do we no longer have prophets in the church? It’s easy. Because we no longer have apostles. If you don’t have apostles, you have no one that can verify the authority of a supposed prophet. Both have passed away. They were the foundation of the church, the apostles and prophets. It took the authority of an apostle to confirm the accuracy of a purported prophecy. Since apostles no longer exist; therefore, prophets no longer exist. Prophets did receive new revelation, and this new revelation sometimes was brand new revelation. Sometimes it simply confirmed or clarified revelation already given. It seems if you do a study of prophesy in the New Testament, that the prophets had an intermittent ability to prophesy. They were restricted. They were restricted.

There’s an example of this. I believe it is in Acts chapter 11. Take your Bibles and turn with me to Acts chapter 11. It’s always dangerous to say, *“I think so,”* and ask you to turn there, but in this case I’m right. Acts 11:27: *“Now in these days prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. And one of them named Agabus stood up and foretold by the Spirit that there would be a great famine over all the world (this took place in the days of Claudius).”* So, Luke is recording that this prophecy came true in the days of Claudius. *“So the disciples determined, every one according to his ability, to send relief to the brothers living in Judea.”* So, here, you have an intermittent revelation given to Agabus the prophet, and the apostles confirm the validity of this. Let me give you another example. Turn in your Bibles to Acts chapter 21. This is a more common example, Acts chapter 21, and this is the same prophet, Agabus, but it relates directly to the apostle Paul. Acts 21:10, Luke says, *“While we were staying for many days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea.”* Now, notice what happens, verse 11: *“And coming to us, he took Paul’s belt,”* this is a little strange, *“and bound his own feet and hands and said, ‘Thus says the Holy Spirit, ‘This is how the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.’”* Verse 12: *“When we heard this, we and the people there urged him,”* that is, Paul, *“not to go up to Jerusalem. Then Paul answered, ‘What are you doing, weeping and*

breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be imprisoned but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.”

Did you catch how the prophecy is given by a prophet, Agabus, but it is only confirmed as valid by the apostles who urge the apostle Paul not to go there? And the apostle Paul says, “Wait a second. This is a valid prophecy. I better go there and submit to the Lord’s will.” That’s why I said there are no longer apostles; therefore, there can no longer be prophets because apostles confirmed whether or not a prophecy came true. Paul speaks about the gift of prophesy in 1 Corinthians chapter 14. He says in verse 3, *“On the other hand, the one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation.”* So, that seems to be the purpose of a prophecy; to upbuild, to encourage, to comfort. Now, that wasn’t that encouraging for Paul to receive that prophecy from Agabus that he was going to be bound and arrested, but there was a comfort in that because Paul knew—didn’t he?—in that moment that that was God’s will for his life. And Paul wanted to be in the center of God’s will. In that sense, the prophecy was an encouragement. It was as confirmation that God was sovereign, and Paul took it that way. That was the role of a prophet. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 14:31, *“For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged.”* And be encouraged. So, it seems that encouragement was the role of prophecy.

Prophecy was not what you see today in the church, okay? It was not some trumped-up, weird prophecy that can’t be confirmed that draws attention to the person who says, “Oh, I received a vision from the Lord.” That does not happen today. The apostles had a broad ministry. The prophets were subservient to the apostles and functioned within the life of the local church, as they submitted to the apostles. The thing to see in all of this is that both the apostles and the prophets were teachers in the church, and another thing that’s important to see, just as the apostolic office has ceased with the foundation of the church now being laid with the death of the apostles, the canon of Scripture complete, so too has the prophetic office ceased. But just as the apostolic ministry continues through the witness of God’s Holy Word, I think it’s fair to say that the ministry of prophecy continues so long as the man of God behind the pulpit is giving the same message of the apostles and prophets of the New Testament. In fact, the Puritans were notorious for using the word *prophecy* as synonymous with preaching, and I think that’s okay. Preachers can still preach prophetically. Here’s the difference: preachers today preach prophetically not because they give new revelation but because they preach old revelation with the freshness and clarity and the power of the Spirit. In other words, I only need to hear someone preach one time before I know they are called to teach. How do I know that? Not because of anything within me, but because I sense the power of the Spirit of God. They speak prophetically, and you sense that. That is why anyone called to the ministry to preach must have the confirmation of the church. There is an awareness that this man speaks prophetically; not new revelation but old revelation spoken powerfully, authoritatively, freshly with clarity and with authority. So, the prophetic ministry continues, the apostolic ministry continues, but the office of apostle, the office of prophet—those are done. The foundation of the church has been laid.

