

**THE SOVEREIGN GOD AND**  
**THE MYSTERY OF HIS WILL:**  
**A STUDY OF EPHESIANS**  
**(LESSON FIFTY-ONE)**  
**“APOSTLES AND PROPHETS”**

**EPHESIANS 4:7-16**

- 7 But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ.*
- 8 Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.*
- 9 (Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth?*
- 10 He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.)*
- 11 And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;*
- 12 For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:*
- 13 Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:*
- 14 That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;*
- 15 But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ:*
- 16 From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.*

In recent **Lessons**, we have been emphasizing the fact that the great spiritual truths outlined in **Ephesians** chapter **4**, are of central importance to our understanding of what it means for individual believers to be members of the Church, the Body of Christ.

In verse **7**, Paul says *“But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift.”* He explains that grace was given to every genuine believer, enabling them to receive at least one spiritual gift. It is the responsibility of each believer to identify his or her gift or gifts, and to use them to edify the Body of Christ, preserve the unity of the Spirit, and ultimately glorify God.

In verse **8**, he quotes **Psalm 68:18** to illustrate to his readers how Jesus Christ was enabled in the divine plan of God to give the grace gift described in verse **7**. He writes, *“Therefore it says, “When he ascended on high he captured captives; he gave gifts to men.”* Paul wants the believers to know that although the gift is free, there was a great price that had to be paid to make this bestowal of grace possible, and so, he proceeds to connect the giving of gifts to the triumphant ascension of Christ. He explains that it is Christ’s exaltation to the right hand of the Father that makes it possible for Him to give gifts to men.

In verse **11**, he identifies some of the spiritual gifts mentioned in verse **7**. He writes, *“And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers.”*

Here, we have a list of the ministry gifts which the Lord Jesus Christ has given to His Body. These are **apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers**.

Paul writes, “*And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers.*” It was Jesus Christ Himself who gave these ministry gifts to His Church. There is an intensive pronoun in the Greek text. The phrase literally reads, “He Himself gave.” Paul is saying that it is the Lord Jesus Himself, and no one else, who gave the gifts of **apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers** to His Church.

Paul’s focus here is not on individual spiritual gifts but rather on **gifted persons** who Jesus Christ has given to His Church. Notice that each of these designations is involved, in some way, with the proclamation of the Word of God. It is through these gifted persons that the Word of God is revealed, declared and taught. This, of course, speaks to the critical importance of the Word of God in respect of the growth and development of the members of the Body of Christ. Brothers and sisters, no Christian assembly can rise higher than the level of its pulpit ministry. Simply put, “No Word, no growth; insufficient Word, insufficient growth; sufficient Word, sufficient growth.”

The word “gave,” is a translation of the Greek word **didómi: (did’-o-mee)**, which, as we noted in our previous **Lesson**, means “to bestow, cause, command, grant or offer,” clearly indicating that these gifted persons were given to the Church based on a decision of our Lord’s will and not on the merit of the recipients. In this **Lesson**, we will consider the first two ministry gifts given to the Church, the gifts of apostles and prophets.

The word “apostles” is a translation of the Greek word **apostolos: (ap-os’-tol-os)**, which refers to “a delegate, or messenger, one sent forth with orders.” The word signifies one who is sent forth by another, often with a special commission to represent another and to accomplish his work. It can be a delegate, or an ambassador sent out on a mission with the authority of the one who sent him. The **apostolos** was officially commissioned for the position or task.

In the New Testament, the word is primarily used as a specific and unique title for the men whom Christ personally chose and commissioned to authoritatively proclaim the gospel and lead the early Church. These men were not only called directly by our Lord, but **all of them were witnesses of His resurrection**. During His earthly ministry, the Lord Jesus had many disciples. Eventually, He selected twelve (12) of them to be apostles. A disciple is a follower or pupil, but an apostle is a divinely appointed representative. We read of the selection of the original apostles in **Matthew 10:1-4**:

- 1 And when he had called unto him his twelve disciples, he gave them power against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease.*
- 2 Now the names of the twelve apostles are these; The first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother;*
- 3 Philip, and Bartholomew; Thomas, and Matthew the publican; James the son of Alphaeus, and Lebbaeus, whose surname was Thaddaeus;*
- 4 Simon the Canaanite, and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed him.*

According to **Acts 1:15-22**, the apostles were to give witness of the Resurrection of Christ:

- 15 In those days Peter stood up among the believers (a gathering of about 120 people) and said,*
- 16 “Brothers, the scripture had to be fulfilled that the Holy Spirit foretold through David concerning Judas — who became the guide for those who arrested Jesus —*
- 17 for he was counted as one of us and received a share in this ministry.”*
- 18 (Now this man Judas acquired a field with the reward of his unjust deed, and falling headfirst he burst open in the middle and all his intestines gushed out.*
- 19 This became known to all who lived in Jerusalem, so that in their own language they called that field Hakeldama, that is, “Field of Blood.”*

20 “For it is written in the book of Psalms, ‘Let his house become deserted, and let there be no one to live in it,’ and ‘Let another take his position of responsibility.’

