



PART ONE



# Ephesians

## 4:1-16

Frameworks  
for Ministry

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# Activating the Theo-genetic codes of APEST ministry

*It is difficult to get a man to understand something when his  
salary depends upon his not understanding it.*

Upton Sinclair

*Those who make history are those who submit to the One who  
orchestrates it.*

John R. Mott

*Every viewpoint is a point from a view.*

Richard Rohr

THE REASONS THAT SISYPHUS WAS APPARENTLY CONDEMNED BY THE GODS are not entirely clear. What is clear is that his terrible punishment was to roll a huge rock up a steep hill, and then just as he reached the top of the hill, it would roll back to the bottom. One can almost feel the sense of futility and frustration that this created. Wretched Sisyphus is condemned to repeat again and again the same meaningless task—one that requires continual effort that never quite pays off.

We start this chapter with a reflection on the nature of futility because we believe that in many ways, the historic church has been engaged in a Sisyphean task. The history of movements of mission and renewal seems to indicate that as soon as we appear to be making significant progress, we bungle it and have to start all over again. At times we have been our own worst enemy. We are so divided against ourselves, how can we stand? Clearly much of our struggle, being not against flesh and blood, can be put down to our participation in the kingdom's struggle against

evil. In a fallen world, evil does not give up without a fight. However, if we were honest, we would have to admit that much of our struggle to extend the mission of Jesus into the world arises from our own sinful attempts to do it our way, willfully or otherwise going against the grain of God's original design and purposes in and through the church. The result is that we seem to be unable to get the job done when everything in our scriptures indicates that we can—and in fact should.

The capacity of God's people to fulfill our very purposes is implicit throughout all our theological codes. For instance, the command to obey implies the possibility of some form of realization through actual obedience, and the injunction to love God and people implies the possibility of fulfilling that command. If that were not true, that is, if we were being given commands that we cannot possibly fulfill, God would be rather capriciously toying with us, and the Bible becomes not the word of God that we are called to believe and lovingly obey, but something that takes on the nature of a cosmic, and rather nasty, prank.

The same potential for fulfillment is also implied in our ecclesiology (the New Testament teachings about the nature and purposes of the church) itself. We are called to believe that Jesus has given us everything that we need to be the kind of church that he intended us to be. We must take our Lord at his word. And if we are not being that kind of Jesus-shaped church, then we should look to our own practices and see whether we conform to the original intention and design. To do otherwise commits us to the Sisyphean struggle of rolling the boulder of the church up the hill, only to have it roll down again, and having to repeat the procedure over, again and again, producing only more toil and frustration.

It stands to reason that to mess with the DNA of the church (that is, its original design and function) means to seriously damage our capacity to actually be ecclesia. In fact, this is exactly how all genetic mutations occur. If we believe that the New Testament codes are authoritative and function in the same way genetics does in biological systems, then we must be sure to align with those codes. We believe that the church's lack of adherence to the teachings of Ephesians 4 is a clear case of how we have altered the genetic codes and paid the price. It is time to correct this egregious flaw in our ecclesiology.

This chapter introduces the foundational dimensions of Ephesians 4, which will provide the context to explore and understand the specific nature of the apostolic ministry. Ephesians 4 is the foundation and context of everything we say about the apostolic ministry in the rest of the book.

## ***Almost* a Silver Bullet**

In presenting Ephesians 4:1–16, we are tempted to say that it is one of those rare things—a silver bullet: a simple, guaranteed solution for a difficult problem. Of course we do not believe that, but over time we have come to think that it is *almost* a silver bullet. We believe that a full appreciation and application of Ephesians 4 typology will unleash enormous energies that will awaken now-dormant potentials in the church that Jesus built.

As far as we can discern, every observable, highly transformative apostolic movement that achieved exponential missional impact has operated with *some* expression of fivefold ministry.<sup>1</sup> We are absolutely convinced of this: it is clear in the explicit teachings of scripture, evidenced in mission’s history and in contemporary apostolic movements in the global church, and confirmed by the best thinking in the social sciences. The rediscovery and reapplication of this one piece of Pauline ecclesiology has massive consequences in our time and place.

## **The Devil Made Me Do It**

We fully recognize that in writing this book, we go directly against the grain of inherited assumptions of the church and its ministry. Perhaps we should instead use the phrase “the institutional church in the West” because there are literally hundreds of millions of believers, hundreds of thousands of churches, and thousands of movements throughout the world today that do believe in and appropriate the teachings of this text, and with great effect. In fact, viewed from the global perspective, our inherited Western views are the minority.

The reality is that the Ephesians 4 typology (the fivefold ministry that we call APEST: apostle, prophet, evangelist, shepherd, and teacher) is a major piece of Pauline ecclesiology. Although there have been bits and pieces of affirmations, we have not been able to find a single theologically substantial published book dedicated solely to this topic. To be sure, some books have emerged from the twentieth-century charismatic and Pentecostal wings of the church, but these are largely one-dimensional and fundamentalist, lack depth, and are front-loaded with domination theology with its overly hierarchical and elitist notions of leadership, the kind of which our Lord expressly forbids (Matthew 20:25–28). We suggest that many of these books are part of the reason that APEST ministry is not embraced as widely as it ought to be in the broader church: they have instead provided the straw man that the others so easily reject.

These books aside, readers should consider how many theological books there might be in the history of the church. We guess that must be numbered in the tens of millions. Yet in the many millions of theological books that have ever been written, we cannot find serious explorations of the topic of fivefold ministry as a living and vital piece of the church's genetic coding. In theological libraries, you will find hundreds of thousands of books that explore some of the most obscure concepts conceivable—from interpretations of matters of ecclesiological polity, the meaning of conjunctives in Lukan grammar, and the eschatological prognostications of the Hittite peoples, to four-hundred-page studies on the finger of God in Luke 11:20, not to mention countless contemporary books of theological bubblegum, and yet there is no open-minded and focused thinking on Ephesians 4 even though it contains a concentrated piece of deeply foundational Pauline ecclesiology.<sup>2</sup> Mostly we have silence, misunderstanding, and a deeply ingrained belief that somehow Ephesians 4 no longer applies to the church. This is not just a tragic omission; it constitutes a direct indictment against our integrity, our love of truth, our pursuit of the things of God and our scholarship.

