

## The Prophetic Fulfillment of Ephesians 4:11-16

by  
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Ephesians 4:11-16 is seldom taught as a prophecy, and, yet, it is the most inspiring revelation of the Lord's will, purpose and plan for the unity, maturity, and glory of His church to be found anywhere in scripture.

The first years of the church in Jerusalem was a prototype of the Lord's will for His church, but by the time the epistle to the church in Ephesus was written, parts of the church had already been addressed by Paul as being "divided," "immature," and "worldly," and deception by men who were themselves deceived was identified as the primary cause of division and immaturity in the church at large.

Today the church in America and the western world is so divided by doctrine, practice, and the interpretation of scripture (and the deception of men who are themselves deceived) that none can even imagine the fulfillment of this prophetic passage, and, though we try to explain it away, the embarrassing truth of our corporate disobedience remains and is evident to the world.

Will this status quo of a deceived, defeated, divided church continue without change until the Lord comes to strip us of our commission and "rapture" us away as dispensationalists teach, or will the prophecy revealed here and in the Lord's own prayer be fulfilled in the days to come?

*And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.*

*As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.*

Ephesians 4:11-16 NASB

Though I have, yet, to hear this passage taught as a prophecy, it is a prophetic revelation of the Lord's ultimate will for the church while we are still in the world as confirmed by the Lord's prayer in John 17.

But what makes this a prophetic passage, and why hasn't the church at large "seen" this as a prophetic, as yet, unfulfilled passage?

The passage in context is about the function of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers in maintaining the unity of the faith by equipping the saints to become mature believers manifesting the fullness of Christ in the world.

Regardless of whether this passage has been fulfilled in some part of the church at some point in time or not, it has prophetic applications that are yet to be fulfilled in most of the body of Christ in coming days. And it is of interest that much of the church has attempted to explain away our current disobedience, our current lack of unity in the faith, and our current immaturity (as defined in the passage).

To receive this passage in its fullness (crammed to the gills with the *dunomis* of God) we need to examine it in parts and then put it all back together again.

I will begin with my own paraphrase:

Author's paraphrase of v. 11-16: He gave (us) apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. For what purpose? To equip the saints for works of service (by grace through faith) and to build up the body of Christ until it becomes a mature expression of Christ Himself in the world. Which is?: 1) to be unified in the faith (not just our initial faith in Him but the entire body of faith and doctrine); 2) to have an intimate spiritual relationship with Him; 3) to fully manifest His person and His love in the world; 4) to speak the truth (absolute, spiritually confirmed truth, not mere intellectual truth) in love (i.e. motivated by love, which is sometimes disciplinary in nature); 5) to be connected perfectly to the whole body in absolute surrender to His truth and His will as the head of the body.

Numerous questions arise. The first is, hasn't this prophecy already been fulfilled in various places and at various times, such as the early days of the church in Jerusalem or during some of the "great awakening" revivals of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries?

The church in Jerusalem was definitely a prototype of the the Lord's will for His church, but this epistle was written at a time when the persecuted church in Jerusalem was already spreading outward in the Middle East and Near East.

Paul's letters to various churches reveal that the church at large at the time this letter was written, was not a manifestation of this prophecy.

That there are now or have been parts of the church unified in the faith and manifesting the fullness of His presence is not in question. There has always been a holy remnant of believers somewhere who are in more or less complete obedience to the revelation of His will, but the scope of this prophecy is larger than that.

And...His will for the entire body does not change when some part fulfills His will. As long as there are any born-again believers who have not attained to the unity of the faith and to their participation in the mature body of Christ, this passage, prophetically speaking, has not been fulfilled.

"Until we all attain..." is the use of the word transliterated from the Greek as *pas* (Strong's #3956), and before collective terms, like "Israel," "the church," or "the body," it signifies either "all" or "the whole" and not some part of the whole.

Likewise, the context itself suggests that "the fullness of Christ" will characterize the entire body of Christ at one single point in time though there will obviously be individuals "in process".

Our experience tells us that it is impossible for the entire body of Christ to attain to the fullness of Christ at the same time while still in the world, but we must confess that this passage leaves us no opportunity to deny the fact that this is His will for us to do so. Therefore, to explain it away is a denial of His expressed, prophetic will for the church.

The next question that arises is, "what about apostles and prophets?" If He gave apostles and prophets to the church until we become the full manifestation of Himself in the world, why aren't they still with us, because we are obviously not manifesting His fullness in the world?

