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The Authority of Scripture: A Biblical Exegesis of Ephesians 4:11-16

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Cover Page Footnote

Ames, J. Teaching as Formation: The Vision of Ephesians 4: 11-16 and Pedagogical Implications for Routine Teaching Tasks. *The Asbury Journal*, 69(2), (2014): 3. Barry, V. W. The application of Ephesians 4:11 in the recent missional debate with reference to scripture. (2018). Bayes, J. D. Five-fold ministry: A social and cultural texture analysis of Ephesians 4: 11-16. *Journal of Biblical Perspectives in Leadership*, 3(1), (2010): 113-122. Breed, G. Ministry to the congregation according to the letter to the ephesians. *Acta Theologica*, 35(1), (2015): 37-58. Broberg, R. Gifts of the Holy Spirit. (2016). Gentry, P. J. Speaking the Truth in Love (Eph 4: 15): Life in the New Covenant Community. *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology*, 10, (2006): 70-87. Gromacki, G. Paul's Ecclesiology of Ephesians. *Journal of Ministry and Theology*, 19(1), (2015): 81-115. Larkin, W. J. *Ephesians: a handbook on the Greek text*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2009. Mbennah, E. D. The goal of maturity in Ephesians 4: 13-16. *Acta Theologica*, 36(1), (2016): 110-132. Osborne, G. R. *Ephesians Verse by Verse (Osborne New Testament Commentaries)*. Lexham Press, 2017.

Abstract

Ephesians 4:11-16 is one of the most powerful Scriptures in the New Testament post crucifixion and resurrection that provide a framework for God's original intention for a glorious church. To understand what makes a glorious church, one must understand the gifts God gave to the church through Jesus Christ, the objective of the gifts, and how to steward the gift properly according to the Authority of Scripture. A biblical exegesis of Ephesians 4:11-16 reveals that God gave the apostle, prophet, pastor, evangelist, and teacher (Ephesians 4:11, NKJV)¹ or what is commonly known as the five-fold ministry or offices today as gifts to the Church through Jesus. These gifts equip believers for the work of ministry, to edify the body of Christ (4:12). To steward these gifts, churches and church leaders must realize that Ephesians 4:11-12 is a Scriptural mandate given by God for the church to carry out. Resulting in unity in the body of Christ, the maturity of believers, who do not wavier from true doctrine, or become influenced by false teachers operating in deceit, who present themselves as true teachers of the gospel (4:14). To show the relevance of this Scripture in the church today, this study will provide a biblical exegesis of the text, outline the definitions and functions of the five leadership gifts, and provide biblical examples.

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages and references are in *The New King James Version*.

Introduction

Unity in Christ is one of the main themes in Ephesians 4. To bring understanding to God's original intent for unity in the body through the Holy Spirit, the apostle Paul (author of the book of Ephesians) reveals God's purpose within the church, which is to build up the body of Christ, reaching full maturity in the faith. This study will focus on Ephesians 4:11-16 which addresses and identifies the offices of the Apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, and teacher which are God's gifts to the church. These leadership gifts serve by training and equipping believers for the work of ministry to edify the body of Christ, until believers reach unity in the faith and the knowledge of God's Son, as they mature to the full stature of Jesus Christ (4:13). The way one views Ephesians 4:11-16 will determine how they equip, lead, train, and teach the church.

Leaders should implement the five-fold offices within the church because these five leadership gifts are given to the church by the Father through Jesus to help believers become doctrinally and functionally mature for the work of ministry and to edify the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:12). Providing a biblical exegesis of Ephesians 4:11-16, outlining the benefits of the five-fold ministry, and how it applies to the church will reveal the relevance and necessity of Ephesians 4:11-16 today. Each office has a different function and role in the church; however, all five offices collectively help the church reach spiritual maturity. "Today the church is divided over doctrine and lacks experiential knowledge of Christ. When Christ returns for his church at the Rapture, these goals will be accomplished and the church will experience true unity."² Therefore, the church must embrace individuals called to the five-fold offices to function within the church to reach these goals and fulfill God's purpose in the church.

² Gary Gromacki, "Paul's Ecclesiology of Ephesians", *Journal of Ministry and Theology* 19, no. 1 (2015): 81-115.