How can we explain this? How did it come to be such a profoundly unexamined teaching? The only conclusion we can reach is that this must ultimately be the work of the Devil. And as extreme as that sounds, it makes complete sense: surely if the Devil wanted to strike a blow against our capacity to be the church that Jesus intended us to be—the gospel's agency for world transformation no less—then this would be as good a place as any. It is a classic divide-and-conquer strategy: divide the foundational ministry of the church, completely delegitimize some of the players, and overlegitimize the others by institutionalizing them, and the ministry of the church, along with its leadership, is thus rendered largely ineffective.

As with any other form of deception, truth telling always disarms the power of a lie and positions us for an embrace with reality. By looking into Ephesians 4, we will be confronted with another reality, one that has been there all along.

### **“Perfectly Designed”**

We are perfectly designed to achieve what we are currently achieving. As a certain tree bears specific fruit, so too the organizational systems we inhabit are biased toward achieving certain outcomes. This axiom is hard to dispute and cuts two ways. One meaning is that if we are in decline, there are likely to be some identifiable, and to varying degrees controllable, reasons for that decline. The task of good leadership is to constantly

ask, “What is our core purpose?” and to make sure that the organization makes the right choices to remain true to that purpose. There is nothing fatalistic about this; unwanted outcomes can be corrected with the right leadership vision along with the political will to do so. The whole notion of leadership actually assumes that this must be the case: we are response-*able*. If we are not doing what a church should be doing, then the task of its leaders is to direct it to be the church that it should be. And if leadership is unwilling to do this, then we suggest that they are abdicating their calling before God.

The other meaning in the idea of being perfectly designed is where our hope lies. In light of the clear New Testament teachings on the church, we are called to believe that we really are perfectly designed by God to be everything that he intended for us to be and do. In other words, if we take our Lord and the scriptures themselves at face value, then we already have everything we need to get the job done. The ecclesia is perfectly designed to achieve its distinctive mission, but to do so means that we must build according to code. We must work with Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit to be the church that makes the difference that only we were designed to make. Only this idea of inherent design can explain why dynamic apostolic movements in history can have massive impact and growth with apparently very few of the resources we in the West think we need to get the job done. We are designed for world transformation; impact is built into the idea of ecclesia itself.

## **A Missional Ministry for a Missional Church**

Clearly one of the biggest issues in the church today is the discussion about what it means to be missional. We believe that how we deal with this will determine the future viability of the church in the West. But we fear that so many of these vital conversations are doomed to frustration because the people in them are unwilling or unable to reconfigure ministry to suit the missional context. Although many buy into the concept, they are unwilling to recalibrate the ecclesiology. Christendom church has been run on a largely shepherd-teacher model, and because it has had a privileged position in society, it has been inclined to dispense with the more missional or evangelistic ministry types (apostle, prophet, and evangelist).

These inherited forms of church are not equipped for the missional challenge because they refuse to recalibrate their ministry along the lines suggested in Ephesians 4. We believe that in order to be a genuinely missional church, we must have a missional ministry to go with it, and that means putting this issue of the apostle, prophet, and evangelist roles back

on the table. If we do not, we believe that there is no real possibility of becoming truly missional.

We devote entire chapters to defining the APEST ministries, but here are some brief working definitions of each of these gifts:

- The *apostle* is tasked with the overall vigor, as well as extension of Christianity as a whole, primarily through direct mission and church planting. As the name itself suggests, it is the quintessentially missional ministry, as “sentness” (Latin *missio*) is written into it (*apostello* = sent one).
- The *prophet* is called to maintain faithfulness to God among the people of God. Essentially prophets are guardians of the covenant relationship.
- The *evangelist* is the recruiter to the cause, the naturally infectious person who is able to enlist people into the movement by transmitting the gospel.
- The *shepherd* (pastor) is called to nurture spiritual development, maintain communal health, and engender loving community among the people of God.
- The *teacher* mediates wisdom and understanding. This philosophical type brings comprehensive understanding of the revelation bequeathed to the church.

We represent these five roles symbolically in Figure 1.1. All five are needed if we are to be the authentically missional church as Jesus intended us to be.

## The Order of Creation and the Order of Redemption

Our friend and colleague Andrew Dowsett, who has worked extensively with Mike Breen, maintains rather intriguingly, and we think correctly, that APEST is reflected in the orders of creation (as part of the general



**Figure 1.1 The Five APEST Ministries**

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human experience) and not simply in the orders of redemption (the church). In other words, these apply in some way to all people, not just Christians.<sup>3</sup>

Dowsett came to this understanding by reflecting on the image in verses 8 and 9, which picture Jesus as liberating people—people who were by creation naturally apostolic, prophetic, instructive types—from the dominion of Satan, and subsequently giving these now-liberated captives to the church as gifts, for the very purpose of enabling the church to be an effective community in the world. This certainly makes sense of the ascension narrative used here. In other words, Jesus redeems what is already present in the world and realigns it, giving it a new theological significance and function within the church.

In this light, one can see how perhaps society in general can be interpreted through the APEST grid:

- Apostles in the generic sense are those sent to pioneer something new—for example, teachers who are called in to turn failing schools around, along with people who start movements of sorts, architect systems, or start entrepreneurial business ventures. Can we see non-Christian people who fit this category? Definitely.
- Prophets tend to be visionaries, but in a very different sense; they often have a keen interest in issues of justice, environmental responsibility, or the creative arts. Are there such people outside the church? Of course.
- Evangelists are particularly gifted at enthusing others about what they stand for, selling the significance of their work, company, or product outside the group itself. These are easy to spot. The United States is full of them.
- Pastors are those with a special concern for seeing and affirming what is human within structures. They might not be the most appropriate people to put together a policy for addressing drug abuse, but if they are not part of delivering the policy, the addicts are in trouble. Are there people who create community and bring healing to others in the non-Christian world? Indeed.
- Teachers are those who are effective trainers and inspirers of learning. They are philosophers, thinkers, people who understand ideas and how they shape human life. Do such non-Christians exist? No brainer.

