

Introduction

We're going on an excursus today. It's kind of like an excursion, except it's not at all like an excursion. An excursus is simply a more focused study of a smaller portion in a larger work. Rather than look at our passage as a whole, we're going to dissect one sentence this week and then see how it fits into the broader passage next week. Doing this will give us a greater understanding of Ephesians as a whole and this chapter in particular. Given we have many newer folk, this excursus also provides an opportunity to explain a bit more why we are structured the way we are as a church. We're looking at Ephesians 4:11 this morning.

Eph 4:11 And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers...
Ephesians 4:11

Offices

The immediate context for this giving is that of verse 7, which we looked at last week. Paul tells the church in Ephesus grace was given to each one of us. This grace is more than the grace of salvation. Earlier in chapter 3 he wrote of “the gift of God’s grace” and “to me...this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles”.

After a lengthy discussion of the unity of the local church in chapters 2 and 3, Paul then narrows the focus. Each and every follower of Jesus has been given grace—a spiritual gift. Not only is each person spiritually gifted, each person is gifted to a unique degree. As God sees fit, he gives some a greater measure of giftedness than others. This is his sovereign decision. I would love to be a better teacher, but I am what I am—by God’s grace.

The difficulty with this text is people often approach it with certain predetermined assumptions. Many assume these are offices in the church. An office doesn’t refer to a room in a building, but an *official capacity*. If you receive a letter from “the Office of the President of the United States” this doesn’t mean the letter is from *the Oval Office*—a literal office that is oval-shaped. It means it’s an official communication from the President. When you hear the word “office” don’t think “room” but “official capacity”.

What makes an office in the church an office, or what gives it its official character? There are two things that distinguish an office in the church from a spiritual gift. First, officers are appointed or elected to the office and second, officers must be qualified.

We see this in Jesus’ appointment of the Twelve Apostles. These men were chosen directly by the Lord Jesus and given a specific task. There are many overlaps with the responsibilities of ordinary believers, of course, but those appointed by the Lord Jesus had an authority—an *official capacity*—that others do not have.

After the death of Judas, Luke tells us in Acts 1 all the disciples were together. He says they “with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer”. Being led by the Spirit of God,

Peter stood up and cited holy Scripture and declared they had to replace Judas. Specifically, he says another must take his “office”. Then he lists qualifications:

Ac 1:21 So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, ²² beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection.” ²³ And they put forward two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was also called Justus, and Matthias. ²⁴ And they prayed and said, “You, Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which one of these two you have chosen ²⁵ to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place.” ²⁶ And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias, and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.

Acts 1:21–26

The apostles were relying on the truth of Proverbs 16:33 which says, “The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD”. Again, the Lord himself chose the replacement for Judas. We see here again the office of apostle came from the direct appointment of the Lord and came with qualifications, with a primary requirements being he must have been taught by Jesus and must be an eyewitness to the resurrection.

Then comes Paul. The Lord Jesus revealed himself to Paul in Acts 9 and saved him. Thus Paul, though he himself says he was “untimely born”—born at the wrong time to be an apostle—became an eyewitness to the resurrection. Paul also received the truth of God in Christ. In his case he did not receive it during Jesus’ three years of ministry on earth. Instead, Paul received his knowledge and understanding by direct revelation. He was able to say in Galatians that when he finally met with other apostles, “they added nothing to me” (Gal. 2:6). Thus Paul was both appointed to his office and met the necessary qualifications.

The only individuals who occupied the office of apostle were the Twelve plus Paul. This was not given as an enduring office in the church. When these apostles died, their office passed with them. This is because, at least partly, the Lord has given a different enduring office to his church: the office of overseer, or elder.

In 1 Timothy 3 Paul gives us the qualifications for the office of overseer. We at New City hold to the view that the historical church has held without controversy for over 1800 years. Overseers, also called elders, though historically the words bishop and priest have been used as well, are certain men in the church who meet specific requirements and are set apart for specific responsibilities.

In general, an overseer must be above reproach, but also Paul gives specifics. An elder must be a “one-woman man”. This is often translated as “husband of one wife” but it’s a character quality, not a status. An overseer must be a man who is the sort, if he were married, would be faithful to his wife. He must sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, etc. There is only one job-specific qualification: he must be able to teach. This does not require the spiritual gift of teaching. The office of overseer carries the responsibility of ensuring right theology in the church so an overseer must be capable of articulating the truth.

