



Date: 08-30-2026

Family Worship

Text: Ephesians 4:11-13 NLT

1. Christ gift to the church is _____.

Ephesians 4:11 NLT

11 Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers.

Notes:

2. Leadership has the privilege to _____ you for the ministry.

Ephesians 4:12 NLT

12 Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ.

Notes:

3. Church _____ is people _____.

Ephesians 4:13 NLT

13 This will continue until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ.

Notes:

Three simple things to remember.

1. God has given you people to help you grow.

2. You have a part to play.

3. Our goal is to become more like Jesus.

Expanded Notes:

What Is a Biblical Apostle?

An apostle is someone who is sent and commissioned with authority to represent the one who sent them. The Greek word *apostolos* means “one who is sent,” “messenger,” or “representative.”

- Jesus chose and sent the Twelve — Luke 6:13; Matthew 10:2–5
- Apostles were witnesses of the risen Christ — Acts 1:21–22; 1 Corinthians 9:1
- They were commissioned to represent Christ and proclaim the gospel — Matthew 28:18–20; Acts 1:8
- The apostles had a foundational role in the church — Ephesians 2:20

The Bible identifies the original Twelve as apostles, along with Matthias, Paul, Barnabas, and James the brother of Jesus. Jesus Himself is also called an apostle in Hebrews 3:1 because He was sent by the Father.

The New Testament also uses the word *apostolos* in a broader sense for messengers or representatives sent by churches. Epaphroditus is called the Philippians' messenger in Philippians 2:25, and other church representatives are described as “messengers of the churches” in 2 Corinthians 8:23.

This means the word can describe both a foundational apostle of Christ and, in some passages, a sent representative of a church. The context determines which meaning is intended.

Simple Definition:

An apostle is a sent representative—someone commissioned with authority to carry out the mission and message of the one who sent them.

What Is a Biblical Prophet?

A prophet is someone called by God to receive and communicate God's message to others. The primary role of a prophet was not simply to predict the future, but to speak faithfully on God's behalf.

- God calls and sends the prophet — Jeremiah 1:5–7
- God gives the prophet the message — Deuteronomy 18:18
- The prophet speaks God's words, not merely his own ideas — Jeremiah 23:16–22
- Prophetic messages are to be tested — Deuteronomy 18:20–22; 1 Corinthians 14:29; 1 Thessalonians 5:20–21

The Bible identifies many prophets, including Moses, Samuel, Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Haggai, Zechariah, John the Baptist, Agabus, and others. Women such as Miriam, Deborah, Huldah, and Anna are also specifically called prophetesses.

The New Testament also shows that prophesying and holding the role of prophet are not necessarily identical. For example, Philip's four daughters prophesied (Acts 21:9), but Scripture does not specifically call them prophetesses.

Simple Definition:

A prophet is God's spokesman—someone called and empowered by God to communicate His revealed message to His people.

What Is a Biblical Evangelist?

An evangelist is someone who proclaims the good news of Jesus Christ and helps bring the gospel to people who have not yet believed. The Greek word *euangelistēs* means “one who announces good news” or “a proclaimer of the gospel.”

- Evangelists proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ — Acts 8:4–12
- Philip is specifically called “the evangelist” — Acts 21:8
- Timothy was instructed to “do the work of an evangelist” — 2 Timothy 4:5
- Christ gives evangelists to help equip and build up the church — Ephesians 4:11–12

The word evangelist appears only three times in the New Testament: Ephesians 4:11, Acts 21:8, and 2 Timothy 4:5.

Philip gives us the clearest biblical picture of this ministry. In Acts 8, he traveled to Samaria and proclaimed Christ to the people. He also explained the gospel to the Ethiopian official and helped him understand that the Scriptures pointed to Jesus.

Timothy is not specifically given the title “evangelist,” but Paul tells him to “do the work of an evangelist.” This shows that proclaiming the gospel was an important part of Timothy's ministry even though he also served in teaching and pastoral leadership.

In Ephesians 4:11, evangelists are listed among the people Christ gives to His church. Their ministry appears to have a particular emphasis on proclaiming the gospel and helping extend the mission of the church to those who need to hear about Christ.

Simple Definition:

An evangelist is a person gifted and called to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ and help others come to faith in Him.

What Is a Biblical Pastor / Teacher?

