

**The Gifted Men, Part 1: Apostles and Prophets**

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 12:28

Code: 1851

Take your Bible, if you will, and turn to the 12<sup>th</sup> chapter of 1 Corinthians...1 Corinthians chapter 12. We are continuing in our study of chapters 12 through 14 in our study of the whole book of 1 Corinthians. And at the beginning of this study of 12 to 14 I told you we wanted to dive a little more deeply than just the text to cover a general cataloging of the truths in the Bible about spiritual gifts, which is a very important and very prominent subject of discussion today.

So this is the third in our series. As an entity in itself it is incomplete. It needs the first two and it needs the following several, in order to make it complete. But I think they'll be some things for us to learn this morning that, in themselves, will be complete and the Spirit of God will encourage and bless our hearts as we share together in it.

Keep in mind the one continuing thing that I've been telling you that, for me, everything comes together at this particular point. Christ revealed Himself, first of all, in a human body, in His Incarnation. Through that human body all of the attributes of deity were made manifest and God was visible in human history. God has done that a second time. He has revealed Himself again in another Incarnation, if you will, in body two, which is the church. The corporate assembly of believers is indwelt by God in order to make God, again, visible to the world, in order to make God a parent again in human history. And all of us who know the Lord Jesus Christ are that body. Every one of us is an individual member, a vital member. And like members of a human body, we must work totally and together, in order to bring about a full functioning body.

The church, the same way, must have a mutual, ministering, working, interdependence for the unity of body two, in order that God might be visible through the manifestation of Christ in the corporate life of the church. As we function, as we work, as we minister, as we build up each other, Christ becomes manifest to the glory of God. And that's the design of the spirituals as they're called in 12:1: the divine enablements, the endowments, the energizing, the services, the charismata, whatever you want to call them. Paul uses five different words for them.

As we minister, the Holy Spirit energizing us, we build each other up. For example, as I minister to you, you are built up. The idea is that you should come to maturity and be like Christ. As we all do that, we all become like Christ as individuals, then corporately we become like Christ. For that individual thing, when it becomes a total thing, becomes a corporate manifestation of Christ in the world, and that's God's design for the church. And there is another benefit. As we minister our gift,

not only do we build each other up, but we help each other understand better how to minister in a given area. For example, as I preach to you, you may not have the gift of preaching, but you're being built up and you're also learning how better to communicate your faith. As you show mercy to me, as you minister that to me, maybe I don't have that as a spiritual gift, but I will learn better how to be merciful to someone else, for having seen you in action.

So this beautiful, mutual interdependence, not only builds us up to Christ likeness, but it helps us better minister in all areas, in all dimensions, to each other. So it is this network that the Spirit of God has designed in the church, this inter-mutual ministry that is vital to the Christ likeness of individuals, and that is vital to the Christ likeness of the total body as it manifests God in the world. And so for a Christian to not be functioning is to be crippling other Christians, consequently, to be crippling the total manifestation of Christ in the world, to say nothing of forfeiting the blessing and the reward that comes to his own life.

Now as we have begun to understand this very basic thought, I have been giving you, in the last two weeks, some principles on which the whole subject of spiritual gifts must be built. And I've given to you at random, and I'd like to pull them all together this morning and give you a list of the basic principles upon which spiritual gifts operate. This will constitute our introduction to what we want to talk about this morning.

What are the basic principles? Now people this is so important. I can't tell you how important it is; you have to find out. And the way you're going to find out how important it is, is when you go out into the world and you start talking to somebody else about spiritual gifts. And they start telling you about spiritual gifts that you can't understand, and certain things occurring that you can't understand. And they don't have this foundation of basic principles in order to govern the things that they can say are true and the things they can say are false. This is very important, very foundational. You'll find out about it if you get into discussion. Hopefully, you have had that experience, so that you'll know what you need to hear and you'll receive it and respond to it.

Let me give you 14 basic principles on which spiritual gifts operate. Now we're going to run by these very fast. Some of you just hyperventilated. We'll have to revive you. But we're going to go by them quickly and we're just going to state them because we've dealt with them in fair detail in the past.

Number one, they are essential. One of the basic principles regarding these spirituals, they are essential. "I would not have you ignorant," he says, in 12:1. "They are essential for the life of the body. Ephesians 4, "The saints must minister, in order that the body might be built up," verse 12 of Ephesians 4.

Secondly, they are counterfeited. Anything that God does Satan counterfeits. And so the spiritual gifts are counterfeited. First Corinthians 12:2 and 3, we explained to you in detail regarding the

counterfeiting. We know they are counterfeited. They are counterfeited all the time. And basically there are two ways to counterfeit them: fleshy counterfeits and Satanic counterfeits. For example, Paul had the gift of preaching, but he could have preached in the flesh. He said to the Corinthians in chapter 2 verse 1, "I did not come unto you with enticing words of man's wisdom." And he said the same thing in verse 4. In other words, "I didn't let my spiritual gift drift into a counterfeit. I didn't come to you appealing with human wisdom or human speech and oratory." So it's possible to have a fleshy counterfeit. Secondly, a Satanic one, such as the false prophets, the false proclaimers, the false teachers who are really mouthpieces for Satan.