21 Thus one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time the Lord Jesus associated with us,

22 beginning from his baptism by John until the day he was taken up from us — **of these must become a witness of his resurrection together with us.**” (New English Translation)

1 **Corinthians 9:1** implies that the original apostles had to have seen the risen Christ personally. Paul writes, “Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? **Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord?**” (New English Translation)

Although he was not one of the apostles commissioned during the earthly life of Jesus, Paul received a special apostolic commission as “*the apostle of the Gentiles*,” from our Lord after His ascension. **Romans 11:13** and **Galatians 2:6-9**, clearly indicate that this was so:

### **ROMANS 11:13**

“For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as **I am the apostle of the Gentiles**, I magnify mine office.”

### **GALATIANS 2:6-9**

6 But of these who seemed to be somewhat, (whatsoever they were, it maketh no matter to me: God accepteth no man’s person:) for they who seemed to be somewhat in conference added nothing to me:

7 But contrariwise, when they saw that the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto me, as the gospel of the circumcision was unto Peter;

8 (For he that wrought effectually in Peter **to the apostleship of the circumcision, the same was mighty in me toward the Gentiles:**)

9 And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision.

Paul was called by the resurrected Jesus Himself during his “Damascus Road” experience (**Acts 9:1-16**).

The apostles were given direct revelation of God’s Word. When they spoke the Word, they had authority and that word of authority especially marked them as apostles. And by the miracles and signs that accompanied their ministry, their teaching authority was verified. For example, in **2 Corinthians 12:12** Paul wrote, “*Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds.*” **Thus, the teachings and writings of the apostles became the foundation of the Church and their authority extended beyond local bodies of believers to the entire believing world.**

Commenting on this verse, the American Christian author and pastor **Ray Stedman** wrote the following: “The foundation of the church is Jesus Christ, as Paul declared to the Corinthians, ‘*For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ*’ (**1 Corinthians 3:11**), and the primary work of an apostle was to declare the whole body of truth concerning Jesus Christ. That is the foundation. What the apostles say about Jesus Christ is the foundation of the church, and what they said about Jesus Christ is recorded for us in the New Testament. That book is written by the apostles and prophets, and the church rests squarely upon that foundation.”

Let me state clearly that there are no apostles today **in the strictest New Testament sense of the word**. The apostles and prophets were the recipients of God’s revelation which in other generations was a mystery that not been made known. The first apostles and prophets were foundational, and once that foundation had been laid in the form of the 27 books of the New Testament, there was no longer a need for this function.

There are no apostles in the sense that the original 12 and Paul were apostles. At times in the New Testament, the term “apostle” seems to have carried the broad meaning of one who was sent as a messenger or delegate with instructions from a group or an individual. But the apostles referred to in **Ephesians 4:11**, refer only to those who were apostles after the Ascension of Christ. In the strictest sense, the term “apostle” was the official title of the Twelve, and Paul, and thus, was a temporary office.

I do believe, however, that the term may be used in a secondary sense to describe those persons who go out and plant churches, but this gift should in no way be confused with the gift given to the original 12 apostles and Paul, whose function was unique and is not to be repeated. In other words, there is no revelation of truth concerning Jesus Christ, other than what the original apostles have given to the Church. There is no so-called apostolic succession as some have mistakenly taught. Any person, male or female, who claims to have the same office and authority of the original 12 and of Paul, is either deceived or a direct agent of the devil!

In **2 Corinthians 11**, we are informed that “*false apostles*” had infiltrated the church at Corinth. In verses **12-15** Paul writes,

**12** *But what I do, that I will do, that I may cut off occasion from them which desire occasion; that wherein they glory, they may be found even as we.*

**13** *For such are **false apostles**, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ.*

**14** *And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.*

**15** *Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works.*

These “*false apostles*” claimed to have divine authority as God’s servants, but their authority was as false as they were. They claimed to be “super-apostles,” on a much higher spiritual level than Paul. With their clever oratory, and their demonically inspired tricks, they mesmerized ignorant believers, while at the same time pointing out that Paul was not as gifted as they were. Unfortunately, some believers were influenced by their pernicious behaviour, instead of standing firm on the basic truths of the Gospel which had been taught to them by faithful pastors and teachers.

