

A Note on “Pastors and Teachers” in Eph. 4:11. Can Structure Help?

There is a continuing debate of extremely long-standing about the relationship between the terms pastors and teachers in Eph. 4:11—are these two separate gifts, or do they always and only occur together in the same person, the pastor-teacher, or can one be a teacher without being a pastor (and possibly vice-versa)?

Much of the debate concerns the grammatical construction of this verse, and whilst it is indeed true that the link between the two words pastors and teachers, at the end of Paul’s list of five gifts, certainly differs grammatically from the earlier linkages, this difference has (in my very limited view!) been wrongly exaggerated by a mis-application of the “Granville Sharp” rule (which excludes plural nouns as well as other categories).

No studies on Eph. 4:11 that I know of look at the structure of the verse and I offer the following notes on structure as a possible contribution to the debate. In what follows, I am using the word pastor to denote the gift of pastoring/shepherding, not an “office” in the church called “the pastor”: despite the subsequent and widespread development of such an office, the New Testament provides no evidence that there was such an office in the New Testament church.

1) First Analysis— a List of Five Gifts

Paul lists five plural nouns, which I suggest are chiastically structured:

- 1) Apostles
- 2) Prophets
- 3) Evangelists
- 4) Pastors
- 5) Teachers

1 and 5: Apostles and teachers

If we regard the Apostles (capital A) as those authorised (amongst other things!) to speak and write authoritative, “general”, revelatory truth from God regarding the Person and Work of Christ (e.g. in New Testament writings), then this corresponds to the (derivative) work of teachers whose task is faithfully to promulgate and disseminate these truths. Together gifts 1 and 5 provide teaching for the church about Jesus and

how He fulfils OT Scripture etc.

(We could perhaps link this idea with corresponding Old Covenant roles: Moses delivered the Law, but scribes such as Ezra explained it to the people.)

2 and 4: prophets and pastors

I suggest that prophets and pastors are linked too in a corresponding way to Apostles and teachers respectively.

If we look for a moment at the prophets of the Old Testament, much of their work was to bring messages from God which drew attention to specific ways in which both the nation and individuals had departed in specific ways from the Mosaic Law, how they should bring their behaviour back into line with the Law and the consequences of not doing so (e.g. Isaiah regarding Sabbath keeping, Jeremiah regarding freeing of slaves who were fellow-countrymen, Malachi on tithing etc.). It was the task of the king as “shepherd” of the people (as well as other leaders—judges etc.) to guide the nation and judge wisely in accordance with the Law. In this the king was often guided by prophets (e.g. the relationship between Samuel and Saul and between Nathan and David).

I wonder then whether the relationship between prophets and pastors might be analogous. It is not clear to me what NT prophecy “looked like” but it would seem that prophets in the New Testament delivered specific messages from God from which the church corporately and individually could learn and be encouraged (1 Cor. 14:3) as well as messages relating to situations (e.g. Agabus’ prophecy of a famine) which would enable the church and individuals to respond with appropriate Christian action in accordance with Christian principles (e.g. love and compassion). Prophetic messages would be tested (1 Cor. 14:29) presumably to ensure that they were consistent with sound teaching and doctrine. Pastors similarly would use wisdom (rather than revelation) as they seek to apply sound teaching and doctrine to specific situations and individuals in the church, (just as a shepherd applies principles of safety, nutrition and welfare to the specific situations of sheep both individually and collectively.) This link between pastors and prophets as “appliers of truth to specific situations” is described much better than I can by many others e.g. in the two “notes” on prophecy (starting on pages 956 and 1087 of A. Thistelton’s commentary on 1 Corinthians).

Thus, on this view, prophet and pastor lie “within” Apostle and teacher

since the prophet and pastor bring practical and specific application so that hearers learn and are encouraged in matters relating to the more “general” truths provided by Apostolic (e.g. Acts 2:42) and other teaching. The term “spiritual formation” is a good way to describe this personal and corporate application or “making real” of doctrinal truth, and both theory and application are required!

