

# Bible Studies for Life: May 12

*Serving in Christ • Ephesians 4:21-7, 11-16*

*By Carl M. White*



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Actually, it is not that simple. In verses 2 and 3 Paul tells us what is required to find the “unity of the Spirit.” Along with a sense of calling, it requires humility, gentleness, patience, tolerance, love, and diligence. It takes all of this to preserve spiritual unity. Paul calls it living “*a life worthy of the calling you have received*” (vs. 1).

In these contentious times, this is a real challenge. Churches are struggling with unity. It comes down to the issue of leadership. Thus, it is of grave importance that churches rediscover the meaning and understanding of the vocational gifts listed in 4:11-13.

There was a time in America when the local pastor was held in the highest esteem in a community. Today, in the judgment of most of the world, a minister of the Gospel is considered irrelevant. Unfortunately, the words and actions of some who carry the title "minister" has contributed to this.

The New Testament speaks on several occasions about "spiritual gifts," such as the lists found in 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12. The gifts listed in our text today are not a list of spiritual gifts, but rather, vocational gifts. How do these differ?

First, these are gifts of Christ himself. The spiritual gifts are of the Spirit. Second, these gifts from Christ are given to the church, not to individuals, as are the gifts of the Spirit. And third, these are gifts of office or vocation, not abilities given to an individual, like giving or healing. These gifts of office, or vocation, are given to the whole church in general, and to specific churches, in particular.

What are these vocational gifts or offices? Verse 11 gives us four: *"So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers..."* Let's consider them one at a time.

*Apostles.* This word literally means "the one who was sent," and it is used to refer to the original Disciples of Christ plus Paul. Thus, when these men died, the office of Apostle ceased. There are people out there who claim to be apostles, but historically, Baptists do not recognize them.

*Prophets.* A prophet is someone who God speaks to, who then speaks to us the words of God. Before the New Testament was written, the church needed prophets. Since the completion of the New Testament, the office of prophet has ceased. We have the Word of God and no longer need a prophet to hear God's word and then speak it to us. Again, there are people who claim to be prophets. Historically, Baptists do not recognize

them. There are times when a minister has a prophetic role, but he is not a prophet.

*Evangelists.* The word means “a bringer of good news,” meaning someone who brings the Gospel to people who have not heard. The office of Evangelist in the New Testament era meant a traveling preacher. The word we use today is Missionary. God is still in the business of calling people to go to specific parts of the world to proclaim the Gospel.

*Pastors and Teachers.* This is two words, but the conjunctive *and* is not in the text. It is just pastor/teacher. The word teacher is self-explanatory. The word pastor comes from the word shepherd. Every ministerial position on a church staff falls under the vocational gift of pastor/teacher, a gift given by Christ to the church.

Paul next explains the purpose of these vocational gifts. These ministers are there to equip the saints, for the work of service, to build the body of Christ (vss. 12-13). Elsewhere, the New Testament uses three other terms: elder, bishop and shepherd, which may be separate offices or functions of the office of pastor/teacher.

In summary, the vocation of minister is a gift from Christ Jesus himself to the church. The pastor/teacher has three roles: 1) as bishop, to oversee, administer the work of the church; 2) as elder, to exemplify the life of a Christian to the church; and 3) as shepherd, to care for the people of God in the church. Malpractice in this office will tear a church apart. Effectiveness in this office helps establish the unity of the Spirit in the church.

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