Third principle: number one was their essential, number two they are counterfeited. Be aware of that. They're going to be counterfeited today as they've always been. Third principle: the Holy Spirit is the source. All spiritual gifts are supernaturally empowered and energized and given. They are beyond the natural. They are not like singing or playing an instrument or being clever with a certain art. They are not those kinds of natural things. They are supernatural enablements. Verse 1 of 12 calls them spirituals. They are characterized and controlled by the Holy Spirit. "They are manifestations of the Spirit," verse 7. "And they are workings of the Spirit," verse 11.

Number four: Spiritual gifts will always unite the body; they will always unite the body. That's a very important truth. They never divide. Why don't they divide? "Because...notice verse 4...it is the same Spirit." Verse 5, "It is the same Lord." Verse 6, "It is the same God who works all in all." Verse 11, "All these works the one and same Spirit." If the same Spirit, same Lord, same God works the gifts then there cannot be disunity. You understand? So wherever spiritual gifts create division there are counterfeit gifts in operation, either they are counterfeited in a fleshy or a satanic way. True gifts will always unite. Wherever division occurs there is counterfeit.

Fifth: spiritual gifts are no sign of spirituality. Somebody might say, "Well I'm spiritual because I have the gift of such and such." No, spiritual gifts have absolutely no relation to spirituality. "How do you know that?" The reason we know that is because the Corinthians had spiritual gifts. They did not have spirituality. Verse 7 of chapter 1, "You come behind and no gift." Verse 1 of chapter 3, "And you are carnal." They were carnal; they had spiritual gifts. Spiritual gifts belong to all Christians, carnal or spiritual. So when somebody says they have a certain gift, that doesn't mean anything in relation to their spirituality.

Number six: spiritual gifts are not for the possessor, but for the others in the body. Spiritual gifts are not for the possessor, but for the ones in the body. And that we say, didn't we, in verse 5, they are called services. That's something I do for you. Verse 7, they are called manifestation. That's something public. "And they are given to every man to profit," says King James. The Greek says, "For the good of those gathered together." In other words, they are all given for the good of the others, for the good of those gathered together. It does no good to anybody to operate a spiritual gift independent of other people. None of them are given for self-edification as their intent and purpose.

None of them.

All right, number seven: spiritual gifts have the promise of divine energy...spiritual gifts have the promise of divine energy. We find that, don't we, in verse one, "They are spiritual." Verse 4, "It's the Spirit." Verse 5, "It's the Lord." Verse 6, "It's God who works all in all. In 11, "It's the Spirit working." So there is an energizing there of God in these things, and that's a fantastic thing to realize people, that we become channels through which the flow of power comes from God to touch the lives of other people. That's an incredible reality, to be a divine channel.

That's why 1 Peter chapter 4 verse 10 says this, "As a man receives the gift, so minister the same to another: as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If any man speak, let him speak, as the oracles of God. If any man minister, let him do it, as of the ability which God gives." In other words, minister your gift in the divine energy. Don't counterfeit it. Why would you want to when it has the promise of divine power?

Number eight: Spiritual gifts come in varieties...they come in varieties. "There are...verse 4...varieties of gifts." Verse 5, "Varieties of services." Verse 6, "Varieties of operations." Verse 11, "Or energizings." Verse 11 says, "He divides to every man uniquely, particularly, severally." No two Christians are alike. Every Christian has his own unique place in the body and his own unique position from which he ministers, in a way that no other Christian can duplicate. That's why all of you are vital. There are no unessential people. There are no hangers on. There are no benchwarmers, at least in God's design. Everybody's in it. There are people who have put themselves on the bench, but that was not God's intention.

Now what we said was...remember this now...the varieties of gifts, the varieties of ways they serve, the varieties of energizings, all of this indicates the uniqueness of every individual's ministry. And I told you this, and I reiterate it, I don't believe that each of us only has one area of ministry. I don't believe that you can divide everybody up and say, "You only have one thing: you have teaching, you have exhortation, you have helps, you have governments, you have wisdom." I don't believe that's the intention of the Spirit of God. I think when He says, "There are varieties...and varieties...and varieties," you have an interchange.

Now some people ask me from time to time, "Do you believe that a Christian only has one gift?" In a sense the answer to that question is, yes...yes. The reason I say that is because that is the term that is used...for example, in 1 Peter 4 it says, "As you have received the gift." In Ephesians 4:7 it says, "According to the gift of Christ." Now some people say, "This means, you see, that we all only have one area of ministry - the gift." Do you know what I believe? Now listen. I believe that what the Bible show us in the variety of things and in the patterns that we see, is that we have one gift, but that gift is a composite of the various kinds of enablements that all come together to make that one unique gift that is our and ours alone.

