

and new believers will not come to maturity. They will remain as spiritual children or even babies. They will also be easy prey for spiritual wolves.

Prophets, shepherds and teachers are like parents who feed and clothe and educate their children and bring them through the phases of childhood until they become adults. They also protect them from many dangers that may lie in their pathway. Evangelists are like midwives who help babies come into the world.

These ministries are gifts from God and Jesus to the church. We must pray and ask God to give them to us.

We must also recognise the ministries he has already given to us. We must recognise these ministries in ourselves and we must recognise them in others.

Maybe you are an evangelist. You must recognise and develop your ministry, and others must recognise you. You must seek gifts of healing that will be evidence to unbelievers that your message is true.

Maybe you are a teacher. Then you must wait on God and seek revelation from him. Going to Bible College and learning from man is good, but it is not enough. You must be taught by the Holy Spirit. Others must recognise your gift and give you the opportunity to teach.

Maybe you are a shepherd. You also must be faithful in the ministry that God has given you. You must understand and obey the command that Jesus gave to Peter, **“Feed my sheep”** (John 21:17).

Maybe God is giving you a prophetic ministry. You must learn to hear God’s voice and bring his messages to his people.

Maybe you have several of these ministries. Maybe even God has called you to be an apostle. You must be faithful to your calling.

When all these five ministries are functioning rightly in our churches new believers will come to faith in Jesus and be born again. They will pass safely through the stages of spiritual infancy, childhood and adolescence till they become spiritually mature and strong adult members of Christ’s body.

# Five Ministries

**Apostles**

**Prophets**

**Evangelists**

**Shepherds**

**Teachers**

They do not even know what is food and what is not. New believers are similar. They cannot distinguish spiritual food from spiritual poison.

How can we protect new believers from false ministries? The answer is true ministries. True ministries protect young believers from false ministries.

Paul explained this to the Ephesians. Let's look again at what he wrote: "And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes" (Eph 4:11-14).

Prophets have the gift of discerning of spirits. True prophets can recognise false prophets. Even if false prophets are quoting many scriptures, true prophets will know in their hearts that a false prophet is not from God.

True teachers will recognise false teachers. True teachers will understand the true meaning of the Scriptures and will recognise wrong interpretation. They will be able to explain why and how the false teaching is wrong.

Shepherds will want to protect and feed their sheep. False teachers are wolves in sheep's clothing. Good shepherds will protect their sheep and drive wolves away. They will want their sheep to have good nourishing food which will bring them to maturity.

Prophets, teachers and shepherds must work together to bring young believers to maturity. Then they will be safe from the many false prophets, teachers and shepherds that want to lead them astray.

## **Conclusion**

Every church needs prophets, shepherds, teachers and evangelists. The wider church also needs apostles. Without these ministries young

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spirits and he saw miracles. He probably used all the nine gifts of the Holy Spirit. Because he had experienced these gifts he could write about them. This kind of power is necessary for the ministry of an apostle.

Paul was an apostle and obviously also a teacher and an evangelist. Probably he was also a prophet and maybe a shepherd.

Peter was an apostle and a powerful evangelist. When he preached on the day of Pentecost 3000 people believed (Acts 2:41). He was also clearly a shepherd. Almost the last words of Jesus to him were, “**Feed my sheep**” (John 21:17).

The work of an apostle is to establish churches.

## False Ministries

In addition to true ministries, the Bible clearly speaks about false ministries.

- Jesus spoke about **false prophets**. “**For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect**” (Mat 24:24).
- Paul wrote about **false apostles**. “**For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ**” (2 Cor 11:13).
- Peter wrote about **false prophets** and **false teachers**. “**But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies**” (2 Pet 2:1).
- Jeremiah and Ezekiel spoke about **false shepherds** (see Ezek chapter 34).

False apostles imitate true apostles. False prophets imitate true prophets. False teachers imitate true teachers. False shepherds imitate true shepherds.

New believers are very vulnerable. Human babies will put anything into their mouths. They cannot distinguish good food from bad food.

## Introduction

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul writes about five different ministries. These ministries are the gifts of Jesus to his church.

In Eph 4:8 Paul wrote “**When he ascended on high ... he gave gifts to men.**”

In Eph 4:11 Paul tells us what these ministries are:

- Apostles
- Prophets
- Evangelists
- Shepherds
- Teachers

In the following verses Paul describes the purpose of these ministries:

“...to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes” (Eph 4:12-14).

