

EPHESIANS: GOD'S GLORY IN THE CHURCH (study 7b)

Authority (pt.2)

Study 7d: How Does the Spirit Build the Church? (4:11-13)

4:11 Should we expect to find 5-fold ministry existing in every church and in every generation? (2:19- 22, key v. 20)

...It deserves attention, also, that, of the five offices which are here enumerated, not more than the last two are intended to be perpetual. Apostles, Evangelists, and Prophets were bestowed on the church for a limited time only, -- except in those cases where religion has fallen into decay, and evangelists are raised up in an extraordinary manner, to restore the pure doctrine which had been lost. But without Pastors and Teachers there can be no government of the church. [Calvin 279-80]

4:12-13 Should we expect a perfect, unified church this side of the parousia? (cf. 1 Tim. 4:1; 2 Tim. 3:1,5,7,13; 4:1-4)

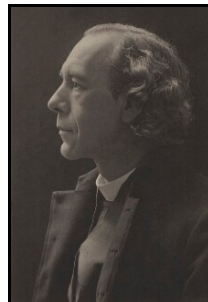
If the life and growth of the Body is to be secured, every member of it, and not only those who are technically called "ministers", must be taught to serve. ... Unity has been spoken of, first of all, as a gift to be kept; it is now regarded as a goal to be attained. Unity, as it exists already and is to be eagerly guarded, is a spiritual rather than an intellectual oneness ... [Robinson 99]

The newly baptized converts are spiritual babies. As such they are prone to sin and error, and almost defenceless against false teaching. Above all else they need teaching from the Word of God ... I sometimes urge my charismatic friends, therefore, some of whom seem to me to be preoccupied with the less important gifts, to remember Paul's dictum "earnestly to desire the higher gifts", and to consider whether these are not the teaching gifts. It is teaching which builds up the church. It is teachers who are needed most. ... All spiritual gifts, then are service gifts ... They are not given for selfish but for unselfish use, namely for the service of other people. Each of the lists of *charismata* in the New Testament emphasizes this. "To each is given the

manifestation of the Spirit for the common good". It follows that their comparative importance (Paul is quite clear that some are "higher" or "greater" than others) is to be assessed by the degree to which they "edify" or build up the church. This is why the teaching gifts are of paramount importance, for nothing builds up the church like the truth of God's Word. [Stott 164-168]

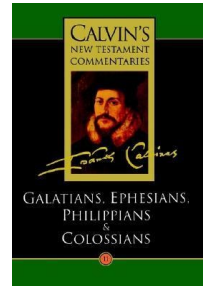
No language more highly commendatory of the ministry of the word could have been employed, than to ascribe to it this effect. What is more excellent than to produce the true and complete perfection of the church? And yet this work, so admirable and divine, is here declared by the apostle to be accomplished by the external ministry of the word. That those who neglect this instrument should hope to become

"Utter madness" of despising Christ's teachers



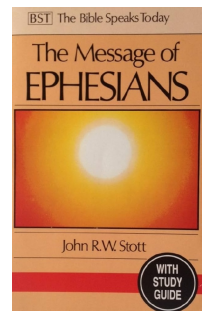
J. Armitage Robinson
(1858-1933)

perfect in Christ is utter madness. Yet such are the fanatics, on the one hand, who pretend to be favoured with secret revelations of the Spirit, -- and proud men, on the other, who imagine that to them the private reading of the Scriptures is enough, and that they have no need of the ordinary ministry of the church ... **We must allow ourselves to be ruled and taught by men.** This is the universal rule, which extends equally to the highest and to the lowest. The church is the common mother of all the godly, which bears, nourishes, and brings up children to God, kings and peasants alike; and this is done by the ministry. **Those who neglect or despise this order choose to be wiser than Christ.** Woe to the pride of such men! [Calvin 281-82, emphasis added]



Do we need apostles and prophets today?

