



THE ROLE OF THE APOSTOLIC AND EPHESIANS 4 GIFTS IN ADVANCE

THE RECOGNITION AND ROLE OF THE APOSTOLIC IN ADVANCE

Advance is a movement committed to planting and strengthening churches and we believe it is apostolic ministry that is catalytic in helping this happen. In light of this, it is important that we explain how we understand the role of apostolic gifting operating among us. We are a movement that embraces all the 'Ephesians 4 gifts' as being for Christ's church today but recognise that defining the role of apostles is confusing for many.

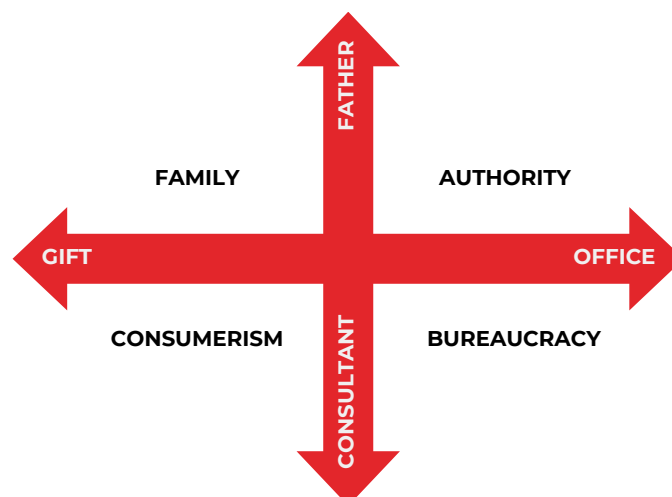
Our friend David Devenish (from the Newfrontiers team) has helpfully taught on what apostles do, namely that they:

- Bring understanding of revelation concerning the overall purposes of God in the earth (Rom. 16:25).
- Lay a foundation in churches (Eph. 2:20).
- Appoint team leadership in churches (Titus 1:5).
- Become like fathers to the churches and to the leaders of those churches (Phil. 2:22; Titus 1:4).
- Ensure ongoing care for churches (1 Tim. 1:3-5).
- Involve the churches they serve in the wider mission to the unreached regions of the world (2 Cor. 10:15-16).
- Bring contextualised wisdom (1 Cor. 10:23-11:1).
- Have a Kingdom mentality (Rom. 16:26).
- Are very concerned for the poor (Gal. 2:10).
- Are concerned for the unity as well as the maturity of the church (Eph. 4:3; Col. 3:14).
- Are to function in team (Acts 12:1-3; 2 Cor. 2:12-13).

In recognising and embracing these characteristics of apostolic ministry and here want to try to answer three questions that arise:

1. When the use of the term 'apostle' is appropriate
2. How apostles are recognised and authorised to operate into local churches
3. What apostolic team leadership looks like.

The following diagram is helpful in illustrating some of the tensions that exist around these questions.



THE GIFT/OFFICE AXIS

We believe that the Ephesians 4 gifts have always functioned in the Church, even if they have often been given different labels. Generally we prefer to use biblical categories and terminology and so do not want to shy away from using the designations of apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor and teacher. However, we also recognise that seeking to recover biblical categories and experiences has resulted at times in an overly boxed-in definition of the apostolic. 'Apostle' can become a letterhead-label that is more a mark of status than genuine ministry or gift.

"The purpose of the gifts is to equip churches so that they are genuinely apostolic, prophetic, evangelistic, pastoral and well taught."

As Ephesians 4:12 makes clear, the purpose of the gifts is to equip churches so that they are genuinely apostolic, prophetic, evangelistic, pastoral and well taught. We understand that *gifting* can be present in a church without having to be tied to a particular ministry office, and we want to see the fruit of these gifts operating in all the churches, and displayed by all kinds of people. For example, there might be many people in a church who feel a great concern for the poor and are gifted in serving them, which is an apostolic characteristic, without themselves being apostles.

However, if we swing the pendulum all the way over to the gifting side, away from the office side, we risk losing the impact that genuine 'E4' gifts can make. We could end up with something very watered down and which would place severe limitations on our mission. So we need to both operate with a generous 'as anyone is gifted let them...' framework, but also expect to have substantial apostolic gifts among us who do exercise an authoritative function.