Paul warned the believers in Corinth that these men were not “super-apostles” at all, but were pseudo apostles - false apostles! Their motive was not to glorify God, but to get personal gain by capturing converts. He calls them “*deceitful workers*.” The word “*deceitful*” is a translation of the Greek word **dolios**: (**dol’-ee-os**). The basic idea of this word is that of using bait to catch fish. The “false apostles” offered the Corinthian believers a Christian life that was “superior” to that described in the New Testament. It was a life that was an unbiblical mixture of Law and grace.

Instead of being empowered by the Holy Spirit, these men were energized by Satan. Three times in this passage, Paul uses the word “*transform*” or “*transforming*” to describe their operations. The Greek word means “to disguise, to masquerade.” There is a change on the outside, but there is no change on the inside. Satan’s workers, like Satan himself, never appear in their true character, they always wear a disguise and hide behind a mask.

Brothers and sisters, there are many “*false apostles*” operating in the Church today and their teaching and actions are just as subtle and destructive as were those of the false apostles in Paul’s day. It is the responsibility of faithful ministers to expose and denounce these deceivers and to protect the members of the Body of Christ from these “wolves in sheep’s clothing,” And it is the responsibility of the saints to adhere to the sound doctrine that is taught to them by God-called ministers of the Gospel.

Every member of the Body of Christ must adopt the approach of the Ephesian church outlined in **Revelation 2:1-2**: *“Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write; These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks; I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: **and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars.**”*

The word “*prophets*” is a translation of the Greek word **prophétés: (prof-ay’-tace)**, which literally means, “one who speaks forth.” It refers to, “an interpreter or spokesman for God; one through whom God speaks; one who speaks forth by divine inspiration.” We commonly associate a prophet with predictions of future events, but this is not the **primary** function of a prophet. In the New Testament, the word “*Prophets*” does not primarily refer to those who foretell the future, but to preachers and expounders of the Word of God.

While it is true that the New Testament prophet was occasionally a **foreteller**, declaring future events, he or she was more often a **forthteller**, speaking forth divinely revealed truth for the purpose of sound doctrinal instruction.

In **Acts 11:27-30**, we have an example of the **foretelling** or predictive aspect of the prophetic ministry:

**27** *At that time **some prophets** came down from Jerusalem to Antioch.*

**28** ***One of them**, named Agabus, got up and predicted by the Spirit that a severe famine was about to come over the whole inhabited world. (This took place during the reign of Claudius.)*

**29** *So the disciples, each in accordance with his financial ability, decided to send relief to the brothers living in Judea.*

**30** *They did so, sending their financial aid to the elders by Barnabas and Saul. (New English Translation)*

In Acts **15:30-33**, we have an example of the **forthtelling** or expounding aspect of the prophetic ministry:

**30** *So when they were dismissed, they went down to Antioch, and after gathering the entire group together, they delivered the letter.*

**31** *When they read it aloud, the people rejoiced at its encouragement.*

**32** *Both Judas and Silas, **who were prophets** themselves, **encouraged and strengthened** the brothers with a long speech.*

**33** *After they had spent some time there, they were sent off in peace by the brothers to those who had sent them. (New English Translation)*

In the New Testament the Greek word **prophétés** corresponds to the person who in the Old Testament spoke under divine influence and inspiration. This included the foretelling of future events and the exhorting, reproving, and warning of individuals or nations as the ambassador of God and the interpreter of His will to men. In the case of the Old Testament, the prophets’ ministry was a foretelling of the salvation **yet to be accomplished** by the Messiah. In the New Testament, prophecy is a publication of the salvation **already accomplished** by the Messiah.

**Ray Stedman**, whom we quoted earlier, has the following note regarding prophets: “A prophet is essentially a man who speaks for God, who unfolds the mind of God. In the early church, before the New Testament was written down, prophets spoke directly by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, uttering the truths that are now recorded in the New Testament. They unfolded what God taught, and thus, the body was motivated, galvanized into activity. Men such as Mark, Luke, James, and Jude were not, themselves, apostles but they were associated with the apostles in the writing of the New Testament.

The gift of a prophet differs from that of an apostle: The apostle gives an authoritative declaration of the whole body of truth concerning Jesus Christ; but the prophet interprets that authoritative word and explains the truth so that it becomes very clear, vital, and compelling.”

Brothers and sisters, as we consider prophesy from the perspective of the New Testament, it is vital for us to remember that the canon of Scripture was completed when the apostle John wrote the word “Amen” at the end of verse **21** of **Revelation** chapter **22**! This means that there is no new revelation! We must keep in mind that believers in the early New Testament churches did not possess Bibles, nor was the New Testament written and completed. How, then, were these believers to know God’s will? The Holy Spirit shared God’s truth with those possessing the gift of prophecy. In **1 Corinthians 13:2**, Paul indicates that the gift of prophecy had to do with understanding: “*And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge.*” He is referring, here, to spiritual truths. According to **1 Corinthians 14:3**, the purpose of prophecy is “*strengthening, encouragement, and consolation*” (**New English Translation**). Believers today get spiritual truths through the Holy Spirit anointed preaching and teaching of the Word. **Ephesians 2:20** clearly indicates that the apostles and prophets had a foundational ministry in the early church that is not needed in the same sense today. Anyone who claims that he or she has received a new revelation from God is a false prophet and should be avoided more than the **Corona virus**!