Viewing APEST sociologically allows us to demystify the overly fraught language of the Bible and approach the meaning of Ephesians

4:11 without the polemics that have accompanied it in the past. When we see it this way, we can see how powerful these roles really are. Of course, any healthy leadership team in any context (corporate, non-profit, or anything else) would benefit from such a complex of influences. It also gives us insight into why having only two of the types in the mix leads to dysfunctions. Finally it is very helpful because it helps us to appreciate the sheer movemental power of the redemption won in and through Jesus Christ. People who are naturally inclined to one of the other APEST types are redeemed, set apart, focused, and legitimized in the church. In fact, they are Christ's ascension gifts (Ephesians 4:8–10).

### **A Letter for Everyone**

We can tell a lot about a letter from whom it is addressed to. Ephesians is not addressed to a president of a organization, theologians, seminarians, or a group of leaders; rather it is addressed to the regular people of God who inhabited the various house churches throughout the city of Ephesus. We must keep in mind that the church in Ephesus was made up of ordinary people—including women, slaves, people of different races, class, and socioeconomic status. This is a letter for the church about the church, and it must be read as such. Furthermore, it is a general, or generic, letter, intended for wide use and distribution among the various churches, including beyond Ephesus itself.<sup>4</sup> The Ephesian text is not what scholars would call a highly contextual document. Letters like Galatians, or 2 Corinthians were crafted for a particular community facing a particular problem. Ephesians has universal significance beyond merely local concerns. Recognizing the cosmic, universal nature of Paul's ecclesiology in Ephesians repositions us to approach the pivotal text of Ephesians 4 from a new angle. This has direct implications for how we digest the entire letter, not to mention our focus on Ephesians 4:7–16.

#### *The Constitution of the Church (with No Amendments Allowed)*

This universal significance also means that Ephesians functions as something of a constitutional document of the church as Paul sees it. In fact Markus Barth calls this section "The Constitution of the Church" and considers verses 11 and 12 to be the means of operationalizing it.<sup>5</sup>

We can apply the metaphor of constitution to the whole letter itself. For instance, if you were to say to Paul, "Tell me your best thinking about the church," he would without doubt slap the book of Ephesians on the table. Although he no doubt says other things about the church

elsewhere, they tend to be incidental to the other issues his letter is addressing. In Ephesians, he is specifically talking about the ecclesia as God intended it to be. In fact, no other book in the Bible deals so specifically, and so authoritatively, with the nature of ecclesia. There is a certain distinctly constitutional weight to this document, and like any other good constitution, it sets the criteria about how we must think about the church and provides all the essential frameworks by which it was intended to operate ever since.

This is exactly why we locate the lever for change here in Ephesians, and especially in 4:1–16. It is also why we think the APEST configuration, as opposed to the other possible lists of gifts, operates as the interpretative center for how we conceive of ministry. Imagine trying to act according to a constitution when more than half the leadership provisions provided for by the constitution itself were annulled or dismissed. It would be like having to run government with no executive powers. Yes, that is precisely what we have done.

## Language Matters

In a chapter in *Organization at the Limit*, a book dedicated to analyzing the organizational dynamics that contributed to the *Columbia* space shuttle disaster, William Ocasio discusses the unique connection between language and organizational activity. Applying an analysis of the language used and how it points to deficiencies in thinking, Ocasio points to the subtle yet powerful capacity of language to focus our attention as well as to blind us to seeing problems when they occur. The language we commonly use can greatly influence what gets noticed and what gets ignored. He says, “It’s not that language determines what can be thought, but that language influences what routinely *does* get thought.”<sup>6</sup> In other words, as G. K. Chesterton noted about institutionalized insiders, it is not so much that insiders cannot see the solution. It is that they cannot see the problem itself because they have no language for it.

To illustrate, the fact that we tend to experience blind spots in vehicles is not so much an engineering problem as it is a linguistic one. When we refer to “rear-view mirrors,” we use those mirrors to look at the rear view alone, in essence, creating the blind spot on the side. When we refer to the external mirrors as “side-view mirrors,” then we will use them to view what is happening on the side of the vehicle. Words matter big time.

Taking his cue from the official report of the *Columbia* disaster, Ocasio and his team of organization consultants concluded that simply putting it down to individual error does not solve the issue of what caused the

crash. The problem instead lay in the way NASA actually conceived of and articulated organization and management itself. Their language indicated that they did not have the categories to help them even see the problem coming, let alone resolve it. He calls this phenomenon of organizational blindness the “vocabulary of organizing.”<sup>7</sup>

In an effort to describe its core practices and procedures, organizations develop a vocabulary that helps describe, as well as prescribe, organizational activity. Realizing this inherent connection between organizational vocabularies and activity is insightful because it helps explain why some issues receive more attention and become more prominent than others. Ocasio says, “The vocabulary of organizing serves to provide the organizational categories which designates what constitutes a problem or issue to be attended to as well as what type of solutions and initiatives are to be considered.”<sup>8</sup> Essentially a vocabulary of organizing plays a significant role in determining what practices will be considered normative and what practices are literally unheard of. Thus, the linguistic categories that an organization uses can shape how it conceives of core tasks.

By applying these ideas to the Western church, we can easily see how our most generative forms of ministry—the apostle, the prophet, and the evangelist—have been edited out of our organizational vocabulary. They are no longer considered to be legitimate descriptors for leaders of ministries in most churches. The result is that we are scripted not to see or pay attention to issues related to apostolic, prophetic, and, to a lesser degree, evangelistic concerns, even when they are staring us in the face. Again we are shown how we are perfectly designed to achieve current outcomes.