Paul travelled about the Roman Empire preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ to people who had never heard his name. Many people believed the message Paul brought them and experienced a new birth through the Holy Spirit. They became babies in Christ.

Human babies are the most helpless offspring in all the animal kingdom. At birth they cannot even move their bodies without their mother’s help. They cannot eat solid food for several months. A year passes before they can even walk and another year before they can communicate their needs. They take 15 or more years to reach physical maturity. They need mothers and fathers and other helpers and teachers

to bring them through the many years it takes them to reach physical and mental maturity.

God describes new believers as babies. Like human babies they must move from conception to birth. They must then progress from spiritual milk to solid spiritual food. They must learn to walk in the spirit. They must gradually grow to spiritual maturity. Throughout this process they must be protected from the many dangers that lie on their path.

The purpose of apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds and teachers is to bring spiritual babies from spiritual conception to spiritual maturity.

Are these five ministries available to us today? Are they functioning in our churches? Are they there, but not recognised? Or did they become redundant, as some people believe, after the Bible was completed and the church became established?

We'll look at them one by one and try to understand them a bit more, but first we will note that Jesus himself exercised all five of these ministries.

## Jesus

Please read the following passages about Jesus.

- “Therefore, holy brothers, you who share in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the **apostle** and high priest of our confession” (Heb 3:1). Jesus was an **apostle**.
- “...Jesus of Nazareth, a man who was a **prophet** mighty in deed and word before God and all the people” (Luke 24:19). Jesus was a **prophet**.
- “**I am the good shepherd**” (John 10:11). Jesus was a **shepherd**.
- “**Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher**” (John 3:2). Jesus was a **teacher**.

Does this mean that every believer is a prophet? No! Most people will receive simple messages from God mainly for themselves. A few people will receive more powerful and important messages and bring these messages to many others. These people will be prophets.

Prophets will bring messages of encouragement or correction, maybe just for their church, maybe for their area, maybe for all the believers in their country.

Prophets may also bring messages about the future. God knows the future but we do not. He is able to speak to his prophets and tell them what they need to know. They can then warn his people to prepare them for what is coming.

## Apostles

The English word *apostle* comes directly from the Greek word *αποστολος* (apostolos), which means *someone who has been sent*. The English word missionary originally had a similar meaning.

After his resurrection Jesus appeared to his disciples and said, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.” And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit” (John 20:21).

God the Father sent Jesus into this world. All four gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, as well as the book of Acts, contain Jesus’ instructions to the apostles to go into all the world to teach and preach and make disciples.

Apostles are the most important of the five ministries. They are often sent to places where no one has even heard the name of Jesus. They will also exercise other ministries. Obviously they must also be evangelists. They must be able to preach the gospel to people who know nothing about Jesus.

Paul wrote to the Corinthians about the signs of an apostle: “The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with utmost patience, with signs and wonders and mighty works” (2 Cor 12:12). Paul himself had a powerful ministry. He saw people healed and set free from evil

## Prophets

Prophets are the only ministry of the five that occur in the Old Testament. From the beginning to the end of the OT we meet prophets. The first was Enoch and the last was Malachi. For more than 2000 years God spoke to his people through these prophets.

God spoke to these prophets in two main ways.

Firstly, God spoke to them with words. We read more than 100 times: “the word of the Lord came to Isaiah”, “the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah” etc. He gave them messages that they should speak to his people.

Secondly, God spoke to prophets in visions. Ezekiel, Daniel and Zechariah all saw many visions.

A prophet is someone who hears from God and then passes on a message to the people.

In Old Testament times prophets were very special people. They were the few people who were able to hear the voice of God and bring messages from him to the people. But in the New Testament, on the day of Pentecost, a wonderful thing happened. God poured out his spirit upon all flesh, not just on a few special people, but on everyone who believed.

Peter quoted these words from the prophet Joel: “And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy” (Acts 2:17,18).

In the Old Covenant God spoke to his people (the Jews) through prophets. In the New Covenant he speaks directly and personally to each believer. Anyone who believes, young or old, male or female, educated or illiterate, can receive words and visions from God.

- “The Spirit of the Lord is on Me, because He has anointed Me to **preach good news** to (evangelise) the poor.” (Luke 4:18) Jesus was an **evangelist**.