Somebody asked me this week, "Well what about Timothy?" In 1 Timothy 4:14 it said, "Paul says to Timothy, 'You ought to not fail to minister the gift.'" In 2 Timothy 1 he says, "Stir up the gift." Doesn't it say there that Timothy only had one gift - the gift? Yes. Well what was that one gift? And then you got problems. If you say Timothy only had one thing that he could do, what was it? Paul says to him, "Timothy, preach the Word." "Oh, it was the gift of preaching. Paul says, "Timothy, do the work of an evangelist." "Oh, he was an evangelist." "Timothy teach faithful men." "Oh, he had the gift of teaching." "Timothy exhort with sound doctrine." "Oh, he had the gift of exhortation." You say, "What's one of the ones that he have?" Not any one of the ones. Timothy had a composite of ministry capabilities the Spirit of God had given him in one package.

Do you know what? Did you ever have birthday and get a bunch of stuff in the same box? Isn't that what we said: a tie and a pair of socks and a handkerchief? That's the way God works. God can do that. You got the gift. And what was it? It was a lot of things. Now that's the way the Spirit of God has put the varieties together. If somebody says to me, "John, what do you feel your gift is?" I could ask ten different on the staff and they would tell you different things. Somebody would say, "He has a gift of preaching." Somebody would say, "He has the gift of teaching." Somebody would say, "Well...somebody told me the other day they felt I had the gift of wisdom and somebody told me a long time ago they felt I had the ability to lead. Well what does that come together to mean?"

I can't say I only have the ability to minister to the body in one little...no, I'm convinced the Spirit of God has poured some things together, stirred them up, and said, "Here, MacArthur, this is yours." The reason I believe that is because I think that all the patterns of the New Testament that you see the gifted men, there is always a multiplicity of things that they're doing. How can a man be ever called upon to teach a flock like you, and to pastor a flock like you, and not have the gift of administration or leadership or the gift of teaching or preaching or the gift of wisdom to make decisions, so we don't get into problems we can't solve. You see, when God puts you in the body He scrambles the things you need to minister through the kinds of personality that He has built into you. Through the background situation, through all of the parts of your life, everything comes together. The Spirit of God pours in the way that He wants to, the multiplicities of ministries through which He wants you to minister to His body. Some of us have more multiplied than you do, than others. Some folks may have a combination of 2 or 3; others have 4 or 5 or 6, or whatever. I don't know. But that's the beauty of variety. So don't put the Holy Spirit in a box.

I always cringe when somebody wants to come along and end all the variety and make everybody a closed classification. I don't think we have that right. And if you study the word charisma...if we have received grace gifts, folks, that is such a broad term. Paul uses it 16 different times, and to speak of all kinds of things in the New Testament. So don't get too classified.

Let me add a footnote at this point. Some folks say, "Well, you see, I only have one area of gifts, and that makes me irresponsible in all other areas. I don't have to do that. I know so and so has got a problem, but I don't have the gift of mercy, so I don't really need to get too involved." That's a copout. One of the reasons that some of us have gifts is to help the people who don't have gifts in those areas to know how to minister there. For example, I don't believe particularly that I have certain gifts. I mean, I'm sure I don't. And that's confirmed to me by my own attitude and by other people. That doesn't mean I want to be irresponsible. God may not have called me to the body of Christ to minister with gifts of helps. God may not have designed MacArthur to go around helping, but to lead. But that doesn't mean when somebody asks me for help I say, "I'm sorry, I'm a leader. That's how it is." You know? That's ridiculous, ludicrous. I want to learn how to help and I want somebody who has that gift to show me a pattern, so that I can learn from them and minister in a non-gift area, yet, with blessing.

It's only a question, people, of emphasis. We are to minister in all areas. I could say, "Well I don't have the gift of giving, hallelujah. I have the gift of receiving." See? "So lay it on me." Wait a minute. We all are called upon to give. Are we not? Let every one of you lay by him and store as the Lord has prospered him. Let every one of you exhort one another. We are all to build up one another in all areas. We are all to show love. If you see your brother have a need, how can you shut up your emotions to him and not meet his needs? So all these areas are to be areas of responsibility, but some of them have a greater responsibility because we have a supernatural energizing to minister to the total body. So don't catalog the gifts and put them in little boxes. There are varieties.

Number nine: You can have a gift and not be using it. And we can all testify to that from personal experience. You can have a gift and not be using it. Paul says to Timothy, "Stir up the gift, Timothy, get it on." He said it in 1 Timothy; he said it in 2 Timothy. You know what that tells about Timothy? Timothy easily got discouraged. When things didn't go well he stopped the ministering. A lot of Christians like that. Then there are others who never get started ministering. Very important: you can have a gift and not be using it.