Because APEST supplies the church with the essential linguistic categories to form a complete vocabulary of organizing, reinserting the very language of apostle, prophet, and evangelist into organizational discourse will revolutionize our conception of the church and its core tasks. Instead of seeing the church as an extension of the seminary (teacher) or as a place to merely get fed (shepherd), we can rightly conceive of the church within the broader framework of Christ’s ministry. For instance, if we persist in using the standard shepherd and teacher frameworks for church planting, then we will inevitably see that the primary purpose of the new plant will be to run worship services and Bible studies.

Adopting a broader APEST understanding and vocabulary brings other insights about the functions of the church into play. New possibilities will present themselves. It will reinstate the possibility of the permanent revolution by giving us a broader range of options and opening us up to a multidimensional way of seeing. Try it: extend your ministry vocabulary, ensure you have a good understanding about the five APEST

roles and functions, and watch how the analysis of the situation as well as the capacity to problem-solve will improve.

## Getting into the Text (or, Allowing It to Get into Us)

When we consider the text itself, we discern three movements within the overall unity of verses 1 to 16: unity (verses 1–6), diversity/APEST (verses 7–11), and maturity (verses 12–16).

### *Unity in the One God: Verses 1 to 6*

The text at the beginning of Ephesians 4 flows out of the famously lofty Pauline prayer for the church in Ephesians 3:14–21. Here Paul prays that they might attain the knowledge of God in Jesus Christ and grow up into being the fullness of Christ (a key theme in the letter) in the world. Immediately he goes on to appeal to the Ephesians (and to all other Christians everywhere) to live consistently with who God is and what he has done in Jesus.

Ephesians 4 is the pivotal section of the letter where Paul moves from theology to praxis. And like any good preamble to a constitution, Paul first condenses the core theological essentials into seven theological axioms relating to the oneness of God, faith, and church.

This was a strategic move that Paul made because any movement experiencing spontaneous expansion will encounter, and therefore become vulnerable to, competing systems of meaning:

As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called—one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all [Ephesians 4:1–6].

Much like the nature of the Ephesian letter, the seven “ones” (one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all) are its universal truths. They provide the necessary theological coordinates to maintain unity within a burgeoning and increasingly diverse movement. Here Paul, true to the apostolic calling, is essentially ensuring the theological integrity of the church. Formulating

it in this manner was a clever way for Paul to clarify the boundaries of orthodoxy yet package it in a reproducible form.

The elevated speech in these verses reflects both the theological significance and the inescapably foundational nature of the text.

### *Diversity in APEST: Verses 7 to 11*

Having laid out the basis of ecclesial unity, Paul proceeds directly to affirm the God-given, or to be more accurate the Christ-apportioned, nature of the ministry of the ecclesia:

But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. This is why it says: “When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men.” (What does “he ascended” mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.) It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers [4:7–11].

Putting aside the meaning of the ascension reference here, Paul clearly states that Jesus has “given” (*aorist*, indicative) certain “charisms” (what we will variously call *ministries*, *callings*, or *vocations*) to the church, distributing them among all the people as he (the giver) sees fit.<sup>9</sup> These gifts are clearly and unequivocally stated as being in the fivefold expressions of apostle, prophet, evangelist, shepherd, and teacher; they have a Christological source and basis and approximate what can now be called *the* constitutional ministry of the church and—following our metaphor of constitution—its legitimate executive.<sup>10</sup>

### *Growing Up into Christ: Verses 12 to 16*

While it is a false break to split verse 12 from verse 11, we can discern a shift in Paul’s argument from a prescription of APEST in verse 11 to a description of the expected results in the church in verse 12. Here we gain insight into why APEST is given in the first place:

To prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up 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. 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. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. 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 [4:12–16].

The charisms of APEST are given that the body of Christ might grow and mature, that we may live out the unity described in verses 1 to 6, that we might achieve true understanding and not be capricious people given to theological illusions, and to find our organic wholeness in Christ and each other, that is, to be the people Jesus intended us to be. We represent these in Figure 1.2.

The logic of this text is integrated and sound theologically. It makes clear that the church's capacity for reciprocity and maturity is based on orthodox understandings of God and church and the constitutional ministry expressed as APEST. A mature and healthy church lives out of its confession as well as into it; it is a self-reinforcing system. If we ignore the inner logic of the text, we should not expect to produce the outcomes it foresees.

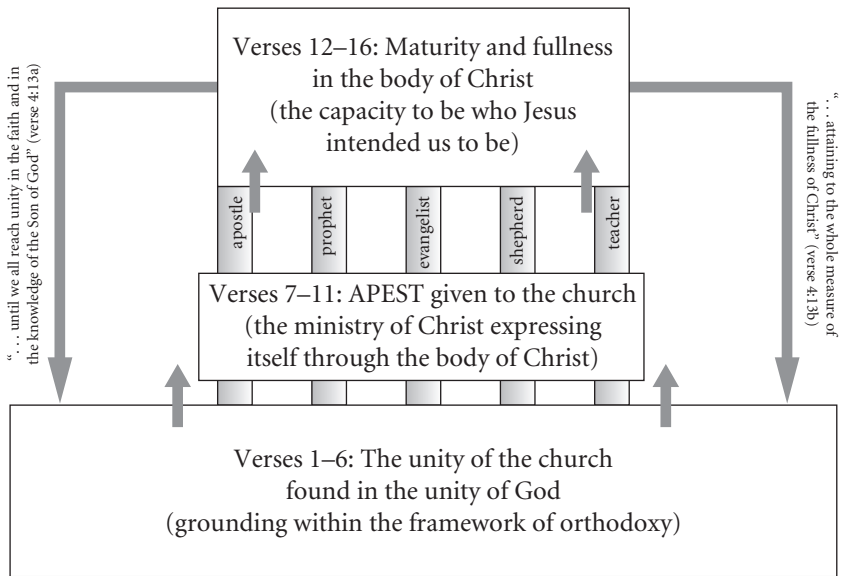


Figure 1.2 APEST Charisms

According to Paul, a fully functioning fivefold APEST ministry is the Christ-given defense mechanism against heresy and false doctrine. There is something about APEST as a whole that moves the church past theological naiveté and anchors it in a more integrated understanding of its central message and core doctrines.<sup>11</sup> Oddly enough, it is the very diversity contained within APEST that aids the church in attaining to the “unity of the faith.”<sup>12</sup>

