

• *Gifts to the church continued*

**Samples of God's gifts to the Church**

• *Prophets – speaking God's word for here and now*

• *Levels of prophecy*

• *Prophecy today – much is unreliable*

• *But some is genuine*

• *Work with other ministries to bring the church to maturity*

• *Gifted not sharply differentiated*

• *Evangelists*

• *Pastors and teachers - closely related*

Paul is telling us what God's gifts to the church actually consist of. 'And it was He who gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers...' <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 4:11

First, Paul gives us, **samples of His gifts to the church**. God gives apostles, as we have seen. God gives prophets. Prophecy is **speaking for God with words given by God**. A prophet is a person who is frequently and reliably used by God in this way. There are different levels of 'prophecy'. Under the Mosaic law the prophet was the most authoritative kind of spokesman for God. He was in a word-by-word manner inspired by the Holy Spirit in the most amazing way. His words could perhaps become part of our inspired Bible. If he turned out to be a false prophet he was subject to the death penalty. Few people were prophets.

After the giving of the Holy Spirit, every one of God's people could be used in 'prophecy' – speaking with God-given words. This is the point of Acts 2:18 which quotes Joel 2:28. Obviously the kind of 'prophesying' we are to expect today is

- (i) **not** on a level with the Old Testament prophets. Nor
- (ii) do I think it is on a level with the prophets who were the colleagues of the first generation of apostles, the eyewitnesses of the resurrection. I have to say also – reluctantly –
- (iii) that I am not very impressed with much of what claims to be prophecy today. Scribble down notes of it (as I often do) and watch to see how reliable it turns out to be, and it is often confusing and of no value to the church at all. The 'prophets' often are self-centred and greedy for money. Yet one must not throw out the baby with the bath-water. There is a lot of messy bath-water around, but there is a baby there somewhere!

It is possible – still – to speak for God where God is giving us exactly what to say. I would not like to claim that it is 'verbal inspiration' quite like that of the Old Testament prophets and the first generation of apostles, but it comes close at times. God can even give outlines of the future. If a person really is a 'prophet' we can expect sooner or later (with no manipulation or over-claiming) powerful evidence that what he says is right. Micah prophesied boldly and said something that was difficult to believe <sup>1</sup>; shortly after his word was confirmed in a way that no one could doubt <sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> 1 Kings 22:17  
<sup>2</sup> 1 Kings 22:34-36

The kind of 'prophet' Paul has in mind here is not the 'God-has-told-me-you-need-inner-healing' kind of prophet (although they exist). It is the kind of prophet who assists apostles and other preaching ministries in bringing the church to a high level of practical maturity. He does so not so much by **exposition** – the work of a teacher – but by a teaching-right-now-for-this-moment based on the message of the gospel and applied to God's people with challenging clarity. A teacher normally has a text. A prophet's text is often the whole message of the Bible with illumination added into what is happening right now.

It should be added that these giftings are not **sharply** differentiated. A teacher can be prophetic. A prophet can be didactic (related to teaching). Someone can be half-and-half or even different things in different places.

God gives evangelists. They are people who focus on the evangelistic message (not the 'whole counsel of God') and have gifts of exhortation, ability in the Spirit to bring about response.

God gives pastors-and-teachers. The Greek wording ties these two ministries together. Some think they are really only one ministry of pastor-teacher. I think it better to think of two ministries that are closely related.

**The Purpose of these Ministries**

• **Preachers train people for ministry who in turn build up the people of God**

• **The goal – even greater unity and knowledge of God**

Pastors are teachers who are good with people. Teachers are pastors who are good at exposition. The two are close to each other. Pastors spend more time with people. Teachers spend more time with their Bible.

Next, Paul gives us, the **purpose of these God-given ministries**. Paul confines himself to five kinds of preacher. There are other kinds of gifts – that is, people with special callings – who are given to the church. The purpose of **these** particular people comes next. They are given ‘for the perfecting of the saints for the work of ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and to the unity of the knowledge of the Son of God.’ <sup>1</sup>

1 4:12-13a

It is important here to see that we do **not** have three parallel phrases:

- for the perfecting of the saints,
- for the work of ministry,
- for the building up of the body of Christ.

Actually the Greek word for ‘for’ is different and shows that the three phrases are **not** parallel. To take it as three parallel statements would imply that only preachers are ‘ministers’, an idea which has seriously damaged the church for centuries. There is to be no comma after ‘perfecting of the saints’. It should be read:

**for** [Greek pros] the perfecting of the saints **into** [Greek eis] the work of ministry [and that in turn leads] **into** [Greek eis] the building up of the body of Christ, **until** we all attain to the unity of the faith and to the unity of the knowledge of the Son of God.

Preachers are trainers! They train people for ministry. The ‘ministers’ are the entire company of God’s people. Every Christian has some kind of ‘ministry’. Preachers train them. This in turn builds up the whole people of God.

How long does this go on for? For the entire history of the church. All five preaching-ministries continue, ‘until we all attain to the unity of the faith and to the unity of the knowledge of the Son of God.’ <sup>1</sup> Paul is referring here to the long-term future history of the church. The church has a goal and a destiny. There is a unity of the faith already! That was the point of verse 5. Yet there is a greater unity still to come. The church is already ‘one body’ with ‘one Spirit... one hope ... one Lord... one faith’, and so on. Yet there is a greater unity yet to come. It comes about when there is a fuller, deeper, richer knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ than has ever been known in the story of the church. We have not reached it, but we are on the way. The church has a glorious future.

1 4:13a

	<p><b>Dr Michael Eaton</b> is highly respected internationally as a theologian, author, preacher and teacher. He lives in Kenya where he is one of the leaders of the Chrisco Fellowship. His <i>Preaching Through The Bible</i> (PTTB) books are highly popular worldwide. Michael Eaton puts the theological and practical meaning of the Bible in a clear and down-to-earth way so that what is written can be easily understood by the reader.</p>	
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