

Ephesians 4:11 "The Apostles Of Jesus Christ"

EPH 4:11 "It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers,..."

This morning we come to a portion of our text which at the outset may seem to be straight-forward. Some have concluded that what Paul is about to address is a group of people who were given offices in the Church to rule in a particular capacity and the list which is given is in descending order of importance.

Since our text has been talking about Christ giving gifts to the church these would also then be considered as gifts of the Holy Spirit to the Body of Christ to be joined with those gifts we find in Romans chapter 12 and 1Corinthians 12-14.

Some have debated as to what extent these gifts are still in existence today in the Body of Christ. And the debate has even included whether or not certain of these 5 gifts in our text aren't actually combining one office or function with another instead of all 5 being separate.

There are those who subscribe to what is referred to as the Five-fold ministry of the Church today. They conclude that since there are five separate offices described in our text, that any church which does not recognize and employ all five is not being faithful to the Scriptures as outlined right here in Ephesians 4:11.

And then you run into the problem of what each individual office or gift is and how it was meant to function in the Body of Christ. We are going to look at all of this over the next couple of weeks and hopefully come away with a better appreciation of what these gifts are and how they are to be utilized in the Church today.

We will define each of these gifts and go to the word of God to see what they were and what they are, and see which ones, if any, are possibly no longer meant to continue in the Church, and hopefully by the time we're finished with this portion of Scripture we'll better understand how all of this works.

Paul begins describing that Jesus Christ gave apostles to the Church, as He did with the rest of these gifts, for the specific purpose of equipping the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ.

And so, whether an apostle or prophet, evangelist, pastor or teacher, they were all meant to be encouraging the body of Christ and equipping them for works of service so that the individual members of that particular church would be about using their gifts in a way that would encourage each other, as well as reaching out to the world with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

So let's start with the apostle. The Greek word from which we derive this term is *apostolos* and it simply means one sent. Well, it would be difficult to define what an apostle is simply with this explanation of one being sent.

In fact, if we were to define what an apostle is simply by this term, "one sent", we could include just about anybody in this category. After all, each believer in Jesus Christ has been called by God and has been sent by Him to represent our Lord and Savior in this world.

And so, for the sake of argument you might say that in its broadest sense we are all apostles of Jesus Christ. But this is not what the N.T. writers had in mind when they were referring to the office of apostle. It is used in a much more narrow sense.

The first thing we might ask is what are the qualifications of an apostle? And by the way, let me just say at the outset that one of the few men I believe to have done some of the most exhaustive work in researching this area is a man by the name of Dr. Wayne Grudem.

His book, "The Gift of Prophecy in the N.T. and Today" is a classic work and is one of the main sources I am using in this study. And so, instead of quoting him throughout the next couple of weeks I will simply acknowledge that he is a major influence in what I will be sharing with you.

But back to the qualifications of an apostle. There are two main qualifications. **1)** "having seen Jesus after His resurrection with one's own eyes (thus being an eye witness of the resurrection), and **2)** having been specifically commissioned by Christ as His apostle." (Grudem)

Now, how do we know what these qualifications are? Well, again we must let the word of God explain. Very early on the disciples, who were hand-picked by Jesus Christ, who we know are also the very apostles of Jesus, counseled together to replace one of the disciples who killed himself.

You might remember that Judas betrayed Jesus after proving himself not to be a true disciple or believer. After our Lord was crucified Judas was filled with grief and went out and hanged himself. In response to this the other disciples sought God and drew lots to choose another twelfth member of their apostolic team.

ACT 1:20-22 "For," said Peter, "it is written in the book of Psalms, 'May his place be deserted; let there be no one to dwell in it,' (Psalm 69:25) and, 'May another take his place of leadership.' (Psalm 109:8) 21 Therefore it is necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, 22 beginning from John's baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us. For one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection."

And so, the first qualification for an apostle of Jesus Christ is that one be an eye-witness of Christ's resurrection. The second qualification for an apostle is that the individual be "specifically appointed by Christ" as an apostle. We see this where Jesus Himself commissions these men, formerly known as Christ's disciples, now to be His apostles, to be sent out to preach in His name.