## Can We Mature with a Twofold Ministry?

Actually if we take the text plainly (inductively) and without prior theological prejudice (deductively), it is not hard to discern that we cannot be a healthy movement without the necessary APEST ministry. Verse 13 explicitly says as much, but the logic of the entire text aims at this. So, for instance, we can ask whether there is any doubt about the universal significance of verses 1 to 6 for any church in any time and place. We seriously doubt that anyone reading this book would suggest that they do not still have abiding authority over us. They were clearly not intended just for the Ephesian Christians.

So if both sections on either side of verses 7 to 11 are true and binding on the church for all time, then by what form of theological trickery have we come to believe that verses 7 to 11 would be any less abiding and universal, especially when grammatically and thematically they are placed at the heart of the same piece of scripture? As far as we can discern, it is simply not possible to be the church that Jesus intended if three (APE) of the five constitutional ministries are removed. According to the explicit teaching of Ephesians 4:1–16, it cannot be done. But in fact it has been done, and the tragic consequences are dramatically demonstrated in and through the history of the Christian church through the past seventeen centuries. We have been condemned to Sisyphean frustration in this matter ever since (Figure 1.3). Every time we seem to develop some semblance of movement and get the missional boulder up the hill, it rolls back down again, only to initiate the next cycle of seemingly futile efforts all over again. Seldom (and maybe never) have we stopped to correct our misunderstandings at this point.

And to be clear, the kind of maturity Paul is talking about here reaches beyond psychological wholeness and moral behavior.<sup>13</sup> These are certainly involved, but what is ultimately at stake is the church’s capacity to embody and extend the mission and purposes of Jesus in the world. When Paul says that APEST is given to “equip” the saints, he uses the Greek word *kataptismo*, which, among its various nuanced meanings, is

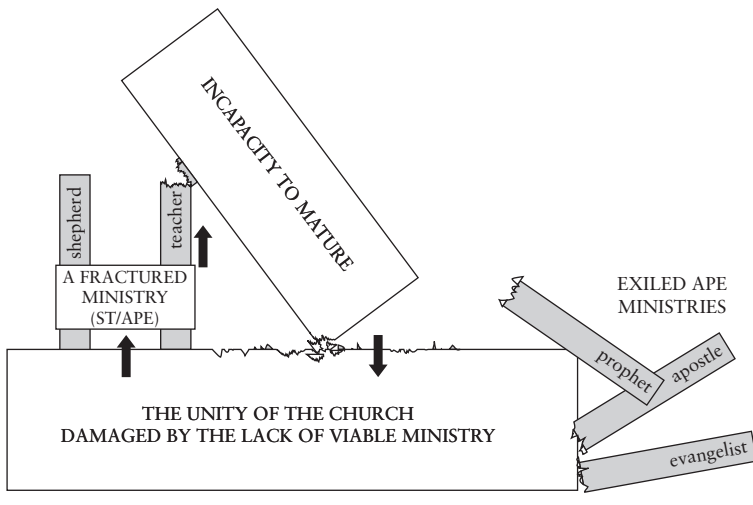


Figure 1.3 The Church Without APE

applied to the act of setting a broken bone.<sup>14</sup> APEST helps us mature so that the “body” can “walk” and ultimately “stand” against the principalities and powers that dehumanize and then crush humanity (Ephesians 6:10–16). Our capacity as a movement to engage the spiritual powers that be is at stake when APEST is not fully operative.

### *The Exiling of the APEs*

Much of this book seeks to redress the imbalance brought about by the disastrous exiling of the APE types from the equation of ministry. We suggest a thorough account as to why it happened in the Appendix, explore many of the results, and make what we believe ought to be a convincing case as to why they should be included again. But to do this, we must ask readers to be patient because we are going against the inherited grain of thinking and have to be thorough. What we are certain of is that we are dealing here with something that has nothing less than paradigmatic significance as to how we might fulfill our distinctive mission in the world. By effectively exiling the apostolic, prophetic, and evangelistic ministries, we have meddled with the very mechanism Jesus intended for us to be a fully functioning ecclesia. The result is that all ministry has been forced to fit into the predetermined formats of shepherd and teacher, pastor and theologian, and nothing else has legitimacy. In the end, when all is said and done, we are perfectly designed to achieve what we are currently

achieving. It stands to reason that if we have found it expedient to ignore the ministry formula revealed in Ephesians 4, we should not expect to achieve the desired outcomes that this same passage promises.

### *The Bed of Procrustes*

Procrustes, whose name means “he who stretches,” was arguably one of the most intriguing characters in all Greek mythology. Like a serial killer in the TV series *Criminal Minds*, he was a devious villain who kept a house by the side of the road where he would offer hospitality to passing strangers. The guests were invited in for a pleasant meal and a night’s rest in his very special bed, a bed Procrustes described as having the magical property in that its length exactly matched that of anyone who lay down on it. What Procrustes did not volunteer was the method by which this one-size-fits-all was achieved: as soon as the guest fell asleep Procrustes went to work on him, stretching him on the rack if he was too short for the bed or chopping off his legs if he was too long—a rather unfortunate way of making everyone conform to his one-size-fits-all bed.

Procrustes’ infamous but profoundly allegorical activity found its way into our language as *procrustean bed* or *procrustean effort* or simply calling something “procrustean.” It means setting a standard or set of conditions, determined arbitrarily, to which everyone and everything is subsequently forced to conform. It means asserting a set of assumptions and subsequently forcing everything to fit those assumptions even when they do not fit. Similar to this is the idea of the narrative fallacy (also called illusory correlation): our tendency to construct stories around facts. This may serve the purpose of illustrating the facts, but when people begin to believe the stories and accommodate facts into the stories, they are likely to err.