There is a second enduring office given to the church and there are qualifications for it as well. Similar to overseers, deacons must be men who are dignified and truthful, who are not addicted to wine or greedy, etc. However, to ensure Timothy and the church in Ephesus

understand him, Paul clarifies the office of deacon is open to women as well. In verse 11 of 1 Timothy he says, “Women likewise must be dignified”, etc. It’s often translated “their wives” but the word “their” is added and the word for wives can mean either women or wives. For a host of reasons, “women” is the better translation.

So a deacon must be a one-woman man or must be a one-man woman. It is important to note Paul only makes this clarification for the office of deacon. Church history bears this out. There are many women named as deacons in the first few centuries of the church. In fact, in Romans 16 Paul identifies a woman named Phoebe as a deacon of the church in Cenchreae. She occupied the office of deacon—not *deaconness*, by the way, for that word didn’t even exist in the first century. Men and women served as deacons, using the masculine form of the word, indicating no real distinction between them.

It is also important to note Paul does not make the same clarification for the office of overseer. He uses masculine terms to describe those qualified for the office of overseer and uses masculine terms for the office of deacon but is quick to clarify with deacons that this applies to women as well. Church history bears this out. There are no named women overseers in the early church. There are many women deacons but no women overseers. New City follows both Scripture and church history on this.

For the church, then, there have been three offices. There was the foundational office of apostle, and there are two enduring offices, which are overseer and deacon. Offices come with qualifications and those in the office are either appointed or elected to the office by the local church. In Titus 1 Paul instructs Titus to appoint elders in all the churches in Crete. In 1 Timothy the instructions regarding qualifications imply a selection by the church. The church must ensure its officers meet the necessary qualifications. Again, early church history bears this out with numerous examples of churches selecting their own elders and deacons.

The dominant view today is Ephesians 4:11 lists five offices in the church. Since offices come with qualifications then what are the qualifications for prophets and evangelists? The truth is there has never been an office of evangelist. There have been those who served as evangelists, but if Paul meant an official capacity in the church, where are the qualifications? There’s a better way to understand this.

Gifts

Rather than see apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds and teachers as *officers* in the church, we should see them as people with specific gifts given to the church. This means that the *gift* of apostleship is still active in the church today even as the *office* of apostle ceased to exist when the apostle John died.

We know of others who were *called* apostles yet were not appointed to the office of apostle by the Lord. Luke refers to Barnabas as an apostle. James, the brother of Jesus, was called an apostle yet was neither appointed by Jesus nor actually qualified for the office. He did not meet the qualification of having been taught directly by Jesus.

You might recall that prior to Jesus’ resurrection, his brothers thought he was crazy (Mark 3:21). His brother James was not his disciple while he was on earth. Andronicus and Junia, probably a husband and wife team, were well-known apostles according to Romans 16. These men and women were *gifted* apostles who were not in the *office* of apostle.

Here's a good example of this distinction between *official* apostles and *gifted* apostles in the early church. The Didache was a manual of church practice written in the first century. Some scholars believe it was written as early as the year 50, which means it could have been around before Paul wrote Ephesians. In that document it says this about apostles:

Did 11:3 Now concerning the apostles and prophets, deal with them as follows in accordance with the rule of the gospel. Let every apostle who comes to you be welcomed as if he were the Lord. But he is not to stay for more than one day, unless there is need, in which case he may stay another. But if he stays three days, he is a false prophet. And when the apostle leaves, he is to take nothing except bread until he finds his next night's lodging. But if he asks for money, he is a false prophet.

Didache 11:3–6

If an apostle comes to you, you must welcome him. This means, at a minimum, you give him a place to stay—but only for one day. Okay, maybe two, it says, but if he stays three days he's a false prophet. Further, when that apostle leaves, he shouldn't take anything for if he asks for money, he's false. In his letters to the Romans and to the Corinthians Paul wrote to ask for their financial support. Some was for the believers in Jerusalem who were suffering under a famine, and some was for himself, that he might travel to Spain. Did the writers of the Didache think Paul was a false apostle?

Around this same time Paul wrote a letter to Philemon. In this letter Paul indicates he is traveling to Colossae. The Colossian church met in Philemon's house. Paul adds this request to the letter:

Phlm 1:22 At the same time, prepare a guest room for me, ~~for I am hoping that through your prayers I will be graciously given to you.~~

Philemon 22

The Didache indicates apostles should only spend a night or at most two nights in your home. Paul requests a guest room be prepared for him. Question: is Paul only planning to spend a single night with Philemon? Or two nights? This text makes more sense if we understand the apostles mentioned in the Didache are separate and distinct from those in the office of apostle.