What is the greatest passage of Scripture to prove this? Well, it’s a passage that you are very familiar with, 2 Timothy 3:16–17: *“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”* That not only affirms the authority of God’s Word

but, listen, that affirms the sufficiency of God’s Word. The only thing the church needs today—it doesn’t need the office of apostle. It doesn’t need the office of prophet. It simply needs “*Scripture [that] is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.*” Parallel passage, Ephesians 4. The pastor-teacher teaches the church the Word of God. They are equipped, they are built up, and as each one is built up and grows in their sanctification, you have a strong body of Christ on your hands. The focus is not the preacher. It’s the sufficient Word of God. It’s the Word of God that does the work. This has always been the case, hasn’t it? In the Old Testament the prophets spoke the Word, and it did its work. In the New Testament with the office of apostle, the apostle spoke authoritatively. The Word of God did its work. The church was built. The New Testament prophets gave new revelation, confirmed the revelation given by the apostles, and the church was built. Souls were saved.

This is a message the church must hear today. There aren’t any sort of creative, manipulative, church growth, church planning strategies other than the one Paul gives here. Preach the Word. Be ready in season and out of season. That is how the church grows. That is how the church is built. Jesus does not want a competitor. He says He will build His church, and the way that He builds it is through the teaching offices of the Word of God. It is so clear here that it’s frustrating to me that people don’t recognize that even within conservative evangelicalism today. The final Word has been spoken. Hebrews 1:1, “*Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son.*” The apostles spoke by the authority of the Son, the prophets spoke by the authority of the Son, and any time God’s Word is authoritatively preached, that is Christ speaking. And where Christ speaks, souls are saved, and the body of Christ is built up. You don’t have to be any smarter than that. It’s simple, so simple that it is stupid-simple, and yet people want to talk about this strategy and that strategy, how to grow the church, how to build the church, how to plant a church. Forget all of it. Focus on Ephesians 4. This is how it works. Let the Word of God do its work. That’s what Paul is saying.

Now, there is a third office here. Notice back in Ephesians 4:11, “*And he gave the apostles, the prophets,*” and now we come, number three, to “*the evangelists, the evangelists.*” And a couple of things I want you to observe carefully, the definite article: “*the evangelists.*” So let me just get this part out of the way. All Christians should share the good news of Jesus Christ. That is clear. We’re all apostles in the sense that we are lower-case *a* apostles sent out into the world to proclaim the gospel, and let me just go further on that; God Himself is an evangelist. Listen to this verse: Galatians 3:8, “*And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith,*” listen, “*preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, ‘In you shall all the nations be blessed.’*” Now, who said that to Abraham? God said that to Abraham, and Paul says that God preached the gospel. The same word that is used here for evangelists: *euangelizō, evangelize, or evangelist.* We “gospel” to the world. God Himself “gospelled” to Abraham. He made a promise: “[*Abraham*] *in you shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.*” God preached the gospel to Abraham. Not only that, what do we learn at Christmastime? We learn that even the angels in heaven are evangelists. When the Christ-child was born, in Luke 2:10, “*And the angel said to them, ‘Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people...I bring you good news.’*” “I gospel to you this great salvation.”