We suggest this is what we have done with ministry. Having exiled the APE types within the first three centuries of Christian history and having subsequently defined ministry according to the remaining two types, shepherd and theologian, we have effectively practiced what is called reflective equilibrium: the tendency to retrofit facts and evidence into preexisting categories in order to resolve apparent categorical tensions. In essence, we have forced all other possible forms of ministry to conform to this twofold standard.

This anachronistic, procrustean reading is the approach that the overwhelming majority of interpreters take—for instance, a random grab at a commentary produced by Arthur Patzia. Patzia, a New Testament scholar based at Fuller Theological Seminary, rightly acknowledges that “what is certain . . . is that Christ gave (appointed) these offices to the church

for the specific function of having the church attain its full maturity in him (4:12–16).”<sup>15</sup> But then he rather arbitrarily goes on to deny any subsequent function of APE in the ongoing life of the church. Parroting the inherited scripting, he says these were replaced by the canon of scripture and the role of shepherd and teacher. Yet nothing in the text itself suggests that this is the case. To the contrary, all evidence points in the other direction. He is not alone in this: the vast majority of commentaries follow the same predetermined, lock-step approach. Rather than taking the text as the starting point of doctrine, they have anachronistically forced it to fit later, and decidedly deductive, conclusions.

Darrell Guder exposes the self-same procrustean tendencies in John Calvin:

Calvin devotes much attention to the relevance of Ephesians 4:1–16 for the formation and structuring of the church. But after centuries of Christendom, he has some problems with Christ’s gifts of some to be apostles, prophets, and evangelists. So, he argues, “These three functions were not established in the church as permanent ones, but only for that time during which churches were to be erected where none existed before.” He acknowledges that there might be special situations in which these offices become necessary again, but they will remain, in his view, “extraordinary.” But, he goes on, “Next come pastors and teachers, whom the church can never go without.”<sup>16</sup>

More surprising perhaps is when some of the best thinkers in missional church circles perpetuate the same basic errors. For instance, Alan Roxburgh certainly acknowledges the missional significance of the Ephesians 4 typology, but he then modifies the terminology so as not to offend prevailing ecclesiological sensibilities. Even as he acknowledges that the current decline of the church in the West requires the apostolic function, he nonetheless subsumes the function itself to that of the pastor. He rather skittishly comes up with the names *pastor/poet* (ST), *pastor/prophet* (P), and *pastor/apostle* (A), and he does not even mention the evangelist.<sup>17</sup> The apostolic, as well as all the others, are thereby forced to fit that of the pastor. In fact, it ends up that there is no stand-alone, fully legitimized, apostle or prophet at all, only the apostolic pastor or prophetic pastor and the like.

All these interpretations amount to hermeneutical gymnastics and demonstrate how deeply biased the Christendom system is toward interpreting the APE modes of ministry through an ST lens. The truly puzzling thing is that no one can clearly state why this is the case, except to give the

embedded, traditionally scripted answer that the functions of apostles and prophets just seemed to have passed away with the canon of scripture. And so the traditional interpretation, that is, the pastor-teacher model, has become the false standard by which all subsequent ministry is assessed. Rather than assessing ministry in light of a fivefold form, we have forced the New Testament to fit our assumptions. As a result, the pastor (shepherd) (and perhaps, to a lesser extent, the teacher) becomes the catchall title, the procrustean office, on which all subsequent ministry is built.

Just to press the point a little more, how many times do you think the word *shepherd/pastor* (*poimein*) is used in the New Testament for people in ministry? The answer is completely astonishing given the universal use of the term—*once!* Yes, once—here, in Ephesians 4:7 no less. Although it is a biblical term in that it is used in the New Testament, that one use hardly justifies having everything from pastors of technology to pastors of administration, and pastors of anything in between. And although the word *teacher* is used much more extensively in the New Testament (around ten times), we are unambiguously warned in scripture that not many of us should seek to become teachers because this vocation is judged more strictly by God (James 3:1). Yet we have made teaching a standard criterion for all ministry. Now Procrustes and Sisyphus join together.

### *One Aorist Rules Them All*

Just one more thing on this issue of the integrity of the APEST ministry as a whole unit: it is very important to note that the verbs for *given* (*edothe*) in verses 7 and 11 are aorist indicatives, that is, adamant verbs with no room for subtle reinterpretations. These are given, once and for all but with clear and abiding significance, to the church. They have the ring of constitutionality with no possibility of amendments about them, once again highlighting the foundational implications of these verses.

What is more, all five APEST ministries come together under the power of the ruling verb—*edothe*. The verbs govern the objects to which they refer—in this case, all five ministries as a self-contained grammatical unit of speech. We cannot eliminate or downplay one of these ministries without undermining the legitimacy, significance, and vitality of the others.

### **To Each One of Us**

Even when these verses are taken seriously by various churches and denominations (for example, the Vineyard, Assemblies of God, and Foursquare), by far the most common way that APEST has been read is

to identify it as the leadership of the church. As the idea states it, Jesus has equipped *some* in the body in order to train all the *others* to do ministry. At first glance, this seems to make a lot of sense: the church staff equips the members to do ministry. Unfortunately, this interpretation of the text is a by-product of the institutional ways we organize ourselves and fails to recognize the movemental nature of ecclesia in the New Testament.

This misunderstanding can be rectified by reading the text organically at verse 7 instead of reading verse 11 as a stand-alone. Paul says in verse 7, “But, to *each one of us* [Greek *hekasto*] grace was given, according to the measure of Christ’s gift.”<sup>18</sup> *Hekasto* literally means “to each and every person.”<sup>19</sup> He intends that we understand it quite literally to mean every person, that is, all believers hearing these words both then and now. Rather than gifts being given to an elite few and for the benefit of the many, these gifts are given to all and are for the benefit of all; it is the saints who equip the saints.