Biblical Exegesis and Interpretation

The presentation of Ephesians 4:11–16, reveals “a silver bullet: a simple, guaranteed solution for a difficult problem... The rediscovery and reapplication of this one piece of Pauline ecclesiology”³ has massive benefits for the structure of the church today. This passage identifies five leadership gifts given to the church through Jesus Christ. This section will help lay the foundation for the rest of this study by focusing on exegeting each verse to provide context and interpretation of the text to discover the original meaning of Ephesians 4:11-16.

Verse 4:11- And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers,” begins with “And” (καί).⁴ This shows a continuation of verses 8-10 which states: “This is why it says: Therefore He says: “When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive,” the next portion states “And gave gifts to men.” (Now this, “He ascended”—what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things). The “He” (αὐτός) is a normative subject of the following phrase “gave” (ἔδωκεν).⁵ The “use of the pronoun to make the subject explicit both emphasizes it, so that the Christological source of the gifts is clearly in view, and by picking up the αὐτός of 4:10 reminds the reader that this is the supremely sovereign, ascended Christ”.⁶ The phrase “gave” (ἔδωκεν)⁷ is best understood in this passage as “giving” because it aligns with the rest of the theme in the passage.

The last line of verse 11 “some *to be* apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers,” (τοὺς μὲν ἀποστόλους τοὺς δε προφήτας... διδασκάλους.)⁸ reveals the gifts Christ gave to the body in the form of people (apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers) and highlights an accusative “direct object of ἔδωκεν. The use of μέν . . . δέ serves to introduce series of items in a list... The construction (τοὺς μὲν . . . τοὺς δέ) does not involve the article as a nominalizer of the particle creating an object-complement double accusative construction... According to Paul’s usage, ἀποστόλους probably should not be limited to the Twelve”.⁹ Instead, this should include leaders with an apostolic function of planting churches, introducing the word of God in uncharted territories, and global expansion.

The term “apostles” (apostolos) means a messenger or one who is sent out. “Apostles were literally commissioned messengers carrying out their sender’s mission. They were backed by the sender’s authority to the extent that they accurately represented that commission”.¹⁰ Prophets are individuals who are spokesmen for God. “A prophet is one who is divinely inspired

³ Barry Van Wyk, "The Application Of Ephesians 4:11 In The Recent Missional Debate With Reference to Scripture", *In Die Skriflig* 52, no. 3 (2018).

⁴ James Strong, *The New Strong's Expanded Exhaustive Concordance of The Bible* Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2010. Strong's Number: 2532.

⁵ Strong, *Concordance of the Bible*. Strong's Number: 846 & 1325.

⁶ Larkin, W. J. *Ephesians: A Handbook on the Greek Text*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press. (2009).

⁷ Strong, *Concordance of the Bible*. Strong's Number: 1325.

⁸ Strong, *Concordance of the Bible*. Strong's Number: 3588, 3303, 652, 1161, 4396, 2099, 4166, 2532, and 1320.

⁹ Larkin, 78.

¹⁰ Bayes, J. D. Five-fold ministry: A social and cultural texture analysis of Ephesians 4: 11. *Journal of Biblical Perspectives in Leadership* 3, no. 1 (2010): 116.

to communicate God’s will to His people and to disclose the future to them”.¹¹ An evangelist is one who announces the good news. “In the New Testament, the good news is the death, burial, resurrection, and the ultimate ascension of Christ”.¹² Prophets have several key characteristics, such as: like the other four offices, God calls them, prophets receive “a word from God through many means—direct declarations, visions, dreams, or an appearance of God. The great variety in prophetic experience prohibits any oversimplification; ecstatic experiences were not mandatory for receiving God’s word”.¹³ Pastors are “shepherds.” The “term pastor is found only once in the English text of the New Testament. However, the Greek word *poimen* is found about eighteen times in the New Testament, translated once as “pastor” and the remaining instances as “shepherd.” Most notably, *poimen* is found in John 10 where Jesus is revealed as the good shepherd.”¹⁴ Ephesians 4:11 is the only Scripture that uses “shepherd” when referencing to a function or office in the Church. “Teachers were expounders of the Scriptures and the Jesus tradition. If they functioned like Jewish teachers, they probably offered Biblical instruction to the congregation and trained others to expound the Scriptures as well”¹⁵ It must be noted that there is debate concerning the distinction of “pastors” and “teachers”. Looking at the “Greek text of Ephesians 4:11, an article proceeds each of the ministry gifts, but the article is omitted before “teachers.” This omission has led some to claim that it is an indication that the two groups are the same. This distinction becomes important in deciding if these five ministries are offices or functions. It is more likely that a person has multiple functions than a person having multiple offices”.¹⁶ Ultimately, all pastors are teachers however, all teachers are not pastors. Therefore, pastors and teachers are seen separately in this study.