A pastor is a shepherd of God's people, responsible to care for, guide, protect, and spiritually nourish the church. A teacher explains and applies God's Word so that believers understand the truth and grow in maturity.

In Ephesians 4:11, Paul closely connects “pastors and teachers.” This suggests that shepherding and teaching are strongly connected ministries. A pastor cares for the flock, and one of the primary ways he does that is by faithfully teaching God's Word.

- Pastors shepherd and care for God's people — Acts 20:28
- Shepherds lead by example rather than controlling the flock — 1 Peter 5:1–3
- Pastoral leaders must be able to teach — 1 Timothy 3:2
- They must hold firmly to sound doctrine and teach it faithfully — Titus 1:9
- Teaching God's Word helps believers grow and mature — 2 Timothy 4:2
- Pastors and teachers equip believers to do the work of ministry — Ephesians 4:11–12

The Greek word translated “pastor” is *poimēn*, which literally means “shepherd.” The picture is of someone caring for a flock. The same shepherding language is used for church leaders in Acts 20:28 and 1 Peter 5:2.

The word teacher describes someone who instructs others in God's truth. Teaching is especially connected to pastoral leadership. Elders are expected to be able to teach (1 Timothy 3:2), and those who labor in preaching and teaching are worthy of honor (1 Timothy 5:17).

There is some discussion about whether Paul intended “pastor-teacher” to describe one specific role or two closely related roles. Either way, Ephesians 4:11 clearly connects the ministries of shepherding people and teaching truth.

The goal of the pastor/teacher is not to perform all the ministry himself. According to Ephesians 4:12, his responsibility is to equip God's people so that they can participate in the work of ministry and help build up the body of Christ.

Simple Definition:

A pastor/teacher is a shepherd of God's people who cares for the church and faithfully teaches God's Word so believers are equipped to grow and serve.

Strongest argument that apostles and prophets continue today

The continuationist case begins with **Ephesians 4:11–13**. Christ gives apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers “to equip God’s people” until the church reaches unity, maturity, and the fullness of Christ. Since the church has obviously not yet reached that final maturity, continuationists argue that there is no reason to assume that two of the five ministries disappeared while the others remained.

They would also point to the “last days” language of **Acts 2:17–18**, where Peter quotes Joel: sons and daughters will prophesy, young and old will receive revelation, and this activity characterizes the age inaugurated by Pentecost. Nothing in Acts suggests that prophecy was meant to cease quickly after the apostles died.

The same case is strengthened by **1 Corinthians 12–14**. Paul gives extensive instructions for prophecy in the gathered church. He tells believers to “earnestly desire” spiritual gifts, especially prophecy (1 Corinthians 14:1), and he never tells them that this gift will soon disappear. Likewise, **1 Thessalonians 5:19–21** says, “Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies, but test everything.” Continuationists argue that Paul’s response to possible abuses is not “stop prophecy,” but rather **test it**.

They also appeal to **1 Corinthians 13:8–12**. Paul says prophecy will cease “when the perfect comes,” and describes that point as when we will see “face to face” and “know fully.” Continuationists typically understand this as Christ’s return or the consummation, not the completion of the biblical canon. Therefore, prophecy remains possible until Christ returns.

With apostleship, the argument usually depends on recognizing that the word *apostolos* is used more broadly than the Twelve. **Barnabas** is called an apostle in Acts 14:14; **Epaphroditus** is described with the same Greek word in Philippians 2:25; and 2 Corinthians 8:23 speaks of “apostles/messengers of the churches.” From this, continuationists argue that while the **Twelve and Paul were uniquely authoritative**, there may still be apostles in the broader sense of **church-planters, missionaries, and sent leaders**.

The strongest continuationist position therefore usually does **not** claim that a modern apostle can write Scripture or possess authority equal to Peter or Paul. Rather, it argues that the **ministries of apostolic sending and prophetic speaking remain active**, while the original foundational apostles remain unique.

Strongest argument that the offices of apostle and prophet do not continue

The cessationist case begins with the word “**foundation**.”

Ephesians 2:20 says the church is “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone.” A foundation is laid once, not repeatedly throughout the life of a building. Likewise, **Ephesians 3:5** says the mystery of Christ was revealed “to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit.”