Not only that, Jesus was an evangelist. Luke 20:1: “*One day, as Jesus was teaching the people in the temple,*” Luke says, “*and preaching the gospel, the chief priests and the scribes with the elders [and the Pharisees] came up...to him.*” So, Jesus preached the gospel; the angels preached the gospel; God preaches the gospel. Jesus is an evangelist; God is an evangelist; the apostles are an evangelist; angels are evangelists; all Christians are evangelists. Now, now that I’ve gotten all that out of the way, that’s not at all what Paul is speaking about in verse 11. Notice again your Bibles, Ephesians 4:11, *the evangelists*, definite article. That shows this is a particular group. Just like there were *the* apostles, and *the* prophets, there are *the* evangelists; those, I think, that have a unique special gift to speak the gospel to the lost and see converts come to know Christ. *Euangelistēs* is the word here, “one who proclaims good news.” It’s difficult to be dogmatic and perhaps we shouldn’t, but it’s clearly not all Christians. The only time this noun is used anywhere in the Bible other than here is in Acts 21:8 to refer to Philip, who was an evangelist. It’s used again in 2 Timothy 4:5, but Paul stops short there of calling Timothy an evangelist. He tells Timothy to do the work of an evangelist. So, we can’t even be certain that Timothy is an example of an evangelist. So, who are these people? If you read older commentators, they believe that evangelists as an office passed away with the apostles and prophets. They believe that evangelists were apostolic lieutenants, to copy the language of one commentator. They were, to use my own language, an almost-apostle but not quite. So, Timothy was an almost-apostle. I mean, he was right there with Paul, and Paul even said that “We write this letter to you.” And Paul was an associate—or Titus or Silas or Barnabas—traveling missionaries, church planters, if you will.

Then other people see the term *evangelists*—and John MacArthur is one of them—he sees New Testament evangelists as missionaries and church planters, he says, much like the apostles but without the title and miraculous gifts. These men went where Christ was not named and led people to faith in the Savior. They had taught new believers the Word, built them up, and then moved on to new territory. MacArthur goes on to say that there ought to be several evangelists in each church because otherwise the church won’t grow. The job of the pastor-teacher is not to get new converts. The job of the pastor-teacher is not to go out and win souls to Christ. His job is to handle the Word of God each Lord’s Day, and evangelists are the ones that are to do the work of winning the lost. MacArthur may be right. There are, I think, some issues with this view, just in the sense that when you read Acts chapter 8—just turn back there with me to Acts chapter 8 for a moment. I think, MacArthur is right in the sense that the church will not grow without evangelists, but the question is does the office of evangelist continue today? The only evangelist that we know for certain existed in the New Testament was Philip, and notice verse 4 of Acts chapter 8: “*Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word. Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ.*” Okay, so here is Philip being an evangelist, right? Then we read in verses 26 and following that he witnesses to the Ethiopian eunuch. The eunuch is converted. He is baptized in the river. You know the details of that. And then skip down to verse 40 of Acts 8: “*But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he passed through he preached the gospel to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.*”

So, Philip did the work of an evangelist, but it seems that he did this outside of the local church. He is traveling. He is visiting. Now, he may have been commissioned by the local church. I won’t dispute that, but this doesn’t seem to be an office in the local church. This just seems to be a spiritual gift that the guy is using, and he is using it to the glory of God, and converts are brought into the church because he is using his spiritual gift. So, I’m not exactly sure who the evangelists

are. Were they gifted beyond normal and able to win the lost to Christ and they worked closely with the apostles and prophets, and they were part of the foundation of the church, and then passed away? Possibly, probably, but why aren’t they listed in Ephesians 2:20 as being part of the foundation of the church? Well, that might be because they didn’t receive new revelation like apostles and prophets did. Perhaps the best solution may be to see that just as the apostolic ministry continues today through the witness of the Word, and the prophetic ministry continues today through preaching old revelation in fresh ways, that evangelistic ministry continues today by those who are gifted in the church to teach the Word of God to the lost.