We should not hesitate, therefore, to say that *in this sense* there are no apostles today. In 1975 John Noble wrote and published a booklet entitled *First Apostles, Last Apostles*. In it his concern is "to arouse my fellow Christians to look for apostles to shape church life in our day", who will "unite and release an army under God which will accomplish his purpose in these end-times". His reading of history is that when the original apostles died, "they left a vacuum of authority into which the wrong men stepped", i.e. the bishops. He criticized both Catholicism and Protestantism, the former for "investing absolute authority in one man" and the latter for "giving every individual the right to rule in the church". We can certainly agree with him that throughout the long and chequered history of the church there have been many misuses of authority, but he misses in his exposition the vitally important truths (1) that the original apostles as eyewitnesses of the historic risen Jesus can in the nature of the case have no successors, and (2) that their authority is preserved today in the New Testament, which is **the essential "apostolic succession"**. Once we have insisted, however, that there are today no apostles of Christ with an authority comparable to that of the apostles Paul, Peter and John, it is certainly possible to argue that there are people with apostolic ministries of a different kind, including episcopal jurisdiction, pioneer missionary work, church planting, itinerant leadership, etc. What about *prophets*? Here again it is necessary to make a distinction. In the primary sense in which the Bible uses the word, a prophet was a person who "stood in the council of God", who heard and even "saw" his word, and who in consequence "spoke from the mouth of the Lord" and spoke his word "faithfully" ... this is the sense in which Paul appears to be using the word here. He puts the prophets next after the apostles (as in 1 Cor. 12:28; "second prophets"), and he brackets "apostles and prophets" as the church's foundation and the recipients of fresh revelation from God (2:20; 3:6). As the foundation on which the church is being built the prophets have no successors, any more than the apostles have, for the foundation was laid and finished centuries ago and we cannot tamper with it in any way today. [Stott 160, emph. added]



Study 7e: Consequences of Ignoring Christ's Gifts (4:14-16)

4:14 What is the inevitable situation of those who ignore Christ's appointed ministers? (cf. vv. 11,12)

Such must be the changeable and unsteady character of all who do not rest on the

foundation of God's eternal truth. It is their just punishment for looking, not to God, but to men. [Calvin 284]

Not "to perfect men": for the Apostle uses the plural of the lower stage only: "that we be no longer children" is his own contrast. We are to grow out of our individualism into the corporate oneness of the full-grown Man. ... Individualism and self-assertion are the foes of this maturity. We are not to be "babes", isolated individuals, stunted and imperfect. [Robinson 100-101]

Of course we are to resemble children in their humility and innocence, but not in their ignorance or instability. Unstable children are like little boats in a stormy sea, entirely at the mercy of wind and waves. Paul paints a graphic picture, tossed to and fro (*klydonizomenoi*, from *klydon*, rough water or surf) meaning "tossed here and there by waves" (AG) and *carried about* (*peripheromenoi*) meaning "swung round by shifting winds". Apparently Plato used this latter word of tops, which led E.K. Simpson to dub such people "whirligigs". NEB brings the two storm pictures together by translating "tossed by the waves and whirled about by every fresh gust of teaching". Such are immature Christians. They never seem to know their own mind or come to settled convictions. Instead, their opinions tend to be those of the last preacher they heard or the last book they read, and they fall an easy prey to each new theological fad ... [Stott 170]

**Are we wayward
"whirligigs" – tossed
about by "every wind
of teaching"?**

4:15-16 Which supreme gift of the Spirit is most at risk where Christ's gifts in men are neglected? (John 16:13)

There are two things in this connection which can hardly escape notice. The one is the high estimate the apostle places on truth; and the other is the evil of error. Holiness without the knowledge and belief of the truth, is impossible; perfect holiness implies, as v.13 teaches, perfect knowledge. Error, therefore, is evil. Religious error springs from moral evil and produces it. ... The character most offensive to God and man is that of a malignant zealot for the truth. [Hodge 238]

