

Ephesians 4

Contributed by Alan Molineaux

Ephesians Four – What's that all about?

It seems that much of the Pentecostal and Charismatic Church is in some confusion over what it should do about the Gift ministries highlighted by Paul in Ephesians Four.

Like all good Evangelicals we have a desire to be 'Biblical' in all that we do and for our churches to follow a New Testament pattern. Yet if we are totally honest we really don't have a complete idea of what Paul meant by these gifts, let alone how to release them into the church. So we have tension.

Feeling secure with the title of Pastor, and in some cases Teacher, we have struggled to come to terms with the other gifts.

Many of those involved in Church leadership would struggle to identify which of the gifts they themselves operate in. Quite often, due to the ministerial framework within which we work, they function in a number of roles and some function in positions that are not their majority gift.

Yet, whatever gift we are given grace for, the whole of the ministry of Christ should be reflected.

Tension, of course, isn't always a bad thing though, in fact it is completely Biblical. Jesus was both fully divine yet fully human; now that is tension! He was full of both grace and truth in equal measure; again, tension. When we, as followers, try to express both grace and truth in equal measure we find that we are stretched between two seemingly opposite emotional forces.

Jesus was both holy and separated to the task of the Father and yet he was completely connected in love to the communities he came to reach. When the church tries to emulate him we find it all too easy to be one and not the other; distant and often irrelevant or connected and without a sharp edge.

Ephesians four presents us with a similar level of tension. We have distinct gifts that are sent by God yet at the same time we believe in the priesthood of all believers. In practice our struggle is seen in our want to both recognise the whole body as ministers and to release the specific gifts given to equip the church. We want to rightly avoid a clergy-laity divide whilst at the same time find ways of acknowledging gift ministries. Both needs are equally valid, which means as we hold on to both of them they bring tension. Perhaps if we grasp that this is a positive place to live we can begin to make head way.

So what are these gifts all about? I have to be honest and say I don't have a complete answer. I do, however, believe that there is a good starting point given to us in Scripture.

In our search for an answer we can all too readily separate the gifts from each other. This leads us to see them as individual gifts and thus gives us a wrong idea of their practice and purpose.

So our starting point should be to see them as composite parts of the same ministry. Each of them represent, after all,

the complete ministry of Christ.

Jesus is the 'apostle and high priest whom we confess' (Heb 3:1). He accepted the holy calling of the Father and came to intercede for us.

Christ did not only bring the Goodnews, the evangel, but he is, as the Living Word, the Goodnews.

Once again as our Good Shepherd he is our pastor and indeed teacher, a title he was often given.

In his Prophetic ministry he was given no honour in his own town and yet he spoke revelation to those he met.

Jesus the Apostle; he heard the call to go and he came to a world in need with the message of hope with 'signs, wonders and miracles', the things that Paul calls the mark of an apostle. (2Cor12:11)

Jesus the Prophet; speaking the truth about the human condition and bringing the answer straight from the heart of God.

Jesus the Evangelist; bringing Goodnews wherever he went with signs following. Jesus is still good news today.

Jesus the Pastor; caring for his flock of wayward sheep who often miss the point of his teaching, yet he still cares for them and leads them.

Jesus the teacher; who taught with the authority of heaven. 'His word' bring life to the dead and hope for the hopeless.

Paul presents us with a picture of the ministry of Christ operating in the Church under the direction of the Holy Spirit. He shows that these gifts, although once given in one unique person, Jesus Christ, are now given through a number of people. It seems only right that the body follows the head in the story of incarnation.

There is evidence for a progression of gifts within individuals but in general terms no one other than Christ represents all of the gifts together. Yet it is God's intention that we in cooperation display these Christ-like grace gifts.

What does this mean for us? Well, it means it is still a place of tension. Anything that involves humanity is bound to involve some amount of stress.

Yet once we see that the gifts are not about individuality but about the corporate expression of the ministry of Christ, we can find a starting point.

Essentially this means that each person who ministers in one area of the Ephesians four gifts must by definition have a flavour of the other gifts. The same Christ like DNA should operate through them all.

A Prophet must have a heart for the pastoral care of the people. To simple Prophecy without having the same goal as the whole ministry of Christ should be unthinkable. Quite often the picture we are presented with is that the Prophet comes into the congregation and stirs the people with a timely word and the Pastor is left to pick up the pieces.

An Evangelist must be passionate that the new converts are taught in the discipleship teaching of the Bible. Again we have been fed an idea that the Evangelist is the itinerant mouthpiece of the church and the local team of Elders are left with the follow up work.

I am glad to say that things are changing and we have a number of Evangelists doing a great job in equipping the body for works of service.

If the gifts do not express, through their individuality, the message of the whole then they are bound to have a limited effectiveness.

How far does this take us? Well! Not far enough. But my challenge is that every ministry gift to the church should spend some part of their journey considering how they reflect something of the other gifts in their own situation.

Every Pastor should have some prophetic edge to their ministry even though we still need to expose our people to the wider gift ministry of the Prophet.

Every Prophet should seek to care for the whole condition of the person to whom they speak.

Indeed all of the gifts should remain sensitive to the apostolic calling of the church. Then we can build for eternity and not just for a season

The church will always be in a place of tension but as we have already seen places of tension are biblically well founded.

Alan Molineaux