

Home Group Leaders Discussion Guide

Ephesians 4:7-16

The book of Ephesians offers us the loftiest view of the Church in all of the New Testament. This makes sense because the Church is inextricably linked to Jesus. The higher the view we have of Jesus, the higher view we'll naturally have of the Church. But conversely, if we have a low view of the Church, it means we have a lower view of Jesus than we'd like to admit. Consider the statement Paul made back in chapter 1: *"And God placed all things under His [Jesus'] feet and appointed Him to be head over everything for the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills everything in every way."* (1:22-23 NIV) Did you catch that? Everything is under Christ, and the Church is the "fullness" of Christ! That's hugely significant. And Paul carries this lofty thought throughout this letter.

Beyond metaphors like *"the family of God"*, the *"body of Christ"*, the *"bride of Christ"*, the *"temple of God"* (just to name a few), a good working definition of the Church is *"the people who are the ongoing presence of Jesus carrying out the ongoing work of Jesus"* (We might even want to add, *"...indwelt and empowered by the Spirit of Jesus"*.) This understanding of the church helps us grasp what Paul says in the present passage.

Paul is very clear that Jesus has given gifts to EACH ONE OF US. But what are these gifts? First and foremost, the gift is Himself in the form of His indwelling Spirit. With that comes a particular role to play, a vocation to fulfill, in His ongoing work. As such, we each are gifts from Jesus to each other.

A common question (and one that happened to be asked during the Q & A portion of the service on Sunday) is how is this passage similar or different from other passages that deal with gifts? The other passages in question are I Corinthians 12 and Romans 12. (I highly recommend you become familiar with them if you're not already.) The most important similarities in the passages is that Paul (who authored all 3 letters) consistently emphasizes unity amongst diversity; that gifts are given as God determines for His purposes; everyone needs to use the gift they've given (or be the gift they are) for the overall benefit of the larger Body; and that love must always rule the day. The primary difference, the one that makes the Ephesians 4 passage stand out a bit, is that here the gifts are people, whereas in I Corinthians 12 and Romans 12 the focus is more on Spirit-empowered abilities. But, again, the main thrust is that we must offer, contribute, or use what we have been given—this honors the One who gave the gifts in the first place; and we must receive and value the gifts of others, or the gift of others—this, too honors the One who gave us to each other.

In order to continue His ongoing work through His Church, Jesus gave each of us a portion of that work to be a part of. To ensure His ongoing apostolic work, Jesus gave His Body some who are apostle. To ensure His ongoing prophetic work, Jesus gave us some who are prophets. To ensure His ongoing evangelistic work, Jesus gave us some evangelists. To ensure His ongoing shepherding work, Jesus gave His Church some pastor/shepherds. To ensure His ongoing

teaching work, Jesus gave us some teachers. These functions continue the work of Christ in the world, and each of us are at least one of these part/functions/roles within the Body of Christ.

It is tempting to think—and has often been taught—that these are leadership roles within the Church. I believe a better way of understanding it is that these are ministry roles within the Church, and we are ALL called to minister. This does not negate the importance of leadership. As Alan Hirsch writes, *“We therefore suggest that calling and ministry are different from leadership only by matter of degree and capacity....Everyone has a gifting, and therefore a possibility of a maturing ministry, but not everyone functions as a leader within his or her scope of ministry. This shift radically changes the way we see God’s people. Everyone is gifted and called to operate out of his or her vocational energies, but not all are leaders. Some people are designed to function prophetically, for example, but not all prophetic people will function as leaders. And some people who are gifted in pastoral care are not necessarily gifted or skilled in leadership. The same is true in all the ministries. Ministry does not a leader make. Leadership must be conceived as a calling within a calling...APEST is a part of the DNA of all God’s people, making it a universal feature of all communities in Christ.”* (From “The Permanent Revolution: Apostolic Imagination and Practice for the 21st Century Church”)

APEST is considered the ongoing work of Jesus because Jesus was all 5 of these: Apostle, Prophet, Evangelist, Shepherd and Teacher. I’m including a link to a short, 5-page article, that offers a good thumbnail sketch/summary of APEST. (Seriously, there is so much out there, finding something that was succinct yet sufficient as a resource was challenging. Again, if you really want to dive deep into this stuff—and I hope you do—I would turn your attention to the work of Alan Hirsch.)

