

Leadership in the Church - An Examination of Eight Words

The New Testament mentions a wide variety of leaders in the church: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers, bishops, elders and deacons. What are these offices? Are they commanded for the church today? Let's examine the evidence. We'll begin with the titles given in [Eph. 4:11](#).

Apostles

Doesn't everyone know what an apostle is? Isn't that the highest rank of church leadership? That may be how the word is sometimes used, but the word had a different meaning before the church existed. It originally meant "one who has been sent" — an ambassador or representative. This general meaning is seen in some New Testament uses.

Jesus used the word in a general sense when he said that a "messenger" is not greater than the one who sends him ([John 13:16](#)). Similarly, Paul referred to some apostles whose names were not given; the NIV calls them "representatives" ([2 Cor. 8:23](#)). That was the general function of an apostolos. When Paul called Epaphroditus an apostolos, he may have meant simply that Epaphroditus was a messenger of the church at Philippi ([Phil. 2:25](#)).

Jesus, who was sent by the Father, was an apostle ([Heb. 3:1](#)). The 12 disciples, who were sent by Jesus, were also apostles ([Mark 3:14](#), etc.). The disciples are not in the same category of authority as Jesus, but the same Greek word is used. Barnabas and Paul were also sent out, and they were called apostles ([Acts 14:4, 14](#)).

The 12 disciples and Paul used the term apostolos as the name of their leadership office in the church ([Acts 15:23](#); [Rom. 11:13](#); [Gal. 1:1](#); etc.). Authority came with the sending — a messenger sent by Jesus Christ had an authoritative understanding of that message.

James may have been an apostle, too — in one verse he is distinguished from the apostles, and in another he is included ([1 Cor. 15:7](#); [Gal. 1:19](#)). Similarly, Timothy is excluded sometimes ([2 Cor. 1:1](#); [Col. 1:1](#)) and included once ([1 Thess. 2:6](#)) — but in this latter verse Paul may have been using the term in a general sense of messenger or representative.

The reference in [Rom. 16:7](#) is debated. Some say that Andronicus and Junias (or Junia)¹ were apostles; others say that the verse simply means they were esteemed highly by the apostles. Even if they were apostles, however, it is likely that they were messengers rather than having a permanent position of authority in the church. (If they were apostles in the same sense that Paul was, it is odd that we know almost nothing about them, either from the Bible or from church history.)

Some people falsely claimed to be apostles ([2 Cor. 11:13](#); [Rev. 2:2](#)). Paul facetiously called them "super-apostles" ([2 Cor. 11:5](#); [12:11](#)). Although he was the least of the apostles, he was not inferior to the self-proclaimed apostles ([1 Cor. 15:9](#)).

God appointed some people to be apostles ([1 Cor. 12:28](#); [Eph. 4:11](#)). This was part of the foundation of the church ([Eph. 2:20](#); [3:5](#)). What role did apostles have in the church? The Twelve and Paul were instrumental in beginning the church. Soon after Jesus had ascended to heaven, the disciples said that a requirement for their "apostolic ministry" was to have been with Jesus during his ministry ([Acts 1:21-25](#)). These apostles not only preached, but also exercised some administrative leadership. They laid hands on deacons whom the people had chosen ([Acts 6:6](#)) and they made decisions with the elders ([Acts 15:22](#)).

Paul mentioned some of his qualifications to be considered an apostle: seeing the Lord and raising up churches ([1 Cor. 9:1](#)). His converts were the "seal" of his apostleship — evidence that he had been sent, at least to them (v. 2). He noted characteristics that marked an apostle: "signs, wonders and miracles" ([2 Cor. 12:12](#)). An apostle preaches the gospel as a faithful messenger of the Lord. He is an official representative of Jesus Christ, more exclusive and authoritative than elders.

Prophets

Isn't a prophet somebody who predicts the future? That may be one meaning of the word, but that's not the only way the word is used. When the Samaritan woman perceived that Jesus was a prophet ([John 4:19](#)), it was not because of a prediction about the future, but because of a revelation about the past and present. When the guards told Jesus to prophesy ([Matt. 26:68](#)), they were asking for a revelation about the present, not the future.