In the early church apostles were those who preached the gospel. The word means “messengers”. This included people like Barnabas and James and Andronicus and Junia. They were *gifted* apostles, not *official* apostles. Because of the very real potential for misusing the title “apostle”, by the second century this term became restricted to the Twelve and to Paul. We see the beginnings of this misuse in the warning of the Didache. Why would it warn about “apostles” who overstayed their welcome and asked for money unless there were, you know, apostles overstaying their welcome and asking for money?

Instead of referring to five offices in the church, in Ephesians 4:11 Paul refers to groups of people who are gifted in five specific ways. These are individuals given to the church who are *spiritually gifted* apostles and prophets and evangelists and shepherds and teachers. Contrary to offices in the church, spiritual gifts do not come with qualifications but are sovereignly bestowed by God.

We saw in Ephesians 4:7 grace *was given* to each one of us. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12:7, “To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.” He goes on to say,

^{1 Cor 12:11} All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.
1 Corinthians 12:11

Nowhere does Scripture indicate a level of spiritual maturity necessary to receive a spiritual gift. Nowhere does Scripture restrict which believers have one. Wisdom suggests a proper time and place for exercising a spiritual gift. A brand new believer who knows nothing about the Bible but receives the gift of teaching should not be given a classroom full of students eager to learn Scripture—but she *should* speak up in City Group. There she can learn and grow and begin practicing her gift.

With the offices of overseer and deacon there are qualifications related to character. One cannot be a deacon if he or she is greedy or is not faithful to his or her spouse. One cannot be an elder if he is addicted to wine or a lover of money. If you have the spiritual gift of encouragement and your character is lacking, you can still encourage your brothers and sisters in Christ! There are no qualifications for spiritual gifts. The Spirit of God gives them as he sees fit, and uses them as he sees fit.

Because spiritually immature believers have and use their spiritual gifts, they may do so in messy ways. Remember what Paul says in verse 1. We are to walk in a manner worthy of our calling, and our calling is to unity in Christ in his local church, and “with all humility, and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love”.

A significant reason we must bear with one another in love is because spiritual gifts do not come with qualifications. We’ve all known that new believer whom God saved in a radical way. His life is transformed and he just can’t wait to tell everyone—literally, *everyone*—about Jesus. Sometimes you have take that brother aside and say, “Hey, I appreciate the enthusiasm, but the gospel isn’t a club. You gotta learn to let the Spirit open a door to share. You can’t just hit people over the head with it.” When a friend asks you if saw the game last night, that’s probably not an opening to say, “Yes, I saw the game, but you know what isn’t a game? *Judgment Day*. Let me tell you about Jesus...”

Dawnae and I knew a guy in college who was like this. He loved to use his time in a public restroom stall to tell people about Jesus, knowing the guy in the stall next to him had no other place to go. We must grow in maturity in the use of our gifts, but this does not preclude the use of these gifts. Remember Paul’s letter to young Timothy:

^{1 Tim 4:14} Do not neglect the gift you have, ~~which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you.~~
1 Timothy 4:14

Paul tells him to not be *careless* with his gift. Immaturity in general is seen in carelessness, whether a toddler putting stuff in her mouth or a new believer fumbling with a spiritual gift. We bear with one another in love and we help one another grow in maturity.

Dangers in Conflating Gift and Office

It is important for us to make this distinction this morning for there are significant dangers in conflating gift and office. There are many highly gifted individuals out there who simply do not qualify for an office, particularly that of elder. Paul says in verse 7 grace has been given to each one of us *according to the measure of Christ's gift*. We saw last week this means that while all are gifted, not all are gifted to the same degree. Because spiritual gifts are given by God's sovereign will, the degree to which a person is gifted is also by God's sovereign will. Some have truly extraordinary gifts.

Not all have the necessary character to handle those gifts well. The danger is in assuming a person who is highly gifted ought to be given an office in the church. Most often this means men who are highly gifted to preach are set apart and ordained to the office of overseer yet who are completely unqualified for the office because of their deficient character. Just look at the #churchtoo movement. See how many celebrity "pastors" have been disqualified from office in recent years due to immorality or bullying.

You may recall from our recent series in 1-2 Timothy that one qualification for elders is they "must not be violent, but gentle". The violence Paul means is not a physical violence, but a verbal violence. Men who harm others with their words and their general demeanor are not qualified for an office in the church, *no matter how gifted they may be!*

One big problem in this regard is the way in which many churches choose their elders. So often if a man is successful in his business or his work and has not cheated on his wife, he's "qualified" to be an elder. This is compounded when elders are selected by popular vote. This tends to favor those who are gregarious and popular, rather than godly and qualified. For many, a man is eligible to be an elder simply by not *disqualifying* himself. This assumes that men, so long as they aren't stupid, should get a crack at leadership. "Hey, you've been here a long time and you haven't cheated on your wife and, most importantly, *you're a dude*. That doesn't qualify anyone!