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/551447e1e4b0ff90915347fc/t/59ca8012f5e231d6ee1886a5/1506443283561/Pentagon.PDF>

Here are some (very) brief descriptions to get us started...

Apostles tend to be pioneers, entrepreneurial, organizers, builders of systems and structures; they see the big picture and are constantly scanning the horizon; they are innovators, risk-takers, visionary, strategic.

Prophets tend to be questioners, challengers, disturbers of the status quo; passionate, principled, reformers; correcting/critiquing.

Evangelists tend to be contagious/infectious, recruiters, motivators, enthusiastic communicators, inviters, winsome.

Pastors/Shepherds tend to be compassionate, protective, tender-hearted, caring, nurturing, empathetic, includers, helping people feel that they belong and are loved; humanizers.

Teachers tend to be thinkers, systematizers, investigative, curious, knowledge-hungry, effective communicators/explainers.

It is very important to note that all of these roles/people function best when connected with the others. When one role tends to do dominate, or when some roles are minimized, imbalance and dysfunction ensues. Each person/role is concerned with valid, legitimate, important aspects of Christ's work. No one person (outside of Jesus Himself) can be all these roles...which is why we need one another.

For those of you who like outlines as a way to get your head around something, a good way to outline what we've covered in Ephesians 4 so far is:

- I. 4:1-6 Focus on Unity
- II. 4:7-11 Focus on Diversity/APEST
- III. 4:12-16 Focus on Maturity

The best way to understand "maturity" in this context is "becoming more like Jesus". (As opposed to the misconception that maturity means acquiring more knowledge. Knowledge acquisition is easy; becoming like Jesus is hard.) Our maturity is dependent upon our unity. But unity is not dependent upon us agreeing on everything. Notice the rather short list Paul offers that we need to agree upon and rally around—One Body, One Spirit, One Hope, One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism, One God and Father. That short list is the core/nucleus that we need to agree upon. Outside of that, we need to give room to disagree. Remember, unity is NOT uniformity. So when Paul thinks of the overall goal of maturity he focuses us on what it takes to maintain unity—humility, gentleness, patience, bearing with one another in love—and working together to continue to work of Christ in the world—APEST. As we do this, we come to know Christ more and attain to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ (4:13).

When every part of the Body is doing his/her part, the proper balance is struck, the proper protection is in place, the proper correction takes place when needed, then the Body is healthy and fulfills her purpose.

Q. How would you describe your relationship with the Church? (What does that, then, say about your relationship with Jesus?)

Q. An apostle asks, "What's next?"

A prophet asks, "What needs to be changed, fixed, corrected?"

An evangelist asks, "Who needs to hear this?"

A pastor/shepherd asks, "How/who can I help?"

A teacher asks, "How can I explain this?"

Which of those questions do you tend to naturally gravitate toward (like it's in your mind without having to think about it or be conscious of it)? Which of these questions rarely occur to you?

What would you like to know more about regarding each role?

Who is someone you know who you think is an apostle? A prophet? An evangelist? A pastor/shepherd? A teacher? What is it about them they leads you to think that?

Do you know your part within the Body of Christ? Are you playing your part? Describe.

If you're not sure what your part is, how can your community help you? If you feel like you do know your part, but aren't how to function in it, again, how can your community help you?

- Q. From your experience and vantage point, which role/function is well-represented within your church community? Which is under-represented? Why do you think that is? Practically, how can that be alleviated?**
- Q. A common frustration is with those who are part of a church (well, they attend), but beyond that seem to be rather apathetic. How might we motivate such people?**
- Q. What confusion or misunderstanding have you seen, observed, experienced about APEST? Why do you think that confusion/misunderstanding exists?**