What is an Ephesians 4 Gift?

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If you are in a partnering Four12 church, it won't be long before somebody makes a casual reference to an 'Ephesians 4 gift'. From that point on in the discussion, you face the very distinct possibility of completely misunderstanding one another. Let me explain how this could happen.

The Difference Between 'Spiritual Gifting' and an 'Ephesians 4 Gift'

In charismatic churches we are very familiar with the term 'gifting'. In fact, if you have a proactive leadership team in your church, then you have probably already spent some time trying to determine what your spiritual gifting/s are (it's usually more than one, but hey, if you only have one then be faithful with it!). There are several lists in Scripture which give a sample of some of the Spirit-enabled abilities that God gives us. The literal translation of the word 'giftings' (in Greek – charismata) is 'gracelets'. Almost like sprinkles of grace throughout the congregation to bless God's people. While God has gifted every individual, the gift is not to bless the recipient so much as to impart grace to the rest of the fellowship through that individual.

While this is probably all old hat to you, things are about to get really interesting, so stay with me. As we take a closer look at the key texts which speak about giftings, we need to ask the question, 'What is God giving?' Let's take a look.

In Romans 12:6, we read, 'We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.'

In a similar vain, we read in 1 Corinthians 12:4, 'There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work. Now t**o each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given** for the common good.'

Compare the language regarding gifts in these preceding texts with the language used in Ephesians 4:11: 'He [God] **gave the apostles,** the **prophets**, the **evangelists**, the **shepherds** and **teachers**, to equip the saints for the work of the ministry, for building up the body of Christ'.

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Similar language is used here in 1 Corinthians 12:27, 'Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. And God has placed in the church first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles...'

Did you spot the difference? In the first two verses, we learn that each member of the church has been apportioned grace-enabled abilities to minister to the needs of the rest of the fellowship. In this case, the 'gift' is the ability that an individual is given – for example, the ability to prophesy.

In the next two verses, something very different is described. In Ephesians 4:11, the gifts that God gives are 'apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers'. Note that the gift is not an ability (although this is implied), it is the people themselves that are given to bless the church! This is made more distinct when Paul says to the church in Corinth that his desire is that every one of them speak in tongues and prophesy (1 Cor 14:1-5), yet in the same letter he says that not all are prophets (1 Corinthians 12:29). In other words, there is a difference between having the gift of prophecy and being a prophet.

To say it in a way we commonly do, we either speak about a spiritual gifting (of the kind mentioned in Romans 12), or about an Ephesians 4 gift, which is when we mean a person who has been given to bless the church, i.e. an apostle, prophet, etc.

Ephesians 4 Gifts in Scripture

– An apostle (Eph 1:1) ‘Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God’

– A prophet (Agabus Acts 21:10, Acts 13:1)

– An evangelist (Philip, Acts 21:8)

– A teacher (Acts 13:1)

– A pastor (Phil 2:20)

What an Ephesians 4 Gift Does

By seizing upon a few key phrases in Ephesians chapter 4, we can get a good idea of how these gifts function in the body.

– They work ‘to equip the saints for the work of the ministry’ (vs 12)

– They are given ‘for building up the body of Christ’ (vs 12)

– So that the church may ‘attain to the unity of the faith’ (vs 13)

– So that she may ‘attain the knowledge of the Son of God’ (vs 13)

– That she may ‘attain maturity’ (vs 13)

– That she may ‘attain the fullness of Christ’ (vs 13)

– That we may ‘not be carried about by every wind of doctrine or human cunning’ (vs 14)

– They are to ‘speak the truth in love’ (vs 15)

– So that they church may ‘grow up in every way into him who is the head’ (vs 15)

– They ensure that ‘each part is working properly’ (vs 16)

How Ephesians 4 Gifts are Recognised

So how would I know if I have the gift of prophecy or if God has called me to be the gift, i.e. a prophet? The precedent given in Scripture is for God to call people to a certain ministry and for the church to recognise the call. In Galatians Paul says, ‘I went [to Jerusalem] in response to a

revelation and, meeting privately with those esteemed as leaders, I presented to them the gospel that I preach among the Gentiles." vs 7 "they recognized that I had been entrusted with the task of preaching the gospel to the uncircumcised. For God, who was at work in Peter as an apostle to the circumcised, was also at work in me as an apostle to the Gentiles.' (Galatians 2:2,7. And for another example of the call and recognition of a call, read Acts 13:1)

The important point here is that the current trend of men and women appointing themselves as 'apostles' or 'prophets' is not the pattern given to us in Scripture. It is God who gives these gifts to the church, and it is the church that recognises the grace upon their lives and sets them into the ministry. As these gifts are released to minister into the churches, the grace of God is imparted in ways unique to each gift, and the church is strengthened and grows in a healthy way.