On the Mount of Olives, Jesus made some predictions about the future. But even before that, the people considered him a prophet ([Matt. 21:11](#)). It was because of his teaching and his miracles ([Luke 7:16](#); [24:19](#); [John 6:14](#); [7:40](#); [9:17](#)). Moses had predicted such a

prophet — "a prophet like me" ([Acts 3:22-23](#)) — and Moses was known much more for teaching than for prediction. Jesus was a prophet like Moses, speaking the words of God. The role of a prophet might include predicting the future, but it didn't necessarily require predictions.

God appoints prophets in the church ([1 Cor. 12:28](#); [Eph. 4:11](#)). In the early church, some prophets made predictions ([Acts 11:27](#); [21:10](#)). Others served in encouraging and strengthening ([Acts 15:32](#)). In Antioch, they worked with teachers ([Acts 13:1](#)). Philip's four daughters prophesied ([Acts 21:9](#)). Paul referred to a prophetic message that accompanied Timothy's ordination ([1 Tim. 1:18](#); [4:14](#)).

On the Day of Pentecost, when people spoke in tongues, Peter said it fulfilled a scripture about men and women prophesying ([Acts 2:17-18](#); cf. [Acts 19:6](#)). God was causing them to speak.

Paul listed prophecy as one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit ([1 Cor. 11:5](#)). A prophet is "spiritually gifted" ([1 Cor. 14:37](#)). Paul urged the Corinthians to desire the gift of prophecy (vv. 1, 39) — but, judging by the way that Paul used the word, this rarely means predicting the future. "Everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort.... He who prophesies edifies the church" ([1 Cor. 14:3-4](#)). Prophecy is also for instruction (v. 31). God inspires prophetic messages to build and help the church.

Prophecy, although a very helpful gift, has its limitations. "We know in part and we prophesy in part" ([1 Cor. 13:9](#)). Prophecies will cease (v. 8). Love is much more important (v. 2). Every Christian should love, but not every Christian has the gift of prophecy. "We have different gifts, according to the grace given us" ([Rom. 12:6](#)).

Paul gave some instructions about how prophetic speaking should be done decently and in order. In keeping with social custom, women were told to cover their heads when prophesying, and men were told they should not ([1 Cor. 11:4-5](#)). Instead of everyone speaking at once, people should take turns ([1 Cor. 14:29-31](#)). If God inspires a second person to speak, the first person should be silent (v. 30). The result of such prophecies would then be "that everyone may be instructed and encouraged" (v. 31).

In summary, prophets help the church by comforting, edifying, encouraging, instructing, strengthening and sometimes by predicting.

Evangelists

Some people use "evangelist" as an administrative rank, but Paul was probably not describing a church-government hierarchy in [Eph. 4:11](#). Although the apostles had more authority than prophets did, Paul does not use this verse to say that. He does not say that prophets had authority over evangelists, or that evangelists had authority over pastors and teachers. He is not prescribing a hierarchy.

Paul seems to be concerned with order only in [1 Cor. 12:28](#), where he numbers the first three gifts: "first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers." However, we do not have any evidence that prophets exercised any administrative authority over anyone — and the category of evangelist is not even mentioned in this verse.

In most of Paul's lists of spiritual gifts ([Rom. 12:6-8](#); [1 Cor. 12:8-10](#)), he does not seem to be concerned about which gift is most important. Even in v. 28, after the first three gifts are numbered, Paul does not seem to attempt to rank the gifts. Indeed, he seems to argue against that idea, saying that one's gift doesn't make anyone more important than others. Every gift is given for the common good; every person should use his or her gift to serve others. In [Eph. 4:11](#), Paul is simply saying that Christ puts all these types of leaders in his church for the same reason: to equip the saints for the work of ministry.

We still need to ask, what is an evangelist? The New Testament uses the word only three times, which in itself suggests that the word is not a formal title in the church. Philip was called an evangelist ([Acts 21:8](#)). That means he did evangelism — he preached the euangelion, the gospel (e.g., [Acts 8:5-40](#)). But there is no evidence that he had any administrative authority.

Paul exhorted Timothy to "keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry" ([2 Tim. 4:5](#)). Paul was not conferring a formal title on Timothy — nor is there evidence that Timothy ever had a formal title like that. Paul was simply listing things for him to do.

"The work of an evangelist" was evangelism — preaching the gospel. A deacon such as Philip could do the work of an evangelist; so could an apostle, such as Paul, or a pastor, such as Timothy. Paul said "do the work of an evangelist" as a way of exhorting Timothy to do evangelism.