From this perspective, apostles and prophets belonged especially to the **foundational, revelatory stage of the church.**

The strongest argument regarding apostles is especially clear. The original apostles were uniquely commissioned witnesses of the resurrected Christ. When Judas was replaced, the qualification included having accompanied Jesus and being a witness of His resurrection (**Acts 1:21–22**). Paul defends his apostleship by asking, “**Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?**” (1 Corinthians 9:1).

In **1 Corinthians 15:7–9**, Paul lists appearances of the risen Christ and then says:

“Last of all ... he appeared also to me.”

Cessationists see “last of all” as significant. Paul portrays himself as an extraordinary, late addition to the apostolic witnesses rather than part of an office that would continue indefinitely.

There were also unique validating signs associated with apostles. Paul says in **2 Corinthians 12:12**:

“The signs of a true apostle were performed among you ... with signs and wonders and mighty works.”

The argument is that if everyone throughout church history could occupy the same office, these “signs of an apostle” would lose much of their identifying function.

For prophets, the cessationist argument focuses on **revelation**. Biblical prophets spoke words received from God. **Deuteronomy 18:18** describes God

putting His words into the prophet's mouth, and **2 Peter 1:21** says men "spoke from God" as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

Therefore, if someone today claims the biblical office of prophet in the same sense as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Agabus, or the prophets of the early church, the obvious question becomes:

Is this person receiving genuine revelation from God?

If yes, what is the authority of that revelation? If God truly spoke it, it cannot simply be treated as an interesting suggestion.

Cessationists therefore connect apostles and prophets with the period in which God was revealing and confirming the New Covenant message.

Hebrews 2:3–4 speaks of salvation first announced by the Lord, confirmed by those who heard Him, and authenticated by signs, wonders, miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit.

They may also point to **Jude 3**, which speaks of "the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints." The apostolic deposit has been delivered, and Scripture now provides the church's authoritative revelation.

On this understanding, **Ephesians 4:11 does not require every office listed there to exist throughout every period of church history.** Christ gave apostles and prophets foundationally, and their ministry continues to benefit the church through the revelation they delivered, while evangelists and pastor-teachers continue the ordinary ministry of proclaiming and teaching that revelation.

Where the debate really turns

The strongest form of each position can be summarized this way:

Question	Continuationist argument	Cessationist argument
Ephesians 4:11–13	All gifts continue until the church reaches maturity	Apostles/prophets were foundational gifts whose work continues through their teaching
Apostles today?	Yes, in the broader sense of “sent missionary/church planter”	Not in the authoritative sense of the apostles of Christ
Prophecy today?	Yes, but it must be tested and is subordinate to Scripture	Biblical prophecy is divine revelation and belonged to the foundational era
1 Corinthians 13	Prophecy ends at Christ's return	The passage does not necessarily establish the duration of every gift
Ephesians 2:20	Refers to foundational apostles/prophets, not necessarily every later manifestation	Strong evidence that these offices were uniquely foundational
Authority	Modern prophetic speech does not equal Scripture	If genuinely from God, it is difficult to explain why it would possess lesser authority

The distinction I think is most important

There are actually **three different questions**, and they should not be collapsed into one:

1. Are there apostles today equal to Peter, John, and Paul?

The biblical case against that is very strong. Their eyewitness, foundational, and revelatory role appears unique.

2. Are there still “apostolic” ministries in the broader sense of sent missionaries, church planters, and representatives?

There is a strong biblical case that this kind of ministry continues, even if we choose not to give those people the title **apostle**.

3. Does the gift of prophecy continue?

That is a harder question than whether the apostolic office continues. Passages such as 1 Corinthians 14 and 1 Thessalonians 5 give continuationists substantial biblical material, while Ephesians 2:20 and the revelatory nature of prophecy give cessationists a substantial concern.

So I would be cautious about treating **apostles and prophets as one identical question**.

For **Ephesians 4:11**, I would summarize the tension this way:

Continuationists argue that because Christ gave these ministries to equip His church until maturity, apostolic and prophetic ministry should continue in some form. Cessationists argue that apostles and prophets fulfilled a unique foundational role in establishing and revealing the New

Covenant faith, while evangelists and pastor-teachers continue building upon that completed foundation.

And one conclusion has unusually strong agreement across responsible versions of both positions:

No modern apostle or prophet possesses authority to add to, correct, or contradict the Scriptures.