I'll start with prophets. The simple fact is that prophets are present in the body of Christ today in surprising numbers, though only a few are publically acknowledged, and these only in denominations and fellowships where it is acceptable to recognize and respond to that gifting.

We tend to think of prophets in OT terms, but the term simply means to speak or write as the Spirit-inspired mouthpiece of God, whether to the body of Christ as a whole, like Paul, or to a single person like Nathan speaking as the mouthpiece of God to David concerning David's sin.

Nor do prophets, or any of the ministry gifts, function alone as did many OT prophets. The prophet's function is to be in concert with the other ministry gifts.

If the reader seeks a deeper understanding concerning the ministry gift of prophets as it relates to the church today, I highly recommend the book, The Seer by Jim Goll.

The qualifications for being an "apostle," though, are much narrower, including the requirements that the apostle must have been in the presence of Christ and must be sent directly by the authority of Christ with signs and wonders following as a demonstration of his commission.

A common assumption is that only the original apostles (which includes Paul) meet, or even can meet, that qualification, but, remember, Paul was in the presence of the resurrected Christ. It is, therefore, possible for others to be called into the presence of the resurrected Christ, in the Spirit (whether in the body or out of the body) and then sent with a purpose and a commission to the body.

Yet, I know of no such men present with us today. There are a few who are called "apostles" for various, dubious reasons, and Southern Baptists explain the concept

away by saying that “apostle” simply means “missionary.” But the truth is that “apostles” in the sense that Paul is using the term would have to meet the same qualifications that Paul met.

Others attempt to explain it away by saying that we have the influence of apostles through scripture, which we do, as a foundation for our faith, but we must remember that some of the original apostles did not write scripture. And some disciples who wrote scripture (Luke, John Mark) were not apostles.

The order in which Paul revealed the specific ministry gifts to the church is also informative and can be seen as a pyramid with “teachers” being the most numerous and apostles being the least in number.

1 Corinthians 12 should be viewed in context with our passage in Ephesians 4, because it specifically examines the purpose and function of various kinds of gifts, and, in 1 Corinthians 12, **apostles** are first in importance (meaning that their influence is to be felt by a large portion of the body of Christ if not the entire body of Christ), **prophets** are second and minister to much larger groups than are found in a single fellowship, and **teachers** are third, ministering primarily to a local fellowship.

Strangely, pastors are left out of the 1 Corinthians 12 list, and, because I have learned that everything included in scripture and everything left out is deliberate, it is my conclusion that the list in Ephesians four includes only four ministry gifts to the body of Christ: 1) apostles; 2) prophets; 3) evangelists; and 4) pastor/teachers.

But, concerning the apparent absence of apostles, another explanation is that the Spirit gives an apostolic anointing to certain men, and I believe that is possible. But when that anointing comes I believe that it will come only as that man comes into the presence of Christ in the Spirit (whether in the body or out of the body) and is sent with a purpose to the body with signs and wonders following.

We naturally long for the presence of apostles to “set things straight,” (with the “others,” of course, because we have it all down pat). But the truth is that we are not likely to accept the presence of apostles until the trouble starts in earnest. And I am personally wary of any attempt to assign the title “apostle” to any man whose authority does not register with and is not confirmed in my spirit by the Spirit as coming directly from Christ.

I am not denying the possibility of the presence of apostles somewhere in the body of Christ, only that I am not aware of any that meet the requirements.

Some prophets, though, are fulfilling some of the apostolic function in the body of Christ, but I strongly believe that we will have recognizable apostles among us again during the latter rains outpouring of the Spirit, which I believe will begin to be experienced by the church at the time of the opening of the first seal of Revelation.

It is the purpose of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastor/teachers to equip the saints for works of service. But don’t mistake this phrase, “works of service” as being the same as “works of the church” or “religious works.” Works of service are works of faith by the empowerment of His grace in response to His direct commands. They are

not works of the flesh in response to the religious expectations of men or religious works done out of a sense of obligation to the one who loved us and gave Himself for us.

If you can't tell the difference, here is the test. We get burned out doing religious works, but we never get burned out doing works of faith. We may become physically and emotionally exhausted, but, because of the joy of the Lord, we never get burned out.

The second purpose of apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor/teachers is to build up the body (i.e. bring it to maturity), which is described as being **unified in the faith** (not just in our faith in Jesus Christ as savior, but the entire body of faith and doctrine), as having an **intimate relationship knowledge of the Lord** (not mere knowledge about the Lord), and, as **manifesting all that He is in the world**.