Clearly, Jesus exercised all five of these ministries. He received no human training on how to be an apostle or prophet or any other of these ministries. He did everything through the power and leading of the Holy Spirit.

When he ascended into heaven, in addition to sending the Holy Spirit, he also gave these five ministries to the church. As in the case of Jesus, none of these ministries come through natural ability or human training. No Bible college or theological seminary can train you to be an apostle. All of these ministries are gifts from Jesus and can only come through the power of the Holy Spirit.

## Evangelists

Before his ascension Jesus appeared to his 11 remaining disciples and gave them his famous last instructions: “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to (evangelise) every creature” (Mark 16:15).

Many people believe and teach that Jesus gives this command, not only to his 11 disciples, but to all his followers for all time including to us. I believed this myself for many years. But think again! Jesus had already prepared and trained these 11 men for their task. He had previously sent them out with the instructions: “Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons.” (Matt 10:8). He had already equipped them with power, “Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you” (Luke 10:9). Most of us have not had this kind of preparation and are not called to be evangelists.

Every true believer can give a testimony of what God has done in his life, but not every believer is called to be an evangelist.

Peter was the most powerful evangelist in the New Testament. He spoke on the day of Pentecost and 3000 people believed his words and were baptised.

Evangelists are people who have received a special gift and calling. A few, like Billy Graham, will have powerful international ministries and lead many people to faith in Jesus. Most will have smaller but still valuable ministries in their local area.

Evangelists need the gifts of healing and casting out evil spirits. When unbelievers see these signs they will believe.

## Shepherds - Pastors

Jesus said, **“I am the good shepherd”** (John 10:11). The Greek word (ποιμην) translated *shepherd* is the same Greek word that in most English versions is translated *pastor* in Eph 4:11 (the passage we are considering). In old English the words *shepherd* and *pastor* had the same meaning. In modern English a shepherd is a man who looks after sheep and a pastor is the leader of a church.

In the New Testament, churches were never led and run by a single person called a pastor. They were led by a group of elders. When the Roman Catholic Church rose to dominance, gradually everything changed. Almost all churches came to have a single leader who was called a priest. After the Reformation, most Protestant denominations kept the idea of single leadership but changed the leader’s title to minister or pastor.

The ministry of a shepherd is nothing to do with being a church leader. Jesus himself was not a church leader.

Shepherds are people who care for their sheep. They protect them and feed them. They are motivated by love.

Jesus, the model shepherd, said, **“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep”** (John 14:11).

The ministry of a shepherd is a personal ministry. We read that Jesus **“calls his own sheep by name”** (John 10:3). Shepherds must know their sheep individually and personally and love them and care for them.

One shepherd in each church is not enough. Some people will have a strong shepherd ministry and care for many sheep. Others will have a

smaller shepherd ministry and maybe they will care for just two or three new believers.

After his resurrection Jesus especially gave a shepherding ministry to Peter. His parting words to him were **“Feed my sheep”** (John 21:20).

## Teachers

Nicodemus came to Jesus and said: **“Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him”** (John 3:2). Jesus was a teacher, but he was not a Bible teacher. Jesus did not need to teach the scriptures because his followers already knew them. They heard the scriptures read every Sabbath in the synagogue. Jesus explained the scriptures. He opened up their hidden meaning.

After his resurrection Jesus joined two disciples on the road to Emmaus. We read: **“And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself”** (Luke 24:27). These disciples knew all about Moses and the prophets, but they only understood the literal meaning of the Scriptures. They had no idea that these scriptures pointed to Jesus. Many people these days are in the same position. They know the Bible well, but they only understand its literal meaning.

Apart from Jesus, Paul was the best teacher in the New Testament. Before Paul met Jesus on the road to Damascus, he spent a lot of time studying the Scriptures (the Old Testament). He knew these Scriptures very well, but he only understood their literal meaning. After his conversion, he did not go to Peter, as we might have expected, to learn about the Scriptures; instead he went to God. God gave him a completely new understanding of the Old Testament Scriptures. Paul received revelation through the Holy Spirit. This did not happen overnight, but took several years. After this he was able to write letters to the Romans and to others, sharing the revelation that God had given him. Paul was a gift from Jesus to the church.

We need teachers who have personally received revelation and understanding from God.