In [Eph. 4:11](#), Paul says that God gives evangelists to the church. God gives us people who can preach the gospel with extra effectiveness. People gifted at evangelism do not have to be ordained or given any administrative authority. Ordination and administration

involve other gifts, which may or may not be present in someone with the gift of evangelizing. In fact, if administrative duties are assigned to people who do not have a gift for handling them, then those duties would decrease their ability to use their true gifts.

Pastors

The word pastor appears only once in the NIV ([Eph. 4:11](#)). The Greek word is usually translated "shepherd." [Luke 2:8](#) uses the word in its literal meaning: "There were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night." Shepherds take care of sheep.

"Shepherd" is often used metaphorically for spiritual leadership. Jesus considered himself a good shepherd ([John 10:11-14](#)). The people were "like sheep without a shepherd" ([Matt. 9:36](#)). His own disciples were "sheep of the flock" ([Matt. 26:31](#); [Luke 12:32](#)) — but Jesus had other sheep, too ([John 10:16](#)). He is the great shepherd, and we are the sheep of his pasture ([Heb. 13:20](#); [1 Pet. 2:25](#)).

Jesus, using the verb for shepherding, told Peter to "take care of" his sheep ([John 21:16](#)). Paul told the Ephesian elders that the Holy Spirit had made them overseers of a flock; he exhorted them to shepherd the church ([Acts 20:28](#)). Peter also told elders to shepherd the flock, serving as overseers ([1 Pet. 5:2](#)).

Lifetime or Temporary?

Christians sometimes view the pastoral ministry as a lifetime calling. This is not necessarily true; there is no verse that requires it. God calls every member to serve, but the way in which he wants us to serve may change through the years. God may call a person to serve as a pastor for several years, to serve as a professor for a few more years and then to serve as a business manager for a while. He might serve as a pastoral supervisor, and then as an assistant pastor a few years later, depending on the needs of the church and changes in the person's family, health or other personal circumstances. He might serve as a full-time employee or as a self-employed or retired elder.

Due to changing circumstances in their lives, pastors may resign from the pastoral role entirely, depending on what they understand God to be calling them to do. They may need to minister (serve) as laypersons rather than as elders. People who see leadership solely in terms of authority might view this as a demotion, but when ministry is seen in terms of service, a resignation might be seen as a spiritually mature response to God's call to serve in a new way.

On the other hand, a resignation could also be a refusal to serve in the way that God wants. Ministers must make their own decisions, without peer pressure or fear of criticism.

How should pastors "shepherd" their flocks? The verb has a range of meanings. On one end of the spectrum, it can mean to rule with great power, as Christ will upon his return ([Rev. 2:27](#); [12:5](#); [19:15](#)). Christ "will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats" ([Matt. 25:32](#)). Some will go to destruction, and others to eternal life.

However, Christ will also be a shepherd of great gentleness: "The Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd [note the irony of a lamb being the shepherd]; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

Church pastors are told to imitate Jesus' gentle style: Serve willingly, Peter admonishes, "not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock" ([1 Pet. 5:2-3](#)). This is the kind of leaders Christ wants in his church. "The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep" ([John 10:11](#)). "Whoever wants to be first must be slave of all" ([Matt. 20:27](#); [Mark 10:44](#)).

We will say more about pastors below.

Teachers

Jesus is the perfect example of every category of church leader. He is an apostle, a prophet, an evangelist, a shepherd, an overseer, a servant and a teacher. He called himself a teacher, his disciples called him teacher, the crowds called him teacher, even his enemies called him teacher. "Teacher" is the Greek equivalent of "Rabbi" ([John 1:38](#); [20:16](#)).

One of Jesus' chief activities was teaching. He taught not only his disciples, but also the crowds — in the temple, in synagogues, in towns and villages, on mountains and at the lakeside. "I have spoken openly to the world," Jesus said. "I always taught in synagogues or at the temple" ([John 18:20](#)).

Jesus commanded his disciples to teach ([Matt. 28:20](#)), and they did. "Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ" ([Acts 5:42](#)). Paul taught in Ephesus "publicly and from house to house" ([Acts 20:20](#)). He called himself a teacher, and he told Timothy to teach ([1 Tim. 2:7](#); [4:11-13](#); [2 Tim. 1:11](#); [4:2](#)).