MAT 10:1-7 "He called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease and sickness. 2 These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon (who is called Peter) and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; 3 Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; 4 Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him. 5 These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: "Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. 6 Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. 7 As you go, preach this message: 'The kingdom of heaven is near.'"

It is here that we see Jesus personally commissioning his 12 disciples, now designated apostles, to go out in His name with special power and authority as they preached the message: "The kingdom of heaven is near."

What is fascinating about this is that Judas is named among the 12 and there is no indication that Judas was not also given this authority and power along with the other 11. And there is no indication that he didn't preach the message that the kingdom of

heaven is near, meaning that Jesus was that one promised as the Messiah in the O.T.

And yet, we know that Judas was not a true believer. Jesus makes reference to this at the last supper in the gospel of Matthew.

MAT 26:21-25 "And while they were eating, he said, "I tell you the truth, one of you will betray me." 22 They were very sad and began to say to him one after the other, "Surely not I, Lord?" 23 Jesus replied, "The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me. 24 The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born." 25 Then Judas, the one who would betray him, said, "Surely not I, Rabbi?" Jesus answered, "Yes, it is you."

On the night that Jesus was betrayed He prayed to His Father and this is what He said concerning Judas.

JOH 17:11-12 "I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name - the name you gave me - so that they may be one as we are one. 12 While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled."

But, since unbelieving Judas, after his betrayal of Jesus, killed himself, there needed to be a replacement for the number 12 spot. And this is where Peter takes the lead in coming to the other apostles and they approach God in prayer.

We find this in ACT 1:23-26 "So they proposed two men: Joseph called Barsabbas (also known as Justus) and Matthias. 24 Then they prayed, "Lord, you know everyone's heart. Show us which of these two you have chosen 25 to take over this apostolic ministry, which Judas left to go where he belongs." 26 Then they cast lots, and the lot fell to Matthias; so he was added to the eleven apostles."

Some have suggested that Peter and the rest of the apostles were acting hastily. But there is no indication that they did so. They realized that Christ called 12 to fill this special apostolic ministry and they knew enough to come to God and pray for wisdom and guidance in filling this 12th spot. In casting lots they were putting

it in God's hand and they believed that in the lot falling to Matthias that Christ personally chose Him.

What's interesting here is that this was a critical time in the life of these apostles because these men were to be foundational stones of the faith, and yet nowhere do we see the risen, ascended Lord rebuking them for this action.

The original eleven apostles plus Matthias were now the original charter members, if you will, as it related to the office of apostle. In fact, these 12 are the only ones whose names are "inscribed on the foundations of the heavenly city, the New Jerusalem."
(Grudem)

REV 21:14 "The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb."

But the question has been raised. If there are only 12 apostles, all of whom are named in the Gospels, and now in Acts where Matthias is added, how do you explain the apostle Paul who would make 13?

Some would contend that the apostle Paul is the true 12th apostle. But that wouldn't explain a number of other true apostles who are mentioned in the Scriptures to where there may be a possible 15 or so legitimate apostles.

We come to a passage like ACT 14:14 "But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of this, they tore their clothes and rushed out into the crowd, ..."

Here, both Paul and Barnabas are referred to as apostles. Since we know that Paul was a true apostle who met the two requirements of having witnessed the risen Christ and then being personally commissioned by the Lord, we must assume that Barnabas met the same requirements since he is called an apostle in the same sentence with Paul who we know saw the risen Christ.

1CO 9:1 "Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not the result of my work in the Lord?"

We also know he was personally commissioned by our Lord.

GAL 1:1 "Paul, an apostle -sent not from men nor by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead -..."

This would also then be true of Barnabas.

When Paul went up to Jerusalem on one occasion he expected to meet with the apostles there in Jerusalem. And yet this is what he says in GAL 1:19 "I saw none of the other apostles -only James, the Lord's brother."

Here Paul describes the brother of Jesus, James, as numbered among the original 12 apostles. Then Paul goes on to place James in the exact same category as some of the other apostles who are referred to as pillars of the Church.

GAL 2:9 "James, Peter and John, those reputed to be pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognized the grace given to me. They agreed that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the Jews."