3: evangelists

These are situated in the middle of the list, and so on this analysis, are not “paired” with any other group. They are involved with bringing new members into the church who can then be involved with the gifts on either side in this list. Bringing new members into the church is obviously part of “building up the body of Christ” which is the wider subject of Eph. 4:11-16, and, in a way, evangelism involves elements of the other four gifts, but applied to this specific situation: both the revealing and teaching of Scriptural truth are involved in evangelism as well application of that truth to people who have not heard the announcement of good news (i.e. evangelism) before—so evangelists are perhaps appropriately placed in the centre.

2) Second Analysis—Word Count Structure

Eph. 4:11 consists of 16 words (omitting the initial “and”), and has a symmetrical structure by word count, as shown below:

1) autos	He	}	God speaks through the apostles and prophets in the form of revelation
2) edoke	gave		
3) tous	the		
4) men	-		
5) aposotlous	Apostles		
6) tous	the		
7) de	-		
8) prophetas	prophets		

9) tous	the	}	These gifts do not rely on “special revelation” - rather they are based on what has already been revealed.
10) de	-		
11) euaggelistas	evangelists		
12) tous	the		
13) de	-		
14) poimenas	shepherds		
15) kai	and		
16) didaskalous	teachers		

The upper eight words are concerned with gifts that involve direct revelation from God. The gifts in the lower eight words “work with” what has already been revealed.

However, there is an additional aspect to this list, since the first five words and the last five words also correspond:

1) autos	He	}	“Global”, “revelatory” teaching plus applica- tion				
2) edoke	gave						
3) tous	the						
4) men	-						
5) aposotlous	Apostles						
				6) tous	the	}	“local”, “revelatory” application- within-teaching
				7) de	-		
				8) prophetas	prophets		

				9) tous	the	}	“global”, “derived” application- within-teaching
				10) de	-		
				11) euaggelistas	evangelists		
12) tous	the	}	“local”, “derived” teaching plus application				
13) de	-						
14) poimenas	shepherds						
15) kai	and						
16) didaskalous	teachers						

In what way do the Apostles correspond with shepherds and teachers?

I suggest that Apostles are concerned both with teaching the truths that have been revealed to them and also with shepherding—that is caring—for the churches that they have founded by “making real” those truths in their churches. (Paul’s letters, frequently divided into “theory” and “application”, clearly do this!) Thus Apostles do, on a large scale, what shepherds and teachers do in a “derivative” way, and on a smaller scale involving the individual local church and individuals within the local church.

I suggest that this structural and word count parallelism between a) Apostles and b) shepherds (pastors) and teachers is a plausible explanation for the (unusual?) grammatical structure that groups pastors (shepherds) and teachers at the end of Eph. 4:11. (It is possible that “local vs. global” link might be proposed between prophets and evangelists as suggested above).

A further aspect to the list is that the first gift in the upper half (Apostles)

corresponds to the first gift in the lower half (evangelists) since both Apostles and evangelists announce the Gospel to people who have not heard it before (i.e. “global” or “missionary” gifts). The other ministries lower down each list are primarily “intra- church” ministries. Thus:

- 1) autos He
- 2) edoke gave

Missionary Gifts

“Intra-church” Gifts

- 3) tous the
- 4) men -
- 5) aposotlous Apostles

- 6) tous the
- 7) de -
- 8) prophetas prophets

- 9) tous the
- 10) de -
- 11) euaggelistas evangelists

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- 12) tous the
 - 13) de -
 - 14) poimenas shepherds
 - 15) kai and
 - 16) didaskalous teachers

Finally, Apostles head the entire list since, in a sense, all the other gifts exist within the context of the pioneering work of the Apostles.

Conclusion

I hope I have shown that, by his combining the way the gifts are ordered, together with the word count and grammatical aspects in Eph. 4:11, Paul has given his readers/hearers a fruitful basis for reflection on the relations between Christ’s gifts to His church. In particular I hope I have shown that pastors and teachers are basically separate gifts, although they could both on occasion exist within a given individual.

Finally, I note that Eph. 4:11-16 forms a chiastic structural unit. Thus for example, the word “Christ” is chiastically located 31 words in from either end of the passage, and verses 11-12 and verse 16 correspond thematically as well as being of equal length (if we exclude the initial “and” at the beginning of v. 11.) This is an excellent passage for a fuller analysis!