Here’s an analogy that is similar. Turn with me to 1 Timothy chapter 5, and this is ultimately where we’re going as we move onto to the fourth point, so we might as well just move there now. 1 Timothy 5:17, notice what it says, and this is just an analogy that I’m giving you: “*Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching.*” So, we know all elders, 1 Timothy 3:2, must be able to teach, all of them, but that’s different than what Paul is saying here. He is saying there are some elders who rule well that are to be considered worthy of double honor. What is that? Well, the first layer of honor is that of being an elder. The second layer of honor is the rest of verse 17, “*Those who labor in preaching and teaching,*” are to receive the honor of being paid a full-time salary. Verse 18: “*For the Scripture says, ‘You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain,’ and, ‘The laborer deserves his wages.’*” So, I’m just giving you an analogy here to say that every elder must be able to teach, but not every elder is called and equipped and educated and has the same level of giftedness to labor in the Word and doctrine on a weekly basis, preaching the Word of God. That’s an analogy to say if that is true with elders, which obviously it is, then it could be true with people in the church who are gifted with evangelism.

So, all Christians are called to evangelize, but there are some that are particularly gifted to devote attention to that. You could refer to evangelists as the obstetricians of the church. They bring new births into the church. They’re in the narthex of the church, the entry point of the church, birthing people in as they preach the gospel. They have various ministries, maybe evangelistic preaching, maybe one-on-one witnessing to the lost, witnessing to strangers, pleading with others to come to Christ. The point that I think Paul is making is that the office of evangelist has passed away. The gift of evangelism has not, and if the church is going to be built, there must be those who are gifted with evangelism who will go to the lost. That’s how the church grows that seeks converts. It’s not the pastor-teacher’s job to do that. Timothy does the work of an evangelist, and he does that from the pulpit. It is the work of those specifically gifted with evangelism that go out and seek the lost. I think that’s Paul’s point. Those gifted, those that have a burning passion for the lost are to use that gift so the church grows and is built up.

So, turn back with me to Ephesians chapter 4, and we’ll notice the fourth and final point of verse 11. We’re talking about the teaching positions in the Word of God: first the apostles, then the prophets, then the evangelists. Here’s the fourth category: the shepherds and teachers, *the* shepherds and teachers. Notice again the definite article *the* shepherds and teachers. There’s not another definite article before teachers, so it doesn’t say *the* shepherds and *the* teachers. It’s one office, the shepherds-teachers or the pastor-teachers, pastor “hyphen” teachers. This is a single ministry. This is a single office with a dual function; one of pastoring, the Greek word *poimén*. The synonym is shepherding, indicating protection, care, leadership over the flock. And then

teaching, which is their primary duty, which is protecting, caring, and leading through disseminating God’s Word. Notice that conjunction *and*. “The shepherds *and* teachers.” The word *and* could literally be rendered *that is*. So, you could read it this way: *The* shepherds or *the* pastors; that is, the teachers. It’s one office, I think, in the church.

These two terms are used together again in 1 Timothy chapter 5. If you turn back there—we just went from there—but 1 Timothy 5:17: “*Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching.*” *Didaskalos*, that’s the verb form there of the noun form in Ephesians 4, teachers. That is their chief job. Peter refers to elders as shepherds. In fact, in 1 Peter 5:1–2, he uses the term shepherd, overseer, and elder—all three—because they’re synonymous terms: elder, *presbyteros*, shepherd, *poimén*, overseer, *episkopos*. They’re all the same person. And what do they do? They feed the flock of God. Here’s the point; with the passing of the apostolic age, the last office that remains in the church is mentioned in verse 11. It’s the pastor-teacher. It’s the highest office of appeal in the local church. It’s mentioned last not because it’s least in importance; because it’s last in chronological order. First Corinthians 12:28, first apostles, then prophets, then teachers. It’s the only office that continues perpetually. Second Timothy 2:2: “*And what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.*” It is an office that is to continue, and while the office of apostle does not continue, the principle of what the apostles did does continue.