Then we have the first council in Jerusalem where the apostles of the church, together with some elders, were convening to settle a dispute concerning adding the Mosaic Law as a requirement to be a Christian. We would certainly expect the leader of this council to be one of the apostles as their decision was to literally effect the whole church world-wide.

We should also note here that only the apostles did in fact have authority over the whole church, not just local congregations, when it came to critical biblical matters as we saw at the council of Jerusalem. There is no such office today in the true church of Christ.

The Roman Catholic Church would of course take issue with this as they would contend that they have the closest thing to an apostle, (successor of Peter), in the form of their pope, but this church has a different gospel, and therefore disqualifies itself as being part of the true church of Christ.

But notice who takes the lead in Jerusalem as this council is convened.

ACT 15:13-19 "When they finished, James spoke up: "Brothers, listen to me. 14 Simon [Peter] has described to us how God at first showed his concern by taking from the Gentiles a people for himself. 15 The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written: 16 "'After this I will return and rebuild David's fallen tent. Its ruins I will rebuild, and I will restore it, 17 that the remnant of men may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who bear my name, says the Lord, who does these things' (Amos 9:11,12) 18 that have been known for ages. 19 "It is my judgment,

therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God."

Almost all commentators agree that James was the leader of the council in Jerusalem. This is the same James who had the authority and commission by Christ to be responsible for contributing to the very word of God as we see in the epistle which bears his name.

This, as we will see a little later, was one of the functions of an apostle; to bring us the word which the Holy Spirit inspired them to write as being the witness to the foundation of our faith, Christ Jesus being the chief cornerstone.

And so, if you do the math you've got the original 12 apostles, Paul, Barnabas and James. Now we're up to 15. But could there have been more? Well, we know that Jesus appeared to over 500 brethren at one time after His resurrection. Could He have appointed more from this group? He certainly could have but we're really not given any indication from the scriptures to verify this.

We do have one other portion of scripture which alludes to possibly two other apostles.

ROM 16:7 "Greet Andronicus and Junias, my relatives who have been in prison with me. They are outstanding among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was."

Another translation of this passage is the RSV which reads: "Greet Andronicus and Junias, my kinsman and fellow prisoners; they are men of note among the apostles, and they were in Christ before me."

Dr. Grudem points out that "men of note" among the apostles may also be translated in the Greek as men noted by the apostles, which would suggest no more than the apostles noted the work of these two men who didn't necessarily have to be apostles.

And so, it would seem that there are at least 15 apostles who are clearly shown to be so in the N.T. Beyond that we can only guess and we shouldn't get into that practice very often when it involves the written word of God, especially as it relates to so important a subject.

But what does seem to be clear is that after Paul's commission by Christ to be the apostle to the Gentiles there were none appointed after him.

We read in 1CO 15:5-9 "and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. 6 After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. 7 Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, 8 *and last of all he appeared to me also*, as to one abnormally born. 9 For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God."

And as we'll see this is just one of a few reasons why we can conclude that there are no more apostles in the narrow sense of the term in the world after the death of the last one, who would have been John on the isle of Patmos somewhere near the end of the first century.

I should probably note here that we do have another apostle mentioned in the word of God, but He is in a category all His own as one sent from the Father. We read of Him in the book of Hebrews.

HEB 3:1 "Therefore, holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we confess."

The function of the apostles involved a variety of things. As we saw earlier they were commissioned by Christ to go out and preach the Good news that the Messiah had come and the Kingdom of God was at hand.

And of course Paul makes note of this throughout his ministry. He writes in ROM 1:1-2 "Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God - 2 the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures..."

But, of course, any Christian can do this. What distinguished the apostles in this case was that they did this in such power that the miraculous accompanied them as the Lord was with them.

Paul bears witness to this as he shows what distinguishes an apostle out in the field doing the work of extending the Kingdom of God regarding this power associated with their ministries.

2CO 12:12 "The things that mark an apostle - signs, wonders and miracles - were done among you with great perseverance."

In this case Paul is emphasizing that this was done in his ministry. But this was somewhat normative among the apostles. It doesn't mean that those who are not apostles didn't have gifts of the Holy Spirit which may have involved certain aspects of signs, wonders and miracles, but apparently the apostles had all the gifts in this area as they advanced the gospel.