Paul told the Colossians to teach one another ([Col. 3:16](#)). People who have been in the church a long time should be able to teach ([Heb. 5:12](#)). If they have a gift for teaching,

they should teach ([Rom. 12:7](#)). Although every member may teach, not everyone has the position of "teacher" ([1 Cor. 12:29](#)). James warns us, "Not many of you should presume to be teachers... because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly" ([Jam. 3:1](#)). God appoints teachers in the church ([1 Cor. 12:28](#)); he gives teachers to equip the saints ([Eph. 4:11](#)).²

The Holy Spirit teaches ([Luke 12:12](#); [John 14:26](#); [1 Cor. 2:13](#); [1 John 2:27](#)). Scripture teaches ([Rom. 15:4](#); [2 Tim. 3:16](#)). Overseers should be able to teach ([1 Tim. 3:2](#)). Paul warned Timothy, "Watch your life and doctrine [teaching] closely" ([1 Tim. 4:16](#)).

We are frequently warned about false teachers and false teachings. Jesus warned about the teachings of the Pharisees; later, some of them taught that gentiles had to be circumcised ([Acts 15:1](#)). John warned about idolatrous and immoral teachings ([Rev. 2:14-15](#); [2:20-24](#)). Keep away from false teachers, Paul warned ([Rom. 16:17](#)). "If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take him into your house or welcome him" (2 John 10).

Using the word for "teaching," Paul warned about "every wind of doctrine," "human commands and teachings," and "things taught by demons" ([Eph. 4:14](#); [Col. 2:22](#); [1 Tim. 4:1](#)). "The time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear" ([2 Tim. 4:3](#)). "Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings" ([Heb. 13:9](#)).

What should be taught? The way of God ([Matt. 22:16](#)). Obedience to Jesus' commands ([Matt. 28:20](#)). The word of God ([Acts 18:11](#)). The Lord Jesus Christ ([Acts 13:12](#); [18:25](#); [28:31](#)). A way of life in Christ Jesus ([1 Cor. 4:17](#)). The teachings given by Paul ([2 Thess. 2:15](#); [2 Tim. 2:2](#)). The elementary truths of God's word ([Heb. 5:12](#)). Specific doctrines ([Heb. 6:2](#)). The true faith ([1 Tim. 2:7](#)). The truths of the faith ([1 Tim. 4:6](#)). The gospel ([2 Tim. 1:11](#)). "You must teach what is in accord with sound doctrine" ([Tit. 2:1](#)).

Teachers play an important role in the church. As a simplification, evangelists bring people into the church, and teachers build on that foundation to enable members in the church to minister according to their spiritual gifts. Of course, the categories overlap — evangelism frequently includes teaching (as seen in the ministry of Jesus and the sermons in Acts), and teaching must include the gospel — but in general, evangelism is targeted at nonmembers, and teaching is targeted at members.

That concludes our survey of the terms found in [Eph. 4:11](#). We will now look at bishops, elders and deacons.

Bishops

In many denominations, a bishop is a person who supervises all the churches in a region. The bishop often leads the largest congregation in the largest city in the region. Hierarchical churches (Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Anglican, Methodist, etc.) assign a bishop to each region to have administrative authority over the pastors and churches in that region. Each city or region has only one bishop.

However, the New Testament does not reveal this particular structure. There was more than one bishop (NIV: overseer) in Ephesus, and more than one in Philippi ([Acts 20:28](#); [Phil. 1:1](#)). Near Ephesus, Paul sent for the elders, called them all bishops, and told them to be pastors of the church ([Acts 20:28](#)). In Philippi, Paul greeted the bishops and deacons without mentioning pastors or elders ([Phil. 1:1](#)). This suggests that bishop, pastor and elder are overlapping terms.

When Paul wrote to Timothy, he listed qualifications for a bishop ([1 Tim. 3:2](#)) but not for an elder, even though Ephesus had elders ([1 Tim. 5:17](#)), and presumably Timothy would ordain elders. Paul left Titus on Crete to ordain elders ([Tit. 1:5](#)). The qualifications for elders are brief ([Tit. 1:6](#)) and blend right into qualifications for bishops (vs. 7-9). It seems that, although Paul used a different term in v. 7, he was talking about the same type of church leader as in v. 6. Why would Paul tell Titus about the qualifications of a bishop if Titus' only commission was to ordain elders? This again suggests that bishop is another name for an elder.

Although the terms bishop, elder and pastor may have suggested slightly different leadership functions, there was a great deal of overlap in these titles. The difference, if any, between such functions was never spelled out. Paul does not seem to be concerned about what the leaders were called, and he does not detail what they did.