What did the apostles do in Acts 6:4? They said we will select seven men deacons among us, and then “*We,*” Acts 6:4, “*will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.*” That fits perfectly with Ephesians 4:11. A shepherd is a teacher. He devotes himself to the ministry of the Word. Shepherd suggests tenderness, gentleness, patience, nurturing God’s people. Teaching suggests protecting, warding off the wolves that might come. Ironically, Paul told the elders of this particular church that there was coming a day in which, he says:

[You need to] pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them.

Paul knew there was coming a day after his departure in which shepherds-teachers would play a critical role because all the apostles would be dead, and the only office remaining perpetually is that of a shepherd-teacher; that is, a pastor-teacher, one who is able to teach, 1 Timothy 3:2. And that is why historically the church has really honed in on 1 Timothy 5:17. There is a plurality of elders, but there always seems to be one man who is called the pastor-teacher who is educated, equipped, has skill at preaching, teaching, handling the Word of God that is to labor in Word and doctrine. What did Jesus tell Peter when He restored him to apostolic ministry in John 21? He said, “*[Peter] do you love me? Feed my lambs. [Peter] do you love me? Tend my sheep. [Peter] do you love me? Feed my sheep.*” It was all about feeding, nurturing, feeding. He said feeding twice, referring to the teaching of the pastor and teacher. Listen, folks, it is so simple that a blind person can see it. The only thing that grows a church, the only thing that establishes a church plant is the teaching and the preaching of God’s Holy Word. There are no gimmicks. There are no strategies. There are no methods of manipulation. Jesus builds His church, and Jesus builds His church with

His own voice. He wants no competitors. He wants His Word proclaimed. And when His Word and the proclamation of His Word is proclaimed, the church will grow spiritually, as verse 12 says, the saints will be equipped “*for the work of ministry,*” and the body of Christ will be built up, and then the numerical growth will occur.

If evangelists are the obstetricians of the church, birthing new converts into the church, then the pastor-teacher is the pediatrician. It is his job to provide the medicine of God’s Word to nurture the maturity and spiritual development of God’s children. That’s what Paul is saying in this passage. The church is to devote themselves to the apostles’ teaching. The pastor-teacher is to devote himself and give himself to labor in the Word and doctrine. He is to devote himself to the ministry of the Word and to prayer. Anything else is a distraction from the church. It is not operating out of the flesh. It’s not hip culturally sensitive music. It’s not shallow and informal worship. It’s not a plethora of attention-grabbing events complete with food trucks, bouncy houses, and constant social events. That brings you people, but what you get them with you must keep them with. But if you get them with the Word of God, you’ll keep them with the Word of God, and the church will be built up. We know this, don’t we? We know this, but we need to be reminded of it. We are a little flock. We are a church start. We are a church plant, and there are hundreds of church plants around us using all sorts of carnal and manipulative methods. Their motives might be pure, but they are wrong. That is not the way the church is built. May we not fall into that trap. Our faith must be in Christ. Our faith must be in the Word of God. The Word must do the work—and listen—the Word will do the work. We just must be faithful. We must trust the Word of God to do the work of God that God’s Word has promised that it will do. It begins with the teaching positions in the church. The only one left is pastor-teacher. The only one left is the office of elder. The only thing left to do is to preach and to teach the Word of God.

I’ll close with this illustration. One of my favorite preachers is Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones. He left a medical practice to pastor Westminster Chapel, and when he got to this church, the church had really fallen into liberalism. They had fallen into removing the Word of God as the central focus of the church. They had in place of the preaching of the Word of God, dramas, skits, plays; and so they oftentimes would clear the stage of everything, including the pulpit, to put on these plays. Martyn Lloyd-Jones became the pastor of that church, and he got the pulpit and he put the pulpit in the center of the platform, and he bolted it into the ground. He was planting his flag. He was saying, “If this church is going to remain, it’s the Word of God that must do a work.” And he preached gloriously, expositionally, verse-by-verse, through the Word of God. He let the Word of God and the people let the Word of God do the work of God. God is always faithful to do that. He calls us to honor Him, to honor His Word, and to trust in Him by faith, and the Word of God will do the work of God. Let us pray.