Remember that the letter is written to, and intended to be read out in, the gathered ecclesia (the various house churches) in Ephesus and not to a leadership conference. It is addressed to all of the people of God as a whole, including women and slaves, and in all their nonprofessional glory. Furthermore, the hearers came from across the racial, social, economic, and gender spectrum. This means that every believer fits into the APEST typology! This is a deeply radicalizing text that has huge ramifications for how we both recognize and unleash the ministry of every believer. This is a massive paradigm shift that in itself will take us to the core of what it means to be an apostolic movement.

Seeing APEST through the lens of the ministry of all believers leads us to believe that Ephesians 4 is not primarily a leadership text but rather a ministry text. Paul is setting forth a reflexive paradigm where each part of the body gets access to, influences, and ministers to all the other parts of the body. In organizational language, Paul is describing a cross-functional team where every person comes to the table with his or her own gifts and contributes to the ongoing development of the body, and thus to the movement.

We therefore suggest that calling and ministry are different from leadership only by matter of degree and capacity.<sup>20</sup> Leadership embodies a particular APEST ministry but extends and reorients it to fit the distinct functions of leadership. In other words, there is a certain flow from gifting to ministry to leadership.

Everyone may have a gifting, and therefore a possibility of a maturing ministry, but not everyone functions as a leader within his or her

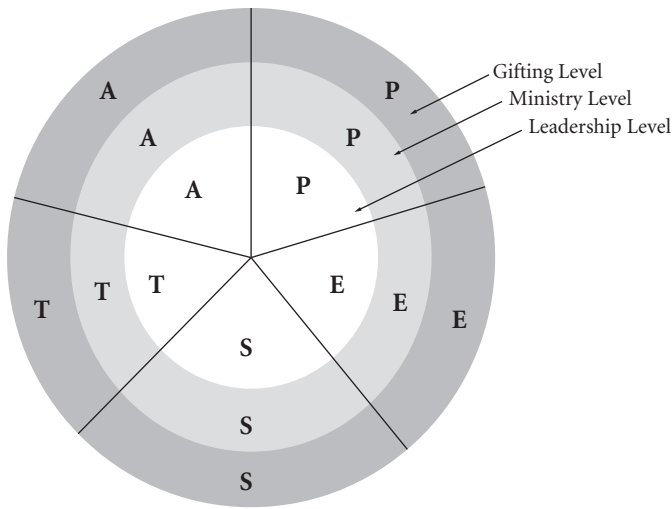


Figure 1.4 Calling Within a Calling

scope of ministry. This shift radically changes the way we see God's people. Everyone is gifted and called to operate out of his or her vocational energies, but not all are leaders. Some people are designed to function prophetically, for example, but not all prophetic people will function as leaders. And some people who are gifted in pastoral care are not necessarily gifted or skilled in leadership. The same is true in all the ministries. Ministry does not a leader make. Leadership must be conceived as a calling within a calling (Figure 1.4). It encompasses a set of skills that enhance the basic calling and influences others from within that call.

APEST is a part of the DNA of all God's people, making it a universal feature of all communities in Christ.

### The Ministry of Christ in and Through the Body of Christ

We can say that APEST is part of the DNA of the church because we are absolutely sure that Jesus himself is. Verse 11 is nothing less than the *ministry of Christ expressing itself in and through the body of Christ*. Consider this. Is Jesus an apostle? The sent one? Yes, clearly he is the archetypal apostle. Is he a prophet? Yes, and the greatest one. Is he the evangelist of evangelists? Yes, clearly he is. Shepherd? Yes, he calls himself that many times. Teacher? Of course. So if we are the body of Christ, then it is hardly surprising that we should reflect these many dimensions of Christ's ministry. In fact, it would be surprising if we do

not reflect a fully orbed extension of what Jesus was about. The spiritual gifts find their proper role in relation to God's purposes in this world through his people. Eugene Peterson rightly says that "each [APEST] gift is an invitation and provides the means to participate in the work of Jesus."<sup>21</sup>

A twofold ministry can never hope to reflect a complete and comprehensive ministry of Christ to the world, and neither can it ever hope to fulfill his purposes through the church. Anything less than a fivefold ministry is a misrepresentation of the ministry of Christ, and by consequence, that leads to a misrepresentation of Christ in the world.

This Christological basis of APEST can be reinforced with the help of the social sciences. According to seminal sociologist Max Weber, when a charismatic leader of a movement is "removed" by death or other means, the various roles that leader played, along with the tasks he or she performed, are now left open. This vacuum poses a dilemma for the followers because typically no one person can step into the founder's shoes and provide the same level of charisma and leadership. What happens next is what Weber called "the routinization of charisma." The function and activities originally performed by the founder are now distilled into roles and distributed through the organization to the various adherents and followers. These roles and activities evolve into routine practices that essentially perpetuate the founder's influence.<sup>22</sup>

In many ways, this is exactly what has happened with the church. Jesus parses out the core elements of his ministry into five distinct categories and plants those ministries deep within the church. What we have here is "root-in-ization of charisma"—the ministries of APEST are rooted in, and consequently extend, the original ministry of Christ. Through his ascension, Jesus distributes the vocational elements of his ministry to the church to mature and equip it for the task of being the fullness of Christ in the world. Christ's ministry is thus routinized into his ecclesia. The question of how the church functions as the fullness of Christ in the world is given a concrete answer here.<sup>23</sup> Visually, it could look something like Figure 1.5.

APEST perpetuates the ministry of Christ so that the church is endowed with the same capacity for movement as the founder. Contained within APEST are the core elements of a full-blown movemental ecclesiology.