In the original hierarchy, Paul was over Titus and Timothy, and they had authority over the elders, who had some authority over other members. A similar hierarchy exists in some denominations today, with denominational leaders providing supervision over pastors, and pastors supervising elders in the churches. This provides accountability at all levels.

Just as pastor is a functional title, describing the shepherding role that church leaders have, bishop is also a functional title. The Greek word is episkopos,³ which comes from the words epi (over) and skopeo (see). A bishop is an overseer, a supervisor, someone who watches over others ([Acts 20:28](#)). This implies both care and authority. A shepherd watches over the sheep. Jesus Christ is both "Shepherd and Overseer of your souls" ([1 Pet. 2:25](#)). Peter told elders to be shepherds, "serving as overseers" ([1 Pet. 5:1-2](#)). Again, we see that the three titles overlap.

What do overseers do? Judging by the qualifications, they must set a good example, both inside the church ([1 Pet. 5:2-3](#)) and in society ([1 Tim. 3:7](#)). Since they must be able to teach (v. 2), teaching must be one of their functions. They must take care of the church in much the same way that they manage a family ([1 Tim. 3:4-5](#)). They are "entrusted with God's work" ([Tit. 1:7](#)). They should "encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it" (v. 9). They must teach, rule, encourage and refute (cf. [2 Tim. 4:2](#)). "Whoever aspires to be an overseer desires a noble task" ([1 Tim. 3:1](#)).

Elders

"Elder" is the most common translation of presbyteros, which means "older one." The prodigal son's older brother was a presbyteros, "the older one" ([Luke 15:25](#)). Patriarchs and prophets were presbyteroi, which the NIV translates as "ancients" ([Heb. 11:2](#)). The 24 elders in heaven are also presbyteroi ([Rev. 4:4](#), etc.). Jewish religious leaders were often called elders. The word was used within the Christian community, too ([Acts 11:30](#); [15:2](#), etc.). Peter and John called themselves elders ([1 Pet. 5:1](#); 2 John 1; 3 John 1).

Since presbyteros can refer to an older man or to a church leader, we have to look at the context to see which is meant. Since [1 Tim. 5:1-2](#) deals with younger men, older women and younger women, it appears that presbyteroi in verse 1 refers to older men, not to church leaders. [Tit. 2:2-3](#) also seems to be about older men and older women. They need to be taught basic things that church leaders should already know. Verses 4-6 then address younger women and younger men, so the context shows that Paul is dealing with older men as an age group, not church leaders.

Paul and Barnabas appointed elders in each of the churches they founded ([Acts 14:23](#)). Paul told Titus to appoint elders in every town in Crete ([Tit. 1:5](#)). In both cases, the churches were young and probably small. Nevertheless, more than one elder was appointed in each church.

In Jerusalem, the elders seem to have had a ruling function in conjunction with the apostles ([Acts 15:6, 22-23](#); [16:4](#); [21:18](#)), just as the Jewish elders had a ruling function when they met as the Sanhedrin. Paul referred to "the elders who direct the affairs of the church" ([1 Tim. 5:17](#)).

What does it mean to "direct" the church? The Greek word is *proistemi*, which literally means "to stand before." This word is used to say that elders and deacons should "manage" their own households ([1 Tim. 3:4-5, 12](#)), which should be done with self-sacrificial love. The NIV translates this word "leadership" in [Rom. 12:8](#). [1 Tim. 5:17](#) tells us that elders helped direct the church, but only some of the elders were preachers and teachers. All preachers⁴ were elders, but not all elders were preachers.

The extent and limits of elders' authority is not spelled out in the New Testament, but it is clear that they do have authority. Members are told, "Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account. Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden" ([Heb. 13:17](#)). "Respect those...who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work" ([1 Thess. 5:12](#)). "The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor" ([1 Tim. 5:17](#)).

Because elders have a leadership position, they sometimes become the object of a disgruntled person's anger. For that reason, Paul told Timothy, "Do not entertain an accusation against an elder unless it is brought by two or three witnesses" ([1 Tim. 5:19](#)). But if the accusation is true, it must be dealt with publicly: "Those who sin are to be rebuked publicly, so that the others may take warning" (v. 20).