Verse 12- for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, (*πρὸς τὸν καταρτισμὸν τῶν ἁγίων εἰς ἔργον διακονίας, εἰς οἰκοδομὴν τοῦ σώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ,*)¹⁷ addresses the purpose of verse 11. This verse identifies what the individuals mentioned in verse 11 will do and what they will accomplish. The text highlights the purposes in three clauses- (1) For the equipping of the saints, (2) for the work of ministry, and (3) for the edifying of the body of Christ. The first clause “for the equipping” (*πρὸς τὸν καταρτισμὸν*) is best understood as “training”, “preparing”, or “discipline” and second clause “for the work of ministry” (*τῶν ἁγίων εἰς ἔργον διακονίας*) should be understood as general service or ministry that all believers perform. Therefore, the first two clauses indicate the main purpose of the gifts, which is to equip believers for the work of ministry. The third clause “for the edifying of the body of Christ” (*εἰς οἰκοδομὴν τοῦ σώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ,*) identifies the purpose of the first two clauses. “The purpose of equipping is to prepare saints for the work of service that aims to build up the body of Christ. Therefore, teachers in theological institutions

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Brand, C., Mitchell, E. A., Bonds, S., Clendenen, E. R., Butler, T. C., & Latta, B. (2015). *Holman illustrated Bible dictionary*. Nashville, TN: Holman Reference.

¹⁴ Bayes, 116.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Strong, *Concordance of the Bible*. Strong’s Number: 4314, 3588, 2677, 40, 1519, 2041, 1248, 3619, 4983, 5547.

have a specific calling to prepare servants for effective ministry in the Church”.¹⁸ Which applies to the church today.

Verse 13- till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; (μέχρι καταστήσωμεν οἱ πάντες εἰς τὴν ἐνότητα τῆς πίστεως καὶ τῆς ἐπιγνώσεως τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ, εἰς ἄνδρα τέλειον, εἰς μέτρον ἡλικίας τοῦ πληρώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ;) begins with “till” (μέχρι) as a continuation of verse 12. Notably, “Paul transitions “from the threefold purpose of Christ's gifts in verse 12 to the threefold goal of the church in verse 13”.¹⁹ The phrase “till we all come” in this context, means “until we all arrive at a place; thus, primarily a temporal indicator. However, the verb also connotes intentionality to pursue the attainment of a specific state. Thus, μέχρι, “till”, has both a prospective force and intentionality... and the apostles, evangelists, prophets, pastors and teachers are to continue to carry out their task both until the whole church reaches the particular destination stated and in order that the church might reach that destination. In using the word μέχρι, Paul depicts the church as being, or as expected to be, on the way to some specific final spiritual state.”²⁰ Which the church must move towards this goal until it reaches the ultimate destination.

The phrase “all” refers to inclusiveness, meaning, all must strive to reach the goal. Paul is writing to the church, so the context of “all” in this verse, “would refer only to the body of Christ, and not to the totality of all nations in all parts of the world. Because of the mention of apostles and evangelists in Ephesians 4:11, numerical growth is probably also implied. However, the introduction of the body metaphor implies the notion of the qualitative development of the church as an organism from within. It should be noted that Paul uses “we all”, and not “each one of us”, to counter possible over-individualization as well as underscore the corporate sense of spiritual maturity”.²¹ Essentially, “Paul restates the fact that the recipients have received a calling, which is the new identity advanced in Ephesians 1-3; he thus urges them to live accordingly (Eph. 4:2)”,²² and remember the oneness (one body, one Spirit, one Lord, one faith, and one baptism) of the church.