The differences between gift and office are so great that offices in the church come with high qualifications. I say that with fear and trepidation, for I often wonder how in the world I was set apart for this work. *I know what goes on in my head, even if I never act on it.*

New City turned thirteen years old this past Wednesday. In the weeks leading up to our public launch our core team met to worship together. I preached through the book of Titus. In my second-ever sermon for New City I told you that if I were to ever disqualify from this office, you must remove me immediately. The church is too important for a man to be allowed to serve in an office for which he is unqualified. This is still true. If I ever show I am unqualified to be an elder in Christ's church, you and my fellow elders must remove me. The work God is doing in this church is more important than I.

What often happens is a man who is highly gifted has the appearance of fruitfulness in ministry. Lots of people join the church. Things seem to be happening. There's a buzz around him. But it's around him, not Jesus. God can use the unqualified, but that is no excuse for allowing them to serve in an official capacity. It would be far better to have a man who is barely gifted but highly qualified than a man who is highly gifted but unqualified.

We must not mistake giftedness for qualification to serve the church in an official capacity because the potential for harm is too great to allow this. Harold Hoehner put it well:

...those who are to occupy an office need to meet the qualifications listed and it is incumbent on those who elect them to be sure that they meet those qualifications.

Harold Hoehner, "Can A Woman Be a Pastor-Teacher?", JETS 50/4 (December 2007), 761–71

This includes removing those who later disqualify themselves from office. Having highly gifted but unqualified people is the first danger in conflating gift and office. The second danger is just as real, though it may not be as readily apparent as a person who disqualifies himself or herself from serving in an official capacity.

If we fail to remember the distinction between spiritual gifts and offices in the church we will overlook the gifts God has given to us. Remember what we saw last week. The Spirit of God empowers men and women. This divine empowerment is known as a spiritual gift. However, the true gift is the person given to the church. You, each and every person here, is a gift from God to this church. If we fail to distinguish between gift and office we will fail to recognize the gifts we have received.

The reality is a majority of the people in any given local church will likely never serve in an office. Unless it's a church where an office is given as a reward for good behavior and good attendance, most will never serve as either an elder or a deacon. This does not change the fact that you remain an incredible gift from God to this church!

Let me be really straightforward here. I told you this when we had an excursus on 1 Timothy 2:11 where Paul says he doesn't allow a woman to speak or to exercise authority and I need to say it again. (If you missed that sermon it's on our website.) I find it very repugnant and downright offensive when those who disagree with our understanding of the office of elder claim that not having women elders is a failure to value women. Listen, and listen carefully: I reject the idea that a person's value—whether that person is a man or woman!—I reject the idea that a person's value is tied to that person's function.

Most of the men here will likely never serve the church as elders but that doesn't mean they lack value or are in any way inferior to those who will. Your value to this church is tied directly to the fact that God has given you as a gift to this church. *You are* the spiritual gift! If we fail to distinguish between official function and a gift given to the church we're going to fail to receive one another as the gifts God has given!

To claim we fail to value women because we will never appoint a woman as an elder is to say we fail to value most of the men in the church whom will never serve as elders and it is to say we don't value any of the men or women who will never serve as deacons. This is absurd! You are not valuable to the church because of what you do; you are valuable because of what you are! We are brothers and sisters in Christ! The Lord Jesus paid a very high price for you, that he might give you as a gift to this church. This has nothing to do with an office.

If we recognize that among the gifted people God has given to the church are those who are apostles and prophets and evangelists and shepherds and teachers, we are free to maintain both the historical understanding of the two offices in the church and we are free to value each and every member who is given as a gift by God to his church. If we do this we can maintain our understanding that the office of overseer is reserved to those who are qualified and called to the office and that the office of deacon is also reserved to those who

are qualified and called to the office, all the while valuing every single person regardless of role in the church.

By maintaining the distinction between gift and office we can recognize that some in the church have the spiritual gift of apostleship and some have the spiritual gift of prophecy and some have the spiritual gift of evangelism and some have the spiritual gift of shepherding and teaching. Gifts are given without qualification and therefore in the church there are men and women who are so gifted.

I want to be very clear about something here. The only place in the New Testament where mere humans are called *pastors*—in the noun form—is right here. Jesus is called our Chief Shepherd—our *Senior Pastor*. The office is not called the office of pastor, but of overseer or elder. Again, please listen carefully: elders are called *to pastor*—that’s an action, but this doesn’t mean *pastors* are elders. Elders are also called *to teach* but that doesn’t mean *teachers* are elders. Elders *must* do these things while gifted people must also do these things.