Number ten: Number ten is there are several terms to describe these divine enablements. Keep that in mind. Just reminding you that from verses 1 to 7 there are several terms to describe these divine enablements: they are called energizings, they are called services, they are called manifestations, they are called grace gifts, they are called spirituals. Just so that you understand the fullness of what they are, number 11, the list is not exhaustive...the list is not exhaustive. I thought I'd read everybody's list and then this week I was in a bookstore and I picked up another book on the charismatic gifts, and it listed 23 different gifts. That's the biggest list I've ever seen. It just proved to me again the fact that when you try to isolate them and put them in little boxes and say, "This is all there are. There ain't no more," you're in trouble.

The list in 1 Corinthians 12:8 to 10, it says: the word of wisdom, the word of knowledge, faith, healing, working of miracles, prophesy, spirits, languages, interpretation of languages. And then in Romans chapter 12 verses 6 to 8 you have another list of these enablements, but there it's completely different: prophesy, ministry, teaching, exhortation, giving, ruling, showing mercy. What does it mean when you see two completely different lists? That there's a flexibility there. Even the term, as I said, charisma is so much broader than just making a quick little closed list. It refers to anything God has given.

You know, I resent being called a non-charismatic. People say, "Oh, you're a non-charismatic." I say, "No, I am not a non-charismatic. I am a charismatic Christian." Now, don't edit that out of the tape and spread that around or I'll be in trouble. I am a charismatic Christian. "What do you mean by that?" I have received grace from God. Do you know a Christian who isn't a charismatic? Do you know any Christian at all who didn't receive grace from God? I don't know any. I am saved by grace, I am equipped by grace, I am kept in grace, and I will be glorified by grace. I am charismatic. There aren't charismatic Christians and non-charismatic Christians. There are only true charismatics and counterfeit charismatics. Let's keep the terminology clear. We always have to give up good words because people take words and make movements out of them.

You know, we used to have a good word called fundamentalists. And all of a sudden they made a movement out of that and then...there were a lot of people that \_\_\_\_\_, "I don't want to be fundamentalist." They made a movement out of a word so now we're afraid to use a good word. See? Because these people are going around condemning and so forth. Well that. . .it's too bad when we have to give up a word. I'm not ready to give up the word charismatic. I'm just as ...I'm as charismatic as a Christian could be. God has poured out so much grace on me, and the word charismatic is charis, grace gift. Everything I have is a gift of God's grace. Is that true? I not ready to give that word up. I just want to be careful how people understand its use. So the concept is broad. And you don't want to get pigeon holed, airtight boxes for these things. All right, that was the idea, the list is not exhaustive, it gives the Spirit of God some breath.

Twelve: all gifts are to build the body...all gifts are to build the body. That's their purpose. In Ephesians 4:12, "For the work of the ministry that the body might be built up." Chapter 12 verse 7, "For the benefit of those gathered together." Chapter 12 verse 7, "For the benefit of those gathered together." All gifts are to build the body. Keep that in mind, very important. "In addition...this is 13...some gifts are also signed gifts." Some gifts are also signed gifts. And we saw these in the Apostolic age. In 1 Corinthians 14:22, "Wherefore languages are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not." There he says, very clearly, "languages...the gift of languages is for them that believe, not as a sign." And yet, verse 5 says, "You should never speak in languages except he interpret that the church may receive edifying." Even though it was signed gift, it was also have an edifying capacity. So all gifts then were to build the church, even the signed gifts. And we'll get into that one in detail as we go into 14.

Now the fourteenth and last point in our quick run through here. "The gifts are distinct from the fruit of the Spirit." Don't confuse the fruit of the Spirit with the gifts of the Spirit. "The fruit of the Spirit...Galatians 5:22 and 23...love, joy, peace, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, self control, are attitudes." The gifts are activities, are actions, are ministries. The fruit must be behind the action. Where the action operates without the fruit you're using your gift fleshly.

All right, those are the principles. Now I just tried to catalog them. I know they went on by fast, like watching the train when you're sitting at the stop. But I want you to just remember them. If you need to review them look at your notes or get the tape, or whatever. Those are basic things.

Now let's look at the gift themselves. And in 1 Corinthians we're going to start...and we're going to actually look at three categories...but we're going to start by looking at the gifted men. There are basically three categories we have to delve into to understand the spiritual gifts. The gifted men; that's one. Two; the permanent edifying gifts. Three; the temporary signed gifts. The gifted men, the permanent edifying gifts, the temporary signed gifts. Now as a point of beginning look at verse 28 of 1 Corinthians 12. And we're adding to a pure exposition of the text here by studying the subject a little broader. But we will look at verse 28. "God hath set some in the church; first apostles, second prophets, third teachers. After that miracles: then gifts of healings, helps, government, diversities of languages." Now there you're introduced to some people: apostles, prophets, teachers.

Look with me at Ephesians 4:11, "And he gave some apostles and some prophets and some evangelists and some pastor/teachers for the maturing of the saints, in order that they might do the work of the ministry that the body might be build up. Now let's look beginningly at the gifted men. In the brief time we have this morning we can't cover all of them, but let's look at the first two. This is very important.