There are many types of unity, but the church is to reach a unity that specifically brings them into the faith and knowledge of Jesus Christ. The construction of this verse makes it clear that the reference of unity isn't “the unity between faith and knowledge, because the construction presents the unity of faith and the unity of the knowledge of the Son of God—two separate kinds of unity. The expression τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ suggests that the Son of God is the only object of knowledge”,²³ given that the article is “the”. Given the call for spiritual maturity throughout the text, it's best to understand “stature” (ἡλικίας) as maturity, which 4:16 later describes. Maturity in this verse means “all Christians together as the church, ultimately attaining a state of oneness

¹⁸ Joy Ames, "Teaching As Formation: The Vision Of Ephesians 4:11-16 And Pedagogical Implications For Routine Teaching Tasks", *The Asbury Journal* 69, no. 2 (2014): 9.

¹⁹ Osborne, G. R. (2017). *Ephesians Verse by Verse (Osborne New Testament Commentaries)*. (Lexham Press., publishers, 2017).

²⁰ Mbennah, E. D. The goal of maturity in Ephesians 4: 13-16. *Acta Theologica* 36, no. 1 (2016): 120.

²¹ Ibid., 121.

²² Ibid.

²³ Mbennah, 121.

of the contents of faith and acceptance and possession of complete, correct and full understanding of Christ, and being so completely filled with Christ's essence in his glorified state that the church, in full conformity with Christ, is an accurate full physical manifestation of Christ in the world".²⁴ Author E.D. Mbennah of *The Goal of Maturity in Ephesians 4:13-16* notes the text encompasses four dimensions of maturity, which are: (1) The essence of maturity occurs when all believers increasingly become one as they reach the ultimate destination, (2) the means of attaining maturity happens through the continuous guidance of the five-fold ministry (4:11) appointed through Jesus. "unlike salvation, which is by divine grace alone (cf. Eph. 2:8-10; Rom. 3:21-30), maturity is a product of salvation, and requires sustained human effort to move towards its attainment",²⁵ (3) the point of attaining maturity is when the whole church reaches the ultimate goal, and (4) some indicators of progression towards maturity are: "the corporate stability and constancy in the truth; the ability to discern error and reject or correct it; the ability and predisposition to speak the truth in love",²⁶ and the meaningfulness of each member's role through the effective use of their gifts.

Verse 14 - so that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, (ἵνα μηκέτι ὦμεν νήπιοι, κλυδωνιζόμενοι καὶ περιφερόμενοι παντὶ ἀνέμῳ τῆς διδασκαλίας ἐν τῇ κυβείᾳ τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἐν πανουργίᾳ πρὸς τὴν μεθοδεῖαν τῆς πλάνης,) presents a negative purpose clause by using the phrase "so that" (ἵνα) that modifies ἔδωκεν (4:11) instead of modifying καταστήσωμεν (4:13).²⁷ The phrase "infants" (νήπιοι) is a predictive nominative of "we might be" (ὦμεν) and is a figure of speech that refers to the spiritual immaturity of believers. Likewise, the usage of "wind" (παντὶ ἀνέμῳ) in this verse is a figurative reference for the inclination that causes one to go from one belief to another. As the verse continues, it reveals the "consistent Pauline usage of the articular διδασκαλία to refer to Christian doctrine (Rom 12:7; 1 Tim 4:13, 16; 6:1; 2 Tim 3:10; Titus 1:9; 2:7, 10), along with the following context,²⁸ illustrates false teachings that appear to be valid teaching. Ultimately, verse 14 results from being spiritually immature.

Verse 15- but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ (ἀληθεύοντες δὲ ἐν ἀγάπῃ αὐξήσωμεν εἰς αὐτὸν τὰ πάντα, ὅς ἐστιν ἡ κεφαλὴ, Χριστός,) the verb "speaking" denotes speaking the truth of the gospel rather than truthful speech. As believers speak the truth (of the gospel) in love, all will grow in maturity in the fullness of Jesus Christ. Keeping in mind that Jesus is the truth, and He is love. One must remember to always speak the truth of Jesus in love if they desire to convey the heart of Jesus to others. Verse 15 reveals that speaking the truth in love leads to spiritual maturity. Use of the Greek verb *alētheuō* expresses the meaning to "be truthful" or "speak the truth". The "Greek verbs ending in -euō have the meaning "to act in a certain capacity or role." The verb *alētheuō*, then, means "to act truthfully." Since this kind of action frequently involves our speech, a common meaning is "to speak truthfully",²⁹ which one expresses in love.