This, by the way, is another indication that the apostolic office of the first century no longer exists. Those today who claim to be apostles not only do not meet the requirement of having personally seen the risen Christ, and having been personally commissioned by Him, but there is no indication that they possess the mark of an apostle as Paul describes it with signs, wonders and miracles.

And by this I don't mean those people who blow into town and promise to bring you a miracle from God. There was no question when Paul or Peter or John or the rest of the apostles were used by God to heal someone, or deliver them of demons or to bring life back to people who died.

What many of these people today claim as miracles are more often than not bogus. Most of the healings are psychosomatic and in most cases can't be proved to be real healings by the medical community. But when God put it upon one of the apostles to heal, they were real, instantaneous and dramatic healings.

People who were blind could now see; people who were lame could now walk; those who had died were brought back to life. There was none of this receive your healing and then go home to see what happens over the next several weeks, or receive your healing if you've got enough faith.

When Paul was empowered by the Holy Spirit and prompted to perform the miraculous it happened because it was God who was prompting it and therefore it was God who was healing as only He can.

This doesn't mean that people aren't miraculously and spontaneously healed today by the hand of God through His servants whom He gifts, but that is a far cry from the sheer numbers and power that was shown through the apostles in the early church, where even clothing taken from Paul was used by God to bring healing to entire villages.

Today you can obtain these prayer cloths through people who claim to speak on God's behalf and you can even get your healing,

as long as you write a check for the proper amount to support their ministries so they can send out more prayer cloths to minister to people.

The television news magazine "60 Minutes", along with similar programs, have done all sorts of stories on these "miracle ministries". And granted, they have a bias which is worldly, but in all of their investigation if they had been to one of those meetings where everyone who came forward left with a legitimate healing I'm sure they would have reported it.

More important, if such "gifted" ministers were shown to be true they wouldn't limit themselves to advertised meetings. They would be in the hospitals or psychiatric wards and such. And it wouldn't be miracles they were peddling. They'd be bringing the gospel of Jesus Christ first and foremost.

Much of the "miracle" ministries we see today are primarily concerned with you getting your miracle, and the gospel is more of an after-thought, if it's presented clearly at all.

I can tell you with all certainty that if "60 Minutes" were around during Paul's ministry there would have been no question as to the validity of Paul's message of Christ, being accompanied by the miraculous.

But again, even this miraculous aspect of Paul's ministry was not the primary focus of Paul. What was of primary focus was what was primary among all the apostles and that is to be used of God to bring the gospel of Jesus Christ, and also delivering to us the very word of God.

This is why the apostles are referred to as foundational to our faith. Again, this points to the fact that the foundation has been set, with Christ as the cornerstone. If the foundation has been set there is no further need to set another foundation with more apostles.

Add to that, the apostles were primarily the ones responsible for the word we have before us in the New Testament. Peter even makes the point that the word Paul brought was equal to that of the scriptures.

2PE 3:15-16 "Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. 16 He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable

people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction."

Peter also makes the point that the word of God came through only two groups. The prophets of old and the apostles of Jesus Christ.

2PE 3:2 "I want you to recall the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets and the command given by our Lord and Savior through your apostles."

If apostles were to exist today, with the same functions as those of the first century, then they have every reason to believe that they too are able to bring us a continual word from God which is the equivalent of Scripture, making the Bible open-ended.

And in fact, there are people who claim to be able to do just that, including but not limited to the "Apostles" of the cult, the Mormon Church, known as the Latter Day Saints. And yet what are we told by John the apostle?

REV 22:18-19 "I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. 19 And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book."

To suggest that God is still adding to His infallible, inerrant word today is to contradict what we are clearly told in His existing word which was given to us through His prophets and apostles.

Christ's apostles were the one's primarily responsible for allowing us to come to know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior through the word of God. Had they not written we wouldn't know with certainty what God wanted us to know.

And it is their ministry which has given us what we know to be true about Jesus Christ. They were His special witnesses and we ought to praise God for them. All but John sealed their ministries with their own blood.

Now, may we walk in the truth these apostles gave us and testify as they did that Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior to the glory of God.