Here’s where much of the confusion comes from. The primary word Protestant Christians use for the office is the term “pastor” rather than elder or overseer, all because this is the word John Calvin chose to use. He was seeking to avoid the bishop / priest distinction and chose “pastor” instead. We see his influence in the church still today. Other than referring to literal shepherders, every time the New Testament refers to a shepherd—a *pastor*—it is in reference to Jesus, with our text being the only exception, and in this exception it’s not even referring to elders.

For this reason we choose to use the biblical terms overseer and elder. We have women in this church with the gift of shepherding, which means we have women shepherds, and what’s another word for shepherd? We have women pastors. This is just like women with the gift of teaching; we call them “teachers”. If we maintain the distinction between gift and office we remain free to hold offices in high regard while also holding each other in high regard and we are free to recognize the kind of gift a person is.

Application

This distinction is important for another reason. It helps us avoid two significant dangers, but there’s an extremely important positive outcome of maintaining this distinction. We will see it in greater detail in the next few weeks but it was necessary to make this distinction for you, that we might better comprehend the fullness of what Paul is saying in chapter 4.

As we will see next week, Paul says God has given gifted individuals to the church to bring the church to maturity. If he were speaking of offices this responsibility of bringing about the maturity of the church would fall on the shoulders of those who are office-holders. Many of those who claim these are five offices also insist that we no longer have apostles and prophets, and they seem to ignore completely the role of evangelists. They also smush-together shepherds and teachers, which effectively limits the application of this text to those whom are most often called *pastors*—elders in the church.

It is the responsibility of gifted people in the church to bring the church to maturity. What is spiritual maturity? Spiritual maturity is seen in obeying Jesus, but not in the sense of following a list of rules. Spiritual maturity is becoming just like him. This is what it means to make disciples. We help one another become like Jesus.

It is the responsibility of gifted people in the church to bring the church to maturity. Who is that? Five examples are those who are gifted apostles and prophets and evangelists and shepherds and teachers, but do not think for one minute the group of gifted people given to the church is limited to these folk.

Eph 4:7 But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.
Ephesians 4:7

Grace was given to each one of us, therefore, each one of us has been given to the church, which means each one of us is responsible for spiritual maturity in the church. We each have different roles in this, which is the entire point of receiving different spiritual gifts and to different degrees of giftedness, but these differing roles don't change your responsibility. But what, exactly, is this responsibility? Yes, it is maturity, but what does this mean?

Paul says in verse 12 these five groups of gifted individuals equip the church to do ministry. This is why we say here at New City elders *lead* ministry while the deacons *facilitate* ministry but it is the church that *does the work* of ministry. What is the aim of this ministry the church does? It is bringing about 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*.

We grow up into Christ. We become more like him, and we continue to become more like him until we are just like him. This is the aim and the intended outcome of life in the church. It is for this reason the Lord has given gifted people to his church. *We make disciples*. Period! It is through the transforming work of God in his local church that disciple-making really happens. Paul frequently describes the goal of our salvation.

Rom 8:29 For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, ~~in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers~~.

Romans 8:29

1 Cor 15:49 Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.

1 Corinthians 15:49

God's aim is for us to become like Jesus! How? How does this actually come about in the local church?

2 Cor 3:18 And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

2 Corinthians 3:18

The outcome of our salvation is our complete and total transformation. We become more and more like Jesus. This is what Paul means in 2 Corinthians 3:18. We are being transformed bit by bit. Little by little. From one degree of glory to another. How? We behold the glory of the Lord. How do we do that?

When God gives gifts to his church, he really gives gifted people to his church. These gifted people—each and every one of us—reveal Jesus to one another. Do you see what’s happening here? As we exercise our spiritual gifts in Christian community, whether in the gathered assembly or in our City Groups or in smaller meetings together outside of formal gatherings, as we are present in each other’s lives, we begin to see Jesus more and more clearly. As we behold his glory with ever-increasing clarity through his body, the church, we become more like him.

New City, when the Lord gives gifts to his church, he gives us one another, and by giving us one another, he gives us the greatest gift he can give, for there is nothing greater than the Lord himself. He gives us each other that he might give us himself. As we engage in true Christian community in the church, we get more and more of Jesus.

Remember what Paul said in chapter 3. It is through the church the manifold wisdom of God is on display. It is through his church that Jesus is seen most clearly. It is through the church *being the church* that Jesus is made visible on earth. As we look to him and begin to see him more clearly, we are being transformed by the Lord. The local church was never meant to be a spectator sport where you sit in the stands watching the “professionals” do everything. It is a contact sport that requires each and every one of us to be involved. Then and only then will begin to see Jesus fully.