Although elders have authority that should be obeyed, they should not use their authority for self-service. Peter told them to serve "as overseers — not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock" ([1 Pet. 5:2-3](#)). Like overseers and pastors, they are to take care of the flock ([1 Tim. 3:5](#)). They anoint the sick and pray for healing ([Jas. 5:14](#)). They "watch out for your souls, as those who must give account" ([Heb. 13:17, NKJV](#)).

However, many of the functions of elders are not restricted to elders. The New Testament tells members to serve one another, teach one another, instruct one another, edify one another, admonish one another and submit to one another. The elders serve in all these areas to build others up, teach right doctrines, promote spiritual maturity and

equip the saints for works of ministry. Elders preach and direct the church with concern for the spiritual well-being of the members; they work to bring out the most in the other members.

Deacons

The word diakonos means "assistant" — someone who works to help others. The word is used in a general sense to describe apostles, preachers, servants and other workers. It is apparently used in a more specialized meaning in [Phil. 1:1](#) and [1 Tim. 3:8-13](#) to denote an office in the church.

The word diakonos and the verb diakoneo often mean manual labor. [1 Pet. 4:11-12](#) makes a contrast between those who serve by speaking and those who serve (diakoneo). Those who have been given a gift of (manual) ministry (diakonia) should use that gift ([Rom. 12:7](#)). The seven men of [Acts 6:3](#) have often been understood as deacons, because they served by diakoneo — waiting on tables (v. 2). Physical service has traditionally formed the core of the duties of a deacon.

We are given a list of qualifications for deacons, but not a list of their duties. The qualifications suggest that deacons may have had some teaching and ruling functions. "They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith" ([1 Tim. 3:9](#)). This concern for doctrinal accuracy may have simply been part of the concern for a good example (v. 8), but it may also suggest that deacons helped teach.

Deacons must manage their children and households well (v. 12). The same qualification was given for bishops in v. 4, with the explanation given that bishops must manage the church (v. 5). If the same rationale applies to deacons, it implies that deacons helped direct the church. However, the New Testament does not mandate the specific duties of deacons. The church today is free to assign duties based on current needs.

Summary

The New Testament church had various leaders, who served members through the word and through physical services. Speaking ministries include preaching, teaching, instructing, edifying and admonishing. Physical ministries included food distribution and other internal needs of the church. Leaders also had a role in directing or managing the church, and they were to be obeyed and respected.

All service, whether in speaking, serving or decision-making, should be done for the benefit of those being served. God puts people in the body as he wishes, all for the

common good. He has given the church leadership roles to help the church function in its upward, outward and inward responsibilities.

[Eph. 4:11-16](#) gives an overview:

- "It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers" — God has given various leaders to the church.
- "To prepare God's people for works of service" — leaders exist to prepare God's people for serving others. Leaders inform, encourage, train and organize to bring out the most in others.
- "So that the body of Christ may be built up" — the result of this is that the church is built up. Works of service help build and unify the church.
- "Until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" — this process continues until the church reaches maturity, which means unity in faith and the knowledge of Christ, as measured by the standard of Christ himself. Although the goal is never attained in this life, it is still the goal the church is working toward.
- "Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming" — maturity in Christ gives us doctrinal stability.
- "Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ" — maturity in Christ comes from combining doctrinal accuracy with love.
- "From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work" — it is from Christ that the church grows, and the church is held together by its members, who work together in love to build the church. Church growth comes as each member does his or her work of service, everyone according to the needs of the church, the place in the body God has given them, and the spiritual gifts he has given them.

In short, leaders and laity work together for the same purpose: maturity in Christ.

Endnotes

1 The form of the word that Paul used most likely came from Junia, a woman's name.

2 The Greek construction in [Eph. 4:11](#) implies that pastors and teachers are two descriptors of the same people. There is one article for apostles, one for prophets, one for evangelists, and only one for "pastors and teachers." One of the primary functions of a pastor is teaching. We see in [Acts 20:28](#) and [1 Pet. 5:2](#) that pastors are overseers, and we see from [1 Tim. 3:2](#) that overseers must be "able to teach." The titles overlap.

3 As the word moved from Greek to Latin to English, it was changed to episcopus, then biscopus, then biscop and then bishop.

4 Paul here seems to equate preachers and teachers. In [Eph. 4:11](#), he seems to equate pastors and teachers. He also seems to equate pastors with bishops. Although different gifts may be involved, the gifts often overlap. Paul does not seem to use any one title consistently.

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