The other day a man said to me...a very serious, and a very capable, and responsible man, established somewhat in the Christian community, he said, "It is my conviction that you are an apostle." That's what he said to me. I am an apostle. Well I had a very immediate reaction to that. I am not an apostle folks. I have no qualification to fit me to be an apostle. Plus I do not care to have the responsibility anyway. I am not an apostle. And I told him that, but he said, "Yes you are. You may not recognize it, but there are a lot of folks who do." Please, I am not an apostle. The last thing I would ever want would be to be thought of in any sense like that. As I've told you before, I am a glorified busboy and the Lord has cooked a meal. He says, "Get it to the table, MacArthur, without messing it up." That's it, and I delivered it, period. I don't write it. I have no apostolic identity. Why do people want to say this? There are other people who say...and I was talking to somebody recently who told me there are apostles and prophets today, and he named some others in America that he feels are the apostles and prophets of this age. That scares me, and I'll show you why. Because I believe the Bible is clear about who apostles and prophets are, and I want you to understand it this



morning.

Ephesians chapter 4, we're looking at verse 11, and let's notice first two that he gives there. He gave some apostles and some prophets. Now what are these apostles and prophets? Some people say these are gifts. And I've read books that have called it the gift of apostle and the gift of prophet. Those are not gifts folks. That is not the correct and precise way to treat these. There is not a gift of an apostleship. There is not a gift of a prophet. Those are gifted men. Those are official titles. Those are special ministries. Look at verse 7 and I'll show you a distinction that might help you. Ephesians 4:7, "But unto everyone of us...that is to every Christian...is given grace, according to the measure of the gift of Christ."

Now here's that one package we've received. It may have three parts in it, but that's our package. Every one of us has received the gift, the divine enablement, the divine endowment, the divine capacity, to minister to the body in a unique way, commiserate with our personality, and just as different as we are different. Beautiful...beautiful, unique thing. We all have the gift. The word there is very important; dorea...dorea. That word refers to a free gift, and the stress is on free. It's not emphasizing, so much, the quality of it as a gift, or the character of it when it gets there, but the free part of it; the gratuitous nature. We have all received a supernatural spiritual gift free. Now notice verse 8, "Wherefore it says, when he ascends on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men." Now this is something else. Because the word here for gift is a completely different word, doma, not dorea, but doma. And that word does not refer to the free, gratuitous source, but the character of the gift. Now he's talking about something very special, some special kind of gift, some quality of gift. You'll notice verses 9 and 10 are a parenthesis, and if you go right from 8 to 11 it reads this way, "He gave gifts unto men and He gave apostles, and prophets, evangelists, and teaching pastors." Listen, verse 11 are the gifts that he gave in verse 8. He gave gifts...what are they?...verse 11: apostles and profits.

Now listen to this, so in verse 7, "All Christians receive spiritual gifts." But in verses 8 and 11 He gives gifted men...who does He give them to?...to the church...verse 12...for the building up of the saints." So we have two things to keep distinct in our mind: spiritual gifts are one thing, gifted men are something else. The Spirit of God...I'll give you an illustration straight from my own life, simple to me...the Spirit of God has given me a gift to minister to the body. He's also given me as a gift to this local assembly. You understand that? So there's a duality there. We all have received gifts, but some of us, in God's grace, become gifted men given to the church, I as a teaching pastor. I am not an apostle, I am not a prophet, I am not an evangelist, but I'm a teaching pastor. I have been given to the church as a gifted man. That's different than my gift. That's different than your gift. So the gifts; all of you have, I have. I have been given as a gifted man to teach you how to minister your gift and to build you up, so that the church can be built. That's the difference. So don't say the gift of apostle, or the gift of prophet, or the gift of evangelist, or the gift of evangelism, as some say, or the gift of pastor/teacher. Those aren't gifts, those are gifted men and they are a composite of other gifts.

Now 1 Corinthians 12 aids us in understanding this distinction again. Look at 1 Corinthians 12:28, "And God hath set...efata...appointed, literally...God has appointed..." It isn't a grace gift anymore, it's an appointment. It's a divine appointment, like you would appoint an ambassador to go to be the ambassador to Italy, or the ambassador to France, or the ambassador to England. "God has appointed apostles, prophets, teachers. After that, or on top of that, or in addition to that He has given gifts, like: miracles, healings, helps, governments, language." You see the difference? There are men appointed to office, as well as gifts given to believers. And that distinction in the word "appointed" and the distinction in the little phrase, "after that," in the middle of verse 28, "after that, in addition to that, there are the gifts."