Thank God there are those in the contemporary church who are determined at all costs to defend and uphold God's revealed truth. But sometimes they are conspicuously lacking in love. When they think they smell heresy, their nose begins to twitch, their muscles ripple, and the light of battle enters their eye. They seem to enjoy nothing more than a fight. Others make the opposite mistake. They are determined at all costs to maintain and exhibit brotherly love, but in order to do so are prepared even to sacrifice the central truths of revelation. Both these tendencies are unbalanced and unbiblical. Truth becomes hard if it is not softened by love; love becomes soft if it is not strengthened by truth. The apostle calls us to hold the two together, which should not be difficult for Spirit-filled believers, since the Holy Spirit is himself "the Spirit of truth", and his firstfruit is "love" ... Some look mainly for structures of unity, but seem to have no comparable concern that the church should become a truly caring community marked by humility, meekness, longsuffering, forbearance and love. Paul's primary concern is not for structures; he begins and ends with love (verses 2,16). [Stott 172]

In the great struggle between God and the sin of the world, every man that stands firm in the ranks of the army of light gives other men courage to stand firm too. Be righteous, and you make righteousness easier to some other Christian man ... Let your faith be strong, and even though you may say little about it you will make the faith of other men stronger. Be devout, and in ways that you cannot trace you will check irreverence and deepen the awe with which your Christian brethren worship God. Love men, and you will diffuse within the limits of your influence the spirit of Christian charity, and how far that spirit may extend who can tell? Fire kindles fire, and when fire is once kindled it burns and spreads. ... Among the many profound and noble words of Marcus Aurelius the following have always seemed to me exceptionally deserving of being constantly remembered: "A branch cut off from the

adjacent branch must of necessity be cut off from the whole tree also. So too a man, when he is separated from another man, has fallen off from the whole social community." [Dale 285-289]



**Lewis Sperry
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SUBJECT FOR MEDITATION: *Can there be "church growth" where the body ignores the Head? (John 14:6; 1 Tim. 3:15); for Christ's method of "growing" the church see 1 Tim. 4:6,13-16; 2 Tim. 2:2; 3:13-17; 4:1-4,7 -- the faith is KEPT, not CREATED, by the church).*

The law of growth for the individual is this: that he should learn more and more to live as a part of a great whole; that he should consciously realise the life of membership, and contribute his appropriate share towards the completeness of the corporate unity ... [Robinson 102]

The continued emphasis in the New Testament on the importance of advancement in the knowledge of Christ, of growing in grace, of becoming an unashamed workman through the study of the Word, and of a tireless striving for full maturity, should not be unnoticed and unheeded ... There need be no fear of the ravages of false teachers or their teachings where God's ordained program for His equipped Church has been executed. [Chafer 134]

Is not to ignore Christ's body to reject Him?

... as in the human body there are certain channels through which the vital influence flows from the head to the members, and which are necessary to its communication; so also there are certain divinely appointed means for the distribution of the Holy Spirit from Christ to the several members of his body. What these channels of influence are, by which the church is sustained and carried forward, is clearly stated in v.11 ... It is, therefore, through the ministry of the word that the divine influence flows from Christ the head to all the members of his body, so that where that ministry fails the divine influence fails. [Hodge 244-45]

All this should rouse and sharpen our minds to profit by the word of God. If we neglect to do so, we may fall into the snares of our enemies, and endure the severe punishment of our sloth ... This means that no increase is advantageous, which does not bear a just proportion to the whole body. That man is mistaken who desires his own separate growth. If a leg or arm should grow to a prodigious size, or the mouth be more fully distended, would the undue enlargement of those parts be otherwise than injurious to the whole frame? In like manner, if we wish to be considered members of Christ, let no man be anything for himself, but let us all be whatever we are for the benefit of each other. This is accomplished by love; and where it does not reign, there is no "edification," but an absolute scattering of the church. [Calvin 286-88]

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