This last part is expanded beautifully in the Amplified version:

*...that [we might arrive] at really mature manhood (the completeness of personality which is nothing less than the standard height of Christ's own perfection), the measure of the stature of the fullness of the Christ and the completeness found in Him.*

Our current condition is: 1) we are divided in the faith and in doctrine; 2) we have a lot of knowledge about the Lord, but very little personal, experiential knowledge of Him; and 3) we are immature, manifesting more of the sinful man than the glory of Christ.

To explain away this apparent dichotomy between what is and what is to be, some have said that we have an imputed position of unity in Christ but that we will not have true unity until we're in heaven. Likewise, they explain, we have an imputed position of being "the righteousness of God in Christ," but we will not truly experience being the righteousness of God until we are in heaven.

The first time I heard that excuse for our sorry condition being preached I saw an immediate problem. We won't need apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers in heaven. Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers have been given to the body of Christ to help us get from where we are now in the world to where the Lord has revealed prophetically that **we will BE in the world**.

A description of our ultimate state of being (as a body) in the world includes being unified in our faith and doctrine, walking in an intimate spiritual relationship with the Lord, able to "hear" His voice clearly and able to "see" what He wants us to see, and becoming, as a body, the very fullness of Christ in the world, glorifying Him in all that we think, say, and do.

This, of course, is not seen as even being a remote possibility by most Christians, because of our current status. And dispensational theologians would have us believe that the body of Christ is going to fail in its commission from the Lord with the Lord rewarding us for our failure by pulling us out of here before the going gets tough. Then

He's going to reward unfaithful Israel by giving the commission to them for the final seven years (though He promised it to the church, "spiritual Israel," until the end of the age, thereby breaking His promise) so they (national Israel) can become the fullness of Him who fills all things with the glory of His being.

But...that's not what scripture says, and that's not what the Spirit of Truth has confirmed in my spirit.

What is extremely interesting to me in this passage is the ONE thing that will change between our current condition and our future condition. And we will overcome that ONE thing only through the equipping influence of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers.

**Then we will no longer be blown around by winds of doctrine and by the deceitfulness of men who are themselves deceived.**

Wrap your mind and your spirit around that for a moment. Intellectually none of us can imagine the possibility, because the most likely time for this change to take place is in the middle of the most difficult time in the history of the world when deception will be increased to the tenth power.

Paul described the activities of false apostles attempting to influence the church at Corinth, and we are instructed by it as we imagine this activity during "the tribulation" being accompanied by false signs and wonders so that even the elect may be deceived, if that be possible:

*For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, if his servants...(men not demons)... masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve. 1 Corinthians 14:13-15 NIV*  
(inserts are the author's)

What should be shockingly clear to us is that a re-emergence of recognizable Christ-appointed apostles in the church will be accompanied by a re-emergence of false apostles appointed by Satan, and it will be these false apostles, accompanied by "lying wonders" who will mislead the "foolish virgins" and be responsible for the great apostasy.

Sometimes the activity of Satan confirms the activity of God, because Satan, the great deceiver, imitates everything God does for the purpose of confusing and deceiving men, thus preventing them from responding to the true move of God.

We have the supernatural gifts of the Spirit; Satan's ministers have the supernatural "gifts" of demonic powers. We have the Bible; Satan has his scriptures. We have Christ; Satan has Antichrist. We have apostles, prophets, and pastor/teachers: Satan has false apostles, false prophets, and false teachers.

The sickening truth is that many of these false apostles will come from among those who were chosen by the Lord to build up His church and bring it into complete unity in the faith just as Judas was chosen to be one of the twelve original apostles, but through the hardness of his heart became a servant of Satan.

Now, connect this piece of the puzzle with the event that awakens the ten virgins, which is the announcement by the groomsman, "**Behold, the bridegroom!**"

I have described this event as beginning with the first seal of Revelation, the white horse and its rider, the rise of the Antichrist to political power in a ten nation confederation of country-states. This will be the same event during which dispensational theologians will begin to crawl from their theological position, some in repentance as they receive revelatory wisdom, and some in non-repentance, though they realize that "tribulation" has begun (but not the final seven years).

Keep in mind that the parable of the ten virgins reveals that the entire true church will be awakened (become spiritually aware) during this time, and the entire body of Christ includes believers with thousands of divisive doctrines, practices, and interpretations of scripture.