²⁴ Ibid., 127.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Paraphrased from Larkin, 81.

²⁸ Larkin, 81-82.

²⁹ Gentry, P. J. *Speaking the Truth in Love (Eph 4: 15): Life in the New Covenant Community. The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology, 10, (2006): 74.*

Verse 16- from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love (ἐξ οὗ πᾶν τὸ σῶμα συναρμολογούμενον καὶ συμβιβαζόμενον διὰ πάσης ἀφῆς τῆς ἐπιχορηγίας κατ'ἐνέργειαν ἐν μέτρῳ ἐνὸς ἑκάστου μέρους τὴν αὐξήσιν τοῦ σώματος ποιεῖται εἰς οἰκοδομὴν ἑαυτοῦ ἐν ἀγάπῃ) is the final verse which concludes that the whole body will grow from Jesus and be joined together or connect (διὰ πάσης ἀφῆς) as each individual does their part in fulfilling God's the purpose of unity. One should note the term "for the edifying of" or "the building up of" (εἰς οἰκοδομὴν) "points to process ("edification") not product",³⁰ which lovingly produces growth.

Application

The purpose of the five-fold gifts is to equip the church to carry out ministry until Jesus returns (1 Corinthians 1:7), for the common good of the body (1 Corinthians 12:7), to build up the church (Eph 4:12 & 1 Corinthians 14:12), and for edification (1 Corinthians 14:26).³¹ Ephesians 4:11-16 explains "the distribution of the gifts in the body. The fundamental gifts (4:11) are given to equip believers, so that they can apply their gifts towards the edification of the body. The service work has a dual purpose, namely, to protect the believers against errors and to enable them to grow towards Christ. As such, every member contributes to the growth of the body. Every member is responsible for the growth, even though everyone has a unique gift and ministry. Special ministries (offices) can only be distinguished from the ministries of other believers with regard to their particular function".³² Therefore, when one takes the Lord and His word (Scripture) at face value, then they will realize they have the perfect blueprint for the glorious church. "The ecclesia is perfectly designed to achieve its distinctive mission, but to do so means that we must build according to code. We must work with Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit to be the church that makes the difference that only we were designed to make. Only this idea of inherent design can explain why dynamic apostolic movements in history can have massive impact and growth with apparently very few of the resources we in the West think we need to get the job done. We are designed for world transformation; impact is built into the idea of ecclesia itself".³³ To be clear, the leadership gifts Jesus bestowed on the church are not for self-gain. "Both the equipment that believers, who constitute the church, give and receive and the service they give and receive make them steadfast in their struggle against heresy (4:11-16)".³⁴ Thus, each gift is for the edification of the body and building others up in the love and truth of Jesus. It is important to note that the position of this paper is not to state that the five leadership gifts are the only individuals who can equip, train, and edify the body, all mature believers can do that. The focus of this study is to identify the purpose and function of the "five-fold" ministry.

³⁰ Larkin, 84.

³¹ Broberg, R. (2016). *Gifts of the Holy Spirit*.

³² Breed, G. Ministry to the Congregation according to the Letter to the Ephesians. *Acta Theologica* 35, no. 1 (2015): 37-58.

³³ Barry, V. W. (2018).

³⁴ Breed, G. (2015).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the church is an essential asset to the development and growth of maturity for every believer. Since “Christ has sovereignly endowed every individual with special abilities to minister to all the other members. It is the responsibility of the divinely gifted leaders to equip the members for a life of mutual service. The goal of ministry is to help all believers grow in a knowledge of Christ and of the core doctrines of the faith, to mature to a greater Christlikeness, and to manifest love for one another in the life of the community”.³⁵ Ultimately, “A congregation that does not endeavor to equip every believer to use his/her gifts in the service of the others may fall prey to error and stagnation. A congregation must nurture its members by addressing their needs”,³⁶ but also by training believers and encouraging them to service work. While there is much more research that can go into this passage, the position of this paper is to provide an outline and foundation of the relevance of this Scripture today.

³⁵ Barry, V. W. (2018).

³⁶ Breed, G. (2015).

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