## Did We Miss Something?

Only one more foundational issue needs to be explored here before we move on to discussing the content and texture of each APEST profile. In our various talks on APEST, people invariably ask us, "Why this list

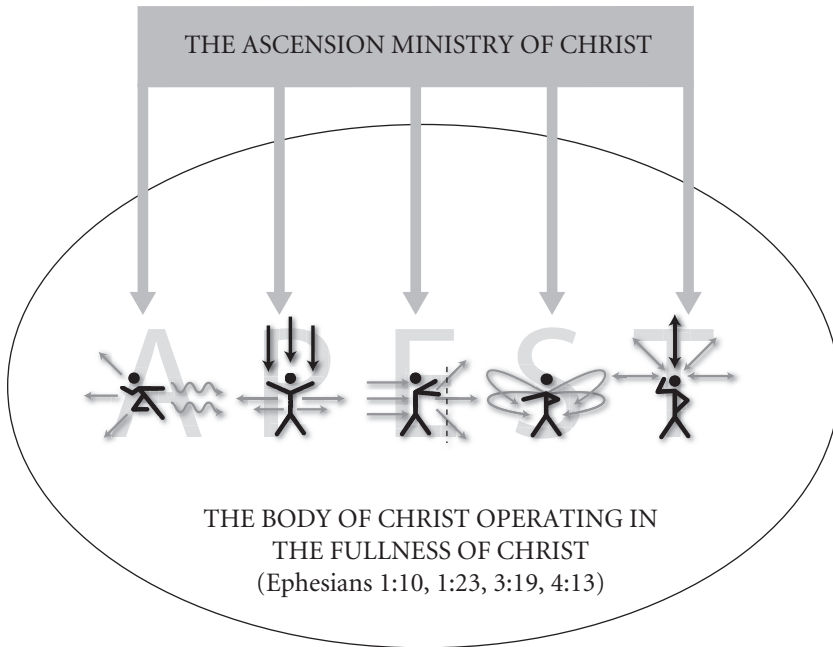


Figure 1.5 Ascension Ministry of Christ

Table 1.1 Contrast of Key Terms

	Key Word in Greek	English Translation	Implication
1 Corinthians 12:7	<i>Phanerosis</i>	Manifestation	Situational
Romans 12:4	<i>Praxis</i>	Action	Practical
Ephesians 4:1	<i>Kalesis</i>	Calling	Vocational

alone? Why not include the other lists of gifts (for example, those in Romans 12 or 1 Corinthians 12)?” It is a legitimate question.

Although we are not going to offer a detailed taxonomy of those giftings here, we do assert what we believe to be important distinctions among them. If we look closer into Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12, we notice each of the lists is prefaced by a key word that frames the nature of the gifts (Table 1.1). The list in 1 Corinthians seems to be mostly associated with the Christian gathering, and that in Romans 12 seems to be more concerned with practical activities done by members of the community.<sup>24</sup>

We believe that what is being referred to in Ephesians 4 is something more substantial, more permanent, and more decisive—something that touches on the idea of a vocation or calling. We are explicitly introduced to the vocational nature of APEST when Paul begins Ephesians 4 by saying, “I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling (*kalesis*) with which you were called (*kalesis*).” Perhaps most convincing is the way Paul uses nouns to present APEST in verse 11: “He gave some to be apostles, and prophets, and evangelists, and pastors and teachers.” Instead of listing activities that exist separate and apart from the individual, he connects the being with the doing: task and person are the same. It becomes a matter of vocational identity. By rooting APEST in our sense of identity and calling in Christ, we believe Paul is affording them a gravitas and permanence not afforded to the other giftings.

So where does this leave these other giftings in Romans and 1 Corinthians? Think about it this way. If each believer has received a specific APEST calling in some form, then that person fulfills that calling by living into it. However, functioning successfully in one’s vocation requires drawing from additional capacities to execute and carry out the task in various contexts. Every assignment is different and presents unique challenges. Because of this, God gives various gifts to carry out the work he has assigned each person to do. In our view, Ephesians 4:11 is the interpretative center, or the organizing principle, around which the other gifts listed in scripture are organized.

Consider this illustration from the field of construction. Let us say someone has a particular calling to build houses. That is, his vocation is to be a carpenter and builder. To accomplish this job, this person needs more than one tool: a hammer, a sledgehammer, a drill, pliers, and so on. At some point, he will need all of these to accomplish the work of building the house, but he will use them only as needed.

Similarly, the gifts in Romans and 1 Corinthians can be viewed as a kind of tool belt. If I am a prophet, I will always be a prophet, but the context in which I function prophetically necessitates that I use the different tools on my belt: insight, prayer languages, dreams, and foresight. It is not uncommon to see an apostle with a natural bent for the gift of visionary leadership, but there are times when an apostle will need the gift of healing, administration, or encouragement to accomplish the task at hand. And the evangelist can draw from the gift of faith, miracles, encouragement, and so on.

Paul seems to be saying that each of us has a fixed vocation, but to live out this calling, we need different tools in different situations

to accomplish the task. The Spirit supplies us with those tools to help us get the job done: these are the charismatic giftings. What is important to recognize is that it is the Spirit who gives these gifts as they are needed and in the ways they are needed.

The artist Henri Matisse was reputed to have said that to look at something as though we had never seen it before requires great courage. That much might be true, but to look at something and recognize its truth and not be willing to change would amount to simple cowardice. For leaders in God's church, this kind of cowardice takes on dimensions of sinful defiance against the purposes of the Lord. In this book, we challenge the church to respond in ways that bring us closer to what Jesus intended in and through us in the first place. If it is repentance that is needed, then we suggest that this is exactly what should be done, and now. The time is critical now, and when it comes to recovering the transforming power of being an apostolic movement again in the West, it is impossible to travel north without turning one's back on the south.

Facing a new direction not only opens us up to new and untapped resources of human capital; it also positions us to once again be enriched by the full spectrum of collective intelligence that Jesus has placed within his people. Once we see the rightful place of APEST within the framework of biblical ministry, we see the church in a new light and full of potential and possibility. Unlocking this can be likened to unleashing the power released in nuclear fission. To this we now turn.