Now five types of gifted persons come in these two places. Ephesians gives you four, 1 Corinthians re-echoes that: apostles and prophets and adds and fifth; teachers. So you have apostles, prophets, evangelists, teaching pastors, and teachers. Those are the gifted people given to the church. Now the question is, are they given to the church in the same sense, all for the same period of time, all for the length and duration of the church? Does the church always have to have apostles, prophets, evangelists, teaching pastors, and teachers? Or was there a time when the church didn't have all five? Or is there a time now when they don't have all five? That's part of what we want to understand.

Let's begin, first of all, by looking at the word in verse 28, apostle. This was the primary gifted man in the history of the church, the apostle. Now I want you to understand something because there's some confusion at this point. The word apostolos, from which we get apostle, the verb form apostelo ...the word apostolosis the simple, common, everyday, street, garden variety, word for messenger. Doesn't mean anything fancy, just plain ole, you know, "Hey, guy, will you take this bucket of sand over to Joe, he's an apostle," in Greek. That's a simple, basic, you know, word. And because of that there are some folks who are somewhat confused when they see that word appearing in the New Testament and they want to elevate everybody who's a messenger to somebody with an official capacity. So we have to be careful that we make a distinction between the "capital A" apostles and the little "a" messengers.

Now there are some folks in the New Testament who are apostles like nobody else was apostle. Do you know who the first apostle was that arrived on the scene? The Lord Jesus Christ. Hebrews chapter 3 verse 1 says this, "The apostle and high priest of our profession, the Lord Jesus Christ." He is the first messenger. He is the first sent one. God sent Him and He's the apostle with a capital A, and capital P and capital O, and everything else. You might just capitalize apostle; every letter uppercase, referring to Christ.

But then there were some others. The 12...the 12 are called apostles. Matthew 10:2, Luke 6:13, and then in Acts 1:25, "They were choosing one to take the place of Judas, that he may take part in this

ministry apostleship, and the lot fell on Matthias, and he was numbered with the 11 apostles." Now all of a sudden the word messenger takes on a technical meaning. It had a general meaning. Christ gave it a very technical meaning, all in caps, the apostles, another technical meaning with maybe a capital A, a proper name, an official title. When somebody says, "Who is an apostle?" The 12 are called apostles. This one was added to the 11, Judas being replaced by Matthias. You say, "Is that the limit of its official use?" No, one other man in the New Testament falls into the category of an official apostle. Who is it? Paul.

In Romans 1:1 Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called, "an apostle, separated under the gospel of God." Galatians 1:1, same thing, and he repeats it again and again. Now listen, these 13 people are the official apostles. And people say, "Well how come there's only 12 thrones? Who isn't going to sit on one of the thrones in the kingdom?" And, of course, the argument will come, "Well Matthias shouldn't have been chosen. The Spirit of God wanted Paul to be the 12<sup>th</sup>, and they got out of line and chose Matthias." Well, you know, the only reason you could conclude that is just sentiment for Paul. Just feeling bad about poor Paul doesn't get in on being one of the 12. Don't worry about Paul; he's going to get more reward than anybody anyway, as far as I can tell. The most faithful man in recorded history. But I don't know who its gonna be. It's hard to know, but the Bible doesn't say they were wrong in choosing Matthias. But the point is 12 plus Paul, "A special apostle...called of Jesus Christ. Uniquely set apart," that is the official capital A group. And what was their duty? Listen to 1 John 1 and you'll hear it.

First John 1:1, "That which was from the beginning." Who is that? In the beginning was the? Was the Word; it's Christ. "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we've seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life; For the life was manifested, we have seen it, we bear witness, we shew to you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and manifest to us. That which we've seen and heard declare we unto you." Who is this collective we that John is talking about? It's the apostles. He is speaking as an apostle, saying an apostle is somebody who heard and saw the manifestation of Jesus Christ, and declare it unto you. Listen, Beloved, you cannot be an apostle today because today nobody sees Jesus Christ. "Yes, whom having not seen we...what?...we love." "Whom having what?...not seen." Watch it when somebody says that they just saw Jesus the other day, He came along and talked to them. "Whom having...what?...not seen."

Now the apostles had to be those who had seen and heard and had a vital, personal relationship with Jesus Christ, a physical presence of Christ. They had to see the resurrected Christ. Acts chapter 1, choosing Matthias...verse 22..."He must be a witness with us with of His resurrection." They had to see the resurrected Christ. You say, "What about Paul?" Believe me he saw the resurrected Christ. He had three separate occasions when Jesus Christ personally came to him. Now that's an official apostle. You say, "Well what about other uses of the apostle term?" Other uses of it come in a far more general way. Remember that is a very common word. It's a very common term. But those men

have no successors.

Dr. Criswell Appley, says it this way, "They are like delegates to a constitutional convention. When the work is done the office ceases." In fact, after Acts 1 you can hardly find them. In fact, if we need apostle today and we need prophets today, how come it never says anything about them in the epistles to the founding of the churches, the epistles to the orders of the church. In all of that about how the church is to be run, and how the church is to be governed, and how the church is to operate, and who is to lead the church, and who is to guide the church, and who is to serve the church, there's never a word about an apostle, never a word about a prophet. Why is it that after Acts 1 you can't even find them hardly? And after Acts 15, the last time we know they ever met together, they're scattered all over the world and never appear again. Why? Because when they were gone, they were gone. That was it. Ephesians chapter 2 verse 20 says that, "The church is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets. And the foundation is laid once and the building goes up from there." And so I believe apostles and prophets have ceased and their ministry is taken over by evangelists, teaching pastors, and teachers.