"Awakened" in the sense I am using it here does not mean revived to become the fullness of Christ in the world. It means awakened by the total spiritual and intellectual awareness that we have entered into the tribulational aspects of the end times (though not into the final seven years), and that awakening (absolute, confirmed spiritual awareness) will trigger the beginning of a time of repentance (trimming the wicks of our lamps) in the church as a whole.

As a counterpoint it is interesting to note that the intense promotion of an imminent "rapture" of the church by many of the very ones who were appointed to equip us to become "mature" and to be unified in the faith, is not awakening the body of Christ as a whole.

Even most of those who strongly believe in a pre-tribulation "rapture" are not responding to that message by becoming spiritually alert and trimming their wicks. Most are just doing what they have always been doing, satisfied that they are among those who have faith in Christ as Savior, and comfortable with the thought that they will not experience tribulation (which is why they are not responding to the message by trimming their wicks).

But, if a pre-tribulation "rapture" is imminent, why aren't they responding with repentance to the message?

Because the message of a pre-tribulation "rapture" is not coming from the Spirit of truth. The expectation that Paul had and taught was one of an imminent time of great trouble followed by the return of Christ, and that expectation does prompt a response of repentance.

The announcement event, "Behold, the bridegroom!" will be made by the Spirit, and it will cause the entire body of Christ, including those who currently believe in a pre-tribulation "rapture", to become spiritually alert.

The final blast of the shofar, though, will be heard after all four seals have been opened and 25% of the world's population has been killed. This final blast of the shofar will come when a treaty is confirmed in Israel between most of the countries in the world as they surrender sovereignty to a central world government for seven years in order to bring in world peace and the restoration of economic prosperity.

It is between the first seal event and the signing or confirmation of this covenant that the trimming of wicks will take place in the true church in response to the awareness that we are IN the final days.

And it is upon these repentant believers, yielding to the equipping influence of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers, that the latter rains will fall.

It is also upon awakened believers, believers who have begun the process of repentance, that the influence of false apostles, false prophets and false teachers will be felt, leading some into apostasy, while many others fall into apostasy because of extreme persecution, betrayal by family members, and even betrayal by members of one's own fellowship of believers.

This apostasy is an event so unimaginable and so shocking that Paul elevated it to the same level of importance as the "revealing" of Antichrist.

*Let no one in any way deceive you, for it...(the day of the Lord)... will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God. 2 Thessalonians 2:3,4 NASB* (insert and emphasis are the author's)

It is my assumption then that the latter rains do not fall on the church as they awaken to the reality of the signs of the times and begin the process of repentance, but only on those "wise virgins" whose repentance is complete as they respond to the equipping influence of apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor/teachers who are, themselves, totally repentant of false doctrines, false practices, and false interpretations of scripture.

Therefore, the process of fulfilling Ephesians 4:11-16 will not be a time of peace and reconciliation in the entire body of Christ at large. It will be a time of extreme conflict between the wise virgins responding directly to Christ through the influence of apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor/teachers and the foolish virgins who become directly disobedient to Christ.

The Lord's chosen apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor/teachers, having repented of false doctrine, false practice, and false interpretations of scripture, will be united in the faith, and those under their influence who are also led to repentance will receive an outpouring of the latter rains in a time of great trouble and conflict in the world and a time of spiritual warfare like nothing we have yet experienced.

*I do not ask on behalf of these...(original disciples).. alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word...(the present day church)...; that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us,...(why?)...so that the world may believe that You sent Me.*

*The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected...(matured to become the fullness of Him)... in unity, ...(why?)...so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me. John 17:20-23 NASB (inserts and emphasis are the author's)*

This prophetic prayer of our Lord, Jesus Christ, clearly reveals that the glory of the Father in the Son, will be witnessed by the world as that glory is revealed in the church as it comes to complete maturity (becoming a manifestation of all that Christ is) because of the influence of apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor/teachers who were given to us for this purpose.

What the world sees now is not unity in the faith, but disunity; not maturity, but immaturity; and not the glory of Christ, but the shame of sinful man.

The "glory" of Jesus Christ is the manifestation of the person and presence of the Father, and the "glory" of the church is the full manifestation of the person and presence of Jesus Christ as a witness to the world, out of which will come an uncountable number of tribulation saints who will respond to the message of the gospel delivered by His glorious church.

This is the fulfillment of Ephesians 4:11-16, as the church, anointed with the latter rains outpouring of the Spirit, brings in the great end time harvest and is ultimately resurrected on the last day immediately before the day of the Lord.

**May this message be received and confirmed in your own spirit with great joy.**