In **2 Peter 2**, the apostle Peter warns those to whom he is writing to beware of false prophets. In verses **1-3**, he writes the following:

**1** *But false prophets arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. These false teachers will infiltrate your midst with destructive heresies, even to the point of denying the Master who bought them. As a result, they will bring swift destruction on themselves.*

**2** *And many will follow their debauched lifestyles. Because of these false teachers, the way of truth will be slandered.*

**3** *And in their greed they will exploit you with deceptive words. Their condemnation pronounced long ago is not sitting idly by; their destruction is not asleep.* (**New English Translation**)

Peter is speaking here, about false prophets in the New Testament Church. In verses **17-22**, he informs us of the characteristics of these wicked individuals:

**17** *These men are waterless springs and mists driven by a storm, for whom the utter depths of darkness have been reserved.*

**18** *For by speaking high-sounding but empty words they are able to entice, with fleshly desires and with debauchery, people who have just escaped from those who reside in error.*

**19** *Although these false teachers promise such people freedom, they themselves are enslaved to immorality. For whatever a person succumbs to, to that he is enslaved.*

**20** *For if after they have escaped the filthy things of the world through the rich knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they again get entangled in them and succumb to them, their last state has become worse for them than their first.*

**21** *For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than, having known it, to turn back from the holy commandment that had been delivered to them.*

**22** *They are illustrations of this true proverb: “A dog returns to its own vomit,” and “A sow, after washing herself, wallows in the mire.”* (**New English Translation**)

Peter likens these individuals to **dogs** and **sows** (female pigs), a clear indication that they, like the false apostles we considered earlier, were never changed on the inside, even though they outwardly appeared to be changed. In , they were never genuinely converted. They were “wolves in sheep’s clothing.”

It is important for us to understand that the Old Testament prophet was one raised up by God whose charge was to proclaim the Word which was given to him by the Lord and that only. The Old Testament prophet could neither, contradict the Law of the Lord or speak from his own mind, for if he did, he was functioning as a false prophet. We find confirmation of this in **Jeremiah 14:14**:

**13** Then I said, “Oh, Sovereign LORD, look! The prophets are telling them that you said, ‘You will not experience war or suffer famine. I will give you lasting peace and prosperity in this land.’”

**14** Then the LORD said to me, “Those prophets are prophesying lies while claiming my authority! I did not send them. I did not commission them. I did not speak to them. They are prophesying to these people false visions, worthless predictions, and the delusions of their own mind.

**15** I did not send those prophets, though they claim to be prophesying in my name. They may be saying, ‘No war or famine will happen in this land.’ But I, the LORD, say this about them: ‘War and starvation will kill those prophets.’

**16** The people to whom they are prophesying will die through war and famine. Their bodies will be thrown out into the streets of Jerusalem and there will be no one to bury them. This will happen to the men and their wives, their sons, and their daughters. For I will pour out on them the destruction they deserve.” (New English Translation)

Furthermore, when the Old Testament prophet made a predictive pronouncement, that Word had to come true, for if it did not, he was a false prophet and he was to be slain. In **Deuteronomy 18:20-22**, we read the following:

**20** “But if any prophet presumes to speak anything in my name that I have not authorized him to speak, or speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet must die.

**21** Now if you say to yourselves, ‘How can we tell that a message is not from the LORD?’ —

**22** whenever a prophet speaks in my name and the prediction is not fulfilled, then I have not spoken it; the prophet has presumed to speak it, so you need not fear him.” (New English Translation)

Any person today, who claims to have the gift of prophecy and who contradicts the written Word of God and makes predictions which do not come to pass, is a false prophet and is being motivated by seducing spirits. Such a person is anti-Christ and his or her ministry must be rejected by all true believers.

The New Testament prophets received direct revelations from the Lord and passed them on to the church for the purpose of edification, not popularity. **What they spoke by the Holy Spirit, was the word of God.** The prophets did not speak their own thoughts but what they received from God. They, however, retained their own consciousness and individuality. In **2 Peter 1:20-21** we read the following: “Above all, you do well if you recognize this: No prophecy of scripture ever comes about by the prophet’s own imagination, for no prophecy was ever borne of human impulse; rather, men carried along by the Holy Spirit spoke from God” (New English Translation).

In our next **Lesson**, Lord willing, we will look at the other ministry gifts mentioned in **Ephesians 4:11**.