You wanna hear something interesting? Just to show you how the apostles were beginning to fade away, by the time of Acts 15 when the Jerusalem council met it wasn't even one of the official apostles who presided, it was James the Lord's brother, who was called a "messenger" or a "sent one," only in a secondary sense. One of the official 12 or Paul did not even preside because the church had been founded. And the design of God was the apostles would lay the solid doctrine...listen...they would lay the solid doctrine, they would lay down the pattern for the church's founding, and then they would turn it over to the elders and the deacons for the running of the church, and they would fade away.

Sure, there are others called "messengers." In Romans 16:7, Andronicus and Junia are called messengers. James, the Lord's brother, is called a "sent one." The messengers in 2 Corinthians 8:23, it says, "Certain messengers accompanied Titus." Well you could translate that "apostles," and who would they be? Epaphroditus is even called a messenger in Philippians 2:25. But these are more general uses. There is that official catalog, that official category that has passed away. If you want to use apostle in it's very, very general sense, all of us become messengers today. Don't we? Messengers carrying the good news to the world that needs to hear.

Now the apostles, to show you how unique they were, had very unique abilities. In 2 Corinthians 12:12 it says this, "The signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deed," miracles. Now if I'm an apostle and I got one big missing ingredient, I can't pull off a miracle. I can't raise the dead. I can't heal the sick. I can't create signs and wonders in the sky. I can't do any of that stuff. Those are the signs and wonders and mighty deeds of an apostle. It says it in 2 Corinthians 12:12. In Hebrews chapter 2 verse 3, "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation...listen...which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was

confirmed to us by them that heard Him." Who were the ones that heard the Lord? The apostles. "God bearing them witness, with signs, wonders, divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit." They had unique abilities, unique, miraculous powers. You know that everywhere Peter went, when his shadow fell over people, what happened to them in Jerusalem? They got healed. Incredible. They were a unique group for a unique period of history, to lay down a doctrinal foundation and to establish a pattern. The only church the apostles ever founded, really, the only church they ever founded collectively, was the church of Jerusalem. And they set it down as a model and their work was done. And Jerusalem was to be the model. Paul, of course, individually established churches, but the collective apostles established and worked and ministered in that one area of Jerusalem. That was their model. They laid out doctrine and the model for the church and they were gone.

And we don't need apostles today. You know why? We already have doctrine. Is that right? Do we need new doctrine? Do we need new truth? Do we need a new pattern for the church? No. Some people say, "Well what about the missionary today? Isn't the missionary a sent one?" Yes, he's an apostle with a small "a." He's a sent one. Others want to say, "Well no, actually the modern apostle is the theologian." Well that's easy to explain by just saying he has the gift of knowledge. You don't need to make him an apostle. He's not really an apostle anyway; he's just somebody who's studying what the apostle's already said. Very important people.

Now secondly, and hastily...let me just show you this cause it ties right in...are the prophets. Who are the prophets? The word profetas means one who speaks out. We think of a prophet as somebody who says, "In three weeks the sky is going to fall," you know. Or, "I predict," you know, this kind of stuff. Do you realize that it wasn't until medieval times that the word in the English language, prophet, even came to be connected with the idea of prediction? It always was connected with the idea of speaking forth...speaking forth, speaking for God. The prophet was somebody who gave God a voice in the world. Now you say, "Well what was the difference between a prophet and an apostle?" Sometimes there wasn't any. Paul was both. Right. Peter was both. We know Paul was both because in Acts 13:1 he's called a prophet, and everywhere else he's called an apostle. He was both; there isn't a lot of difference.

But I'll tell you what the difference is as I see it, in studying the New Testament. And this can confirm to your own mind too. The difference is that the apostle had a broad based ministry to the church worldwide. The prophet had a ministry to a local congregation. Do you know the only time Paul is ever called a prophet was when he was one of the five pastors at the church at Antioch. You see, the prophet was somebody, apparently, who stayed in a more localized ministry. We know they were a distinct, unique group and their message was Revelation from God. In the Old Testament the prophet spoke Revelation from God. In the New Testament Paul, and Peter, and John the Baptist, and Agabus, spoke Revelation from God. They spoke the Word of God. In addition to that, they also taught the apostles doctrine. Every time they opened their mouth it wasn't Revelation. They could preach and proclaim as the five pastors in Antioch. Acts 13:1, "Those five men are called prophets."

Doesn't mean every time they opened their mouth they predicted the future, and it doesn't mean every time they opened their mouth they gave Revelation. They spoke for God. Sometimes it was direct Revelation, sometimes speaking for God, based on what they had learned from the apostles. So this is an office. Now don't confuse this with the gift. The office is passed away; the gift of proclaiming is still here. The office is gone. What was their focus then? It was to give Revelation to a localized situation. That's why the pastors at Antioch are called prophets. That's why Agabus had that very unique ministry of talking about what was going to happen to the church in Jerusalem, getting a very localized prophesy.

Verse 32 of Acts 15, "And Judas and Silas, being profits also themselves, exhorted the brethren with many words, and confirmed them." They had a ministry of exhortation as well. And confirming them probably means they confirmed the Word with miracles. So they were revelatory, they had miraculous capacities. Now let me give you the distinction, so you'll get them. A prophet is geared to a local congregation. Listen to 1 Corinthians 14...I'll show you this...verse 29, "The prophet speak two or three, let others judge." Thirty two..."Spirits of the prophets, subject to the prophets." Now listen, there's no indication that there were any apostles in Corinth, but there were prophets. Again, corroborating the idea of a localized ministry. So the apostles have a general, broad, widespread responsibility. The prophets are localized responsibility.

Listen, Revelation given to the apostles was doctrinal. Revelation given to the prophets was practical. That's a general distinction. So that the apostles laid a doctrinal basis, the Word of God. Whereas, the prophets gave the practical advice to the church. Why? Well they were an infant church people. They didn't have a composite word in order to extract practical principles. They didn't know what was coming in the future; they were a little, tiny baby. And the prophets had a vital ministry of telling them, "Don't do this," or, "Do this," or, "Watch out for this," or, "God says, 'try this'" or, God says, "Don't do this," to preserve the church in its infancy until such a time as the canon was done and the Word of God was finished and they had their standard. And once that was done the apostles and prophets ceased to have any purpose.

One more distinction between them is in chapter 14 verse 37, "If any man think himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge the things that write are the commandments of the Lord." Paul says, "If anybody claims to be a prophet, make sure that what he says agrees with what the apostles wrote." So the prophets were subject to the apostles. They were secondary to the apostles.

All right, now, listen quickly. I'm going to wrap it up. They were a temporary group, as they were temporary earlier. You know the prophets were only around till the Old Testament Canon was closed and...bang...when it was closed they were gone. Aren't any prophets for the 400-year period after the Old Testament. As soon as the New Testament is to be written, prophets appear again, and as soon as the New Testament is complete...bang...prophets are gone. There aren't any prophets today

because the Word of God gives us all we need.

Now what were the functions of the prophets? They had three functions; it's like the apostles and prophets. Number one, foundation. Ephesians 2:20, they had a foundation responsibility. "The church is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ the corner stone." Secondly, Revelation. They were God's mouthpiece to reveal His truth, both doctrinally and practically. Ephesians 3:5, "Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, but is now revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Holy Spirit." So foundation and Revelation. Thirdly, confirmation. They had gifts and abilities to do miracles to confirm their Revelation. Now if Revelation is complete, then that part of their function is gone. If that part of their function is gone, there don't need to be any confirmation signs for them. And if the church foundation is already laid, it doesn't have to be laid again. Do you understand? So the ministry of foundation is gone, Revelation is gone, confirmation of that Revelation is gone, and when those things went, believe me, the apostles and prophets went with them.

Now I'm going to give you a little diagram up here so you'll understand this as I close. This will just put something in your mind to remember. Christ gives apostles and prophets...you can see the apostle distinguished by holding the Word of God as it were...doctrine...for a foundation, Revelation, and confirmation with a result to establish the church with solid doctrine. Okay? To establish the church with solid doctrine.

Now next Lord's day morning we will find the second phase, where the Lord gives to the church evangelists, who wear bright suits and wave their arms, and more conservative types with glasses, who are teaching pastors. Now their purpose...their purpose is evangelism, edification, and exhortation. You see? It's building upon the foundation, Revelation, and confirmation. And what is its purpose? To equip the church, not with doctrine, but with what? Effective ministry; to take the doctrine already given and pour it into the lives of the people, so they can minister with affect. And the result of it all is to be this...and this is what we'll get into as we continue in our study...that the church; the building, be full of people mutually ministering their abilities together, so that when the world looks at us they don't see a building, they see a body. That's the purpose. Now all of that comes together to fulfill the significance of the ministry's spiritual gifts.

Let's pray. Thank you, our Father, for our fellowship this morning. Thank you for being our teacher. Help us to be wise students, and obedient ones, and to know the joy and the blessing that You, alone, give to those who are faithful to fulfill the ministry of givenness.

Help me, Father, and all the other gifted men You've given to this assembly and to Your church worldwide, to fulfill our part in perfecting the saints, that they may do the work of the ministry, that the body might be built up, that when the church is seen by the world. They don't see a building; they see a body, Jesus Christ Himself, in whose name we pray. Amen.

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