THE FATHER/CONSULTANT AXIS

There should be a fatherly component to apostolic ministry but this can be overplayed. While we can see that Paul's model was to at times spend extended times with churches (from weeks to months to years) a desire to have a 'father' do the equivalent in our settings, getting to know individuals in the congregation on a deep level, and spending weeks ministering in the church, can be both unrealistic and potentially to abdicate the responsibilities of eldership. While Paul did spend extended season in some of the churches (Ephesus, Corinth), there were others he was with only briefly (for example, spending just three weeks with the Thessalonians) or did not seem to visit at all, yet still felt apostolically responsible for (as was the case with the church in Colossae). This was why Paul instructed that elders should be appointed in every town - precisely because it was meant to be the responsibility of the elders to 'father' the churches on a day to day basis.

On the other side of this pendulum swing, though, is apostolic ministry as consultant. This can be reduced to essentially asking someone to come into our churches to give management or church growth tips. While this can have value it is not apostolic. It lacks the genuine missional, relational, and spiritual dynamic of apostolic ministry.

FAMILY, AUTHORITY, BUREAUCRACY, CONSUMERISM

Of course, any 2-axis diagram is way too simplistic, but in general terms these four quadrants represent different ways we can spin as we try to be apostolic.

The Office/Consultant quadrant

A movement in which office is particularly emphasised and outside input functions primarily as a consultancy will become bureaucratic. This is what inevitably happens in denominations: labels become all-important; processes and red-tape all-consuming.

The Gift/Consultant quadrant

If the emphasis is too much towards recognising everyone's gift alongside inviting in outside consultants the result will be a consumerist shaped movement. What can I get out of this? How can I be helped to be a better version of me? This leads to the prosperity gospel and inch-deep evangelicalism.

The Father/Gift quadrant

Where the emphasis is allowing everyone's gifts to flourish and having strong, fatherly, input a genuine sense of family can develop. This is clearly good, but the downside can be when this morphs into something very introspective and cosy. If everyone is having a good time using their gifts with the security of a father figure overseeing things why bother to reach people who might disrupt the happy family?

The Father/Office quadrant

A strong emphasis on fathering combined with an emphasis on office is likely to result in a movement that is very authoritarian. Only a few people really get to be involved in the action. The potential for abuse is especially high in this model.

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The Healthy Centre

On this diagram we should be somewhere near the centre of the two axis.

We want to:

1. Recognise and release apostolic ministry that functions with real authority.
2. Recognise and release the E4 gifting present in all our churches but which is not tied to office.
3. Receive input in our churches that helps with the practical issues of church life and leadership.
4. And recognise men who do have a genuinely fatherly role across the movement.

This centre helps us recognise who is apostolic among us and clarifies their role.

Having unpacked this we can return to our three questions...

When the use of the term 'apostle' is appropriate

We see certain people recognized and called apostles in the New Testament, and we are comfortable using the term today, when we see someone operating in the full measure of the gift as enumerated in David Devenish's list. Overall, though, we prefer to be a movement defined by the activity of the apostolic, rather than the appointment of apostles.

"Our movement is led by a global team, of apostolically recognized men, who team closely with recognized Ephesians 4 gifts..."

How apostles are recognised and authorised to operate into local churches

Our movement is led by a global team, of apostolically recognized men, who team closely with recognized Ephesians 4 gifts, and a broader group of church strengtheners. The recognition of these men begins with the way in which they are received and serve in local churches, is confirmed by the witness of the Spirit, and affirmed by the other members of the team.

What apostolic team leadership looks like in Advance

The global team leads the movement in plurality, with a recognition of certain roles played by different members of the team. These roles and functions are not permanently set and will from time to time shift and change within the team.

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All those who serve on the global team should be apostolic men: they function with authority, help release E4 gifts in the churches, provide strengthening to churches and serve in a fatherly role. However, we are less concerned with the title of apostle than we are with teaming together to prioritise the activity of the apostolic and don't believe we need an apostle to lead the team.

And while we primarily work through geographical spheres, which provide proximity for partnership and regularity of connection moments, we recognize that relationships transcend the bounds of these geographical spheres, and churches will, and are encouraged to, connect with others around the world.

UNDERSTANDING THE OTHER "E4" GIFTS

Having given an overview of the way in which we understand the apostolic gift to work in Advance we need to provide some explanation around the gifts of prophet, evangelist, pastor and teacher.

Just as we understand that apostolic gifting can be present in a church without having to be tied to an office of apostle, so we recognise this to be the case with the other gifts. We want our churches to be prophetic, evangelistic, pastoral and well-taught. Yet, in order to equip the saints in these gifts and release all church members into service it is necessary that those who are recognised as carrying these gifts in a fuller measure minister among us.

THE GIFT OF PROPHET

The second set of gifted people whom Christ provides to the church is “prophets”. This does not refer to the Old Testament prophets or the prophetic texts they wrote (e.g., Rom 1:2; 3:21), but to new covenant people through whom God speaks. Paul lists this gift in the three other passages where he enumerates spiritual gifts (Rom 12:6-8; 1 Cor 12:8-10, 28-30). He told the Corinthians that a person who prophesies speaks to people “for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort” (1 Cor 14:3) and builds up the church (14:4,5). It is thus easy to see how the operation of this gift was vital as churches were being planted, especially where there was intense opposition that could lead to profound discouragement.

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Prophecy sometimes also included an element of foretelling, as can be seen in the case of the prophet Agabus (Acts 11:28; 21:10-11), who predicted the Judean famine as well as Paul’s arrest in Jerusalem. Although Paul says that prophecy is primarily for the benefit of believers (1 Cor 14:22), he does explain how God can reveal the secrets of the heart of an unbeliever to a prophet, which results in the person turning his heart to God (1 Cor. 14:24-25). In spite of the danger of false prophecy (see, e.g., 2 Pet. 2:1; 1 John 4:1), Paul warns the Thessalonian church not to set aside this gift (1 Thess. 5:20-22). Rather, they should exercise discernment to see what is good and what is evil (presumably what is from the Lord and what is not). In Paul’s view, prophecy is a gift that should be eagerly sought (1 Cor. 14:1) because it edifies the community of believers.

David Devenish, again, helpfully suggests certain roles prophetic ministry could play today:

A study of the prophets role generally in Scripture one could draw at least the following job description:

- Bringing the cutting edge of God's purposes – the 'now' word both for the church internationally, nationally and specifically for the local church.
- Bringing a sense of vision and direction.
- Seeing through issues.
- Imparting gifting and producing a church which moves in the charismatic gifts.
- Discerning gifting either through a tested prophetic word or by picking things up.

Note that prophetic words must all be weighed even if from a prophet, and beware of churches which are all vision but see nothing built. They are also to be involved in foundation laying alongside the apostle. It is not a different foundation but needs to be laid by the two ministries each bringing their own insight.

EVANGELIST

Evangelists are those individuals within the churches whom the ascended Christ had especially gifted to make known the redemptive message of the gospel. Luke referred to Philip as one who was gifted in this fashion (Acts 21:8), and Paul appeals to Timothy to “do the work of an evangelist” (2 Tim. 4:5). Since the apostles are gifted to go and proclaim the gospel in new areas where they would establish churches, the evangelists are probably those who remained in the local churches and continued to make known the gospel to those in the city or region who still had not heard.

The context makes it clear that the evangelists not only proclaimed the gospel, but also helped equip other believers in the church to share their faith and to grow in a knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ (Eph. 4:12).

The clearest demonstration of evangelistic gift is sustained zeal in witnessing and regular fruit in conversion. Those with ‘E4’ type evangelistic gifts also have a growing track record of helping others grow in confidence and fruitfulness in witness.

PASTOR

In spite of its popularity as a title for ministers in contemporary Protestant churches, the term pastor (“shepherd”) is actually rare in the NT. Ephesians 4:11 is, in fact, the only time that it is used for a class of church leaders. Both Peter and the writer of Hebrews use it as a title for Jesus himself (Heb. 13:20; 1 Pet. 2:25), but neither writer uses it to refer to ministers. Paul did, however, use the imagery of shepherding one other time – when he addressed the elders of the Ephesian church: “Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock” (Acts 20:28–29; see also 1 Pet. 5:2).

The usage of the term in this context suggests that the role involves a great deal of care, concern, and godly leadership. It also points to a close connection with the office of overseer/elder since Paul in Acts 20 charged the Ephesian elders/overseers with the task of pastoring. Teaching sound doctrine is an integral part of this ministry so that the flock can discern and avoid the dangerous teaching that comes by way of the wolves.

This image probably stems from Jesus himself, who taught that he was “the good shepherd” (John 10:1-18), but then commissioned Peter (and by extension, others in leadership in the church) to “feed my sheep” and “take care of my sheep” (John 21:15-17).

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From Jesus' example in his Good Shepherd Discourse, we know that this involves knowing people intimately (John 10:3,14), leading them (John 10:4), protecting them from "wolves" (John 10:7-10, 11-13), and loving them enough to sacrifice one's life for them (John 10:11-13, 15). As the *good* shepherd, Jesus' leadership contrasted sharply with the many bad shepherds Israel had throughout her history (Ezek. 34; Jer. 23:1-3). Jeremiah prophesied a time when God would "give you shepherds after my own heart, who will lead you with knowledge and understanding" (Jer. 3:15).

Pastors are therefore those who have primary responsibility to lead, feed, guard and guide in congregations. This also means that there is a close overlap between the gift of pastor and that of teacher. A measure of teaching is always involved in leading, feeding, guarding and guiding a church, while those who teach must do so with pastoral goals in mind, and not merely as an academic exercise.

"Teachers did not simply impart information or open up new ways of thought. They urged their hearers to live by what they taught"

THE GIFT OF TEACHER

The last named group, Paul mentions teachers third in his list of gifts in 1 Cor. 12:28 after apostles and prophets (see also Rom. 12:7). Teaching was a responsibility of the pastors (see above) and was a qualification for someone who serves as an overseer/elder (1 Tim. 3:2; 2:12; 5:17; 2 Tim. 2:24; Titus 1:9).

The apostles, mentioned first on the list, also exercised a teaching responsibility as they planted churches and fulfilled their ministry in imitation of the example of the Twelve (see Acts 4:2,18; 5:21,25,28,42).

The teachers not only passed on content and explained it, but they also exhorted the hearers to live in conformity with what they were learning. A gifted teacher is someone who equips others to learn! As the churches in Asia Minor continued to reach many Gentiles with the gospel of Christ, the need for many gifted teachers was great.

Teaching is often an exposition or application of Scripture (Acts 15:35; 18:11, 25; Rom. 2:20, 21; Col. 3:16; Heb. 5:12), or an explanation and reiteration of apostolic injunctions (1 Cor. 4:17; Rom. 16:17; 2 Thess. 2:15; 2 Tim. 2:2; 3:10). In the Pastoral Epistles, teaching appears to be an authoritative function concerned with the faithful transmission of apostolic doctrine or tradition and committed to men specially chosen (e.g., 2 Tim. 1:13-14; 2:1-2; 1 Tim. 3:2; 5:17; Tit. 1:9). Timothy is urged not only to pursue a teaching ministry himself but also to entrust what he has learned to faithful men who will be able to teach others also (1 Tim. 4:13, 16; 2 Tim. 2:2).

This teaching then has a cascading effect throughout the church as different groups are equipped to teach others (Tit. 2:3) and as whole congregations “teach and admonish one another” (Col. 3:16). Teachers did not simply impart information or open up new ways of thought. They urged their hearers to live by what they taught (Eph. 4:20–21). So important is this ministry for building the body of Christ that provision is made for its continuity for succeeding generations.

IN CONCLUSION

Prophet, Evangelist, Pastor and Teacher, in partnership with the apostolic; are given *“to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”* (Eph 4: 11 - 13. It’s our sincere hope that we would increasingly see these gifts at work in the local church and amongst